

**Navigating Instagram and Influencers:
A Qualitative Study investigating the Influence of Instagram
Influencers on Tourism Organisations and Travellers.**

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate how Instagram and the influencers on the app can affect travel organisations and travellers alike.

Instagram users from the ages of 18-34 were the focus of this study, as it is the largest age group of Instagram users (Statista Research Department, 2022a). Tourism and the hospitality industry have been revolutionised since the emergence of social media. While there are many different social media platforms that exist in the digital sphere, Instagram was ultimately chosen as the subject of this paper as it is one of the most popular social media platforms and one of the front-runners in the space of visual communication. Visual communication and tourism compliments each other as visual content can a powerful stimulator of emotions (Kim and Pan, 2018) which can influence how users view and see travel content on the platform of Instagram.

However, Instagram has since its emergence gained significant criticism for being to manipulative of a platform and having content that is heavily edited and unrealistic to which travel and tourism content is no exception from (Faelens, et al., 2021). When influencers and the act of sponsorship and advertisement, as well as the editing of photos a problem arises. Influencers has long been a bridge between brands and consumers, but when Instagram and its history of having manipulative and edited content comes in contact with Instagram influencers, the issue of trustworthiness and reliability of the influencers arises.

To investigate this, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted and summaries subsequently made. A thematic analysis was done, and 17 themes were made, whereunder the codes found in the interviews were systematically unfolded.

This was followed by a conclusion of our findings. We found that the visual aspect of Instagram made the interview participants more likely to believe what they saw, while they also remained skeptical of content uploaded by influencers or companies as they were aware of editing. It was found that Influencers could function as inspiration, however, there has been a decline in trust towards them which means that tourism organisations should reconsider their usage of them.

Through the findings of this paper then we advise travel companies to consider what they want to do with their brand and the impact the social media marketing choice they make has on it. This both goes for the current state of social media marketing perception on instagram and the need for improved honesty.

Three avenues for further research was suggested. Firstly, one could investigate other visual social media platforms such as TikTok. Secondly, one could investigate if there is a difference in the perception of travel content in short-form or long-form formats such as Youtube travel videos. Lastly, one could investigate the media literacy of current as well as subsequent generations when it comes to social media and how that affects travel expectations.

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1. Introduction

With the emergence of digital media and the internet, it has become easier than ever before to find travel inspiration/information. Instagram has since its emergence in 2010 become one of the biggest social media platforms due to its heavy focus on visuals and sharing photos with other people. The platform made visual communication extremely easy and people often share snippets of their lives, including travel. Travel and tourism are phenomenons that people often share on Instagram. The hashtag #travel has amassed over 600 million posts which solidifies the popularity of travel content on the platform. However, the social media platform Instagram has for many years received criticism from its user base for being too manipulative with the content on Instagram of people posting unrealistic and edited photos from Instagrams users' everyday lives (Faelens, et al., 2021) and travel/tourism content on the platform is no exception.

Furthermore, when this comes in touch with the social media sphere where many manipulate their pictures and experiences to look better than they actually are, it becomes a problem for the tourism industry. Users of social media platforms now have to learn how to decipher and filter out what is real and what is not. This can have implications for the tourism industry as many people use social media platforms to search for travel inspiration/information (Ong, 2022).

As Instagram as an app developed, the position of influencer emerged. Influencers are people who use the platform and have gained a significant following to which they can influence the behaviour and opinions of other people to fx. buy a certain product that they are promoting (Abidin (2015 as cited in Enke & Borchers, 2019, p. 262). Instagram has become a mecca of influencers where you can find both smaller and larger communities all following the same influencers. Influencers have since their emergence become a part of a larger marketing eco-system as many brands and organisations use influencers to promote their products. The reason why influencers are so popular for brands to use is due to their trustworthiness and more 'personal' feel, to which Instagram users find them more trustworthy than regular brands (Dinis, et al., 2021, p. 136) and can help brands achieve a broader audience that is otherwise hard to target with ordinary marketing strategies (Enke &

Borchers, 2019, p. 261). However, when you then take the manipulation and editing that Instagram has been criticized for into consideration, a problem arises. Suddenly, Instagram users have to decipher whether what they see on their screen is real or not. As tourism heavily relies on visual aspects such as pictures to promote destinations, the manipulation of them can then be detrimental as it can ruin the expectation of Instagram users, which can suddenly lead to distrust for both the influencer but also the travel brand or organisation that sponsored them in the first place. This project will therefore present the problem formulation: How can Instagram influencers and the manipulation and editing of travel photos affect both tourism organisations and travelers alike?

To obtain data in pursuit of answering the problem formulation this project will utilise the data collection method of semi-structured interviews. The data consists of 10 interviews with Instagram users between the ages of 18 and 34. The participants were asked a series of questions to which they were free to answer however they liked. The interviews have then been analysed through the method of thematic analysis to identify patterns and organise the data from the interviews. The project itself has taken an abductive approach to analysing the data to which the researchers have gone back and forth from data and theory to create codes from the data. The analysis consists of 17 different codes that have all been found through the data to which the interviewees' opinions have been presented and then analysed.

2. Literature Review

This section of the paper will contain a literature review of which previous research about topics such as social media, and tourism and how they can be tied together. The literature review will serve as a basis for this project to elaborate on aspects of tourism in the digital space and the problems that follow along with it.

The tourism and hospitality industry has, without a doubt, been revolutionised by social media (Law et al., 2014). When it comes to picture sharing of traveling, it can be said that Instagram has a profound impact on the industry. Image-sharing has always been a part of tourism, and Instagram has since its launch been closely aligned with the tourism and hospitality industries. It has been proven many times throughout literature and studies that Instagram has been proven to directly impacted tourist decision-making largely due to the visual communication that ties Instagram and the travel industry together (Smith, 2021, p. 605) Instagram has a unique way of making tourists interact with destinations as it allows for anyone to interact, search and post about their travels. Instagram has undoubtedly shaped the tourism and hospitality industry and made visual communication easier.

However, Instagram has both pros and cons. With Instagram's popularity, it is evident that social media and Instagram have had an impact on the sociocultural landscape. Social media in general has been found to have a serious effect on many young people's mental well-being and social media with an emphasis on images such as Instagram have the worst impact (Moreton & Greenfield, 2022, p. 2). Some of the mentioned factors that have contributed to a negative self-perception from Instagram are mostly caused by impression management, to the point where everyone wants to be perceived as being 'perfect' which creates unrealistic ideals that not many can live up to. Furthermore, built-in editing features create an even more unrealistic norm that pressures Instagram users to portray a 'perfect life' and users would "only present the best version of themselves on the platform in order to show off to their peers" to then gain validation through likes and comments (Moreton & Greenfield, 2022, p. 6). Since how one chose to present oneself on Instagram, the content tends to be of a certain refined calibre that shows only the good parts of life. This has then since resulted in the emergence of a popular slang/catchphrase of 'do it for the 'gram'. This phrase refers to doing things in your life, with the purpose of taking pictures solely for Instagram. (Urban Dictionary, n.d) This could be going to a coffee shop with the purpose of taking a photo for Instagram or it could be travelling to a certain destination with posting Instagram pictures in mind. A photo posted on Reddit in 2018, which gained over 75.000

upvotes in 24 hours, shone a light on the effect Instagram has on picture-taking at certain destinations. The photo was dubbed 'The social media queue' and first showed a picture of a singular person on a mountain top in New Zealand, and then presented a 'behind the scenes' photo which showed hundreds of people lining up to take the exact same picture (Park, 2018). Smith (2021) argues that this specific picture became so popular because it "lifts the veil on a photographic composition that has become deeply associated with the representation of travel on social media" (p. 604). It shows that while we mostly see the singular picture and not the queue, it is certain that social media has a profound effect on how we wish to represent ourselves when we travel. Instagram has created certain 'hotspots' or 'Instagram-worthy' locations where people gather to take pictures due to their visually pleasing appearance to which terms such as 'Instagram-worthy' can be said to influence and constitute a new type of urban tourism (Fan & Zhang, 2022).

Instagram as a platform is a great tool for influencers to show off great destinations and inspire people to travel. However, Instagram influencers have also gained criticism for ruining travelling. Instagram as a platform has created a culture where everything has to be perceived as 'perfect' ruining the authenticity and realism of travelling. In a debate article written for Forbes magazine James Asquith (2019) heavily criticizes travel influencers for creating a culture where travel influencing becomes less about the destinations themselves and more about being perceived as 'pretty' to which edited images and self-fame has taken over from what travelling is all about. Asquith (2019) then continues with critiquing those who specifically portray luxurious holidays too, for example, the Maldives or Bali, and heavily edit them to which the followers are being "sold a dream" and that influencer who mostly get complimentary stays at luxurious resorts creates an unrealistic expectation for the average traveller and that it would be considered false advertisement. This then puts a question mark on the authenticity of influencers that are otherwise known as being more reliable and authentic than regular marketing campaigns done by companies or brands.

This literature review will therefore consist of different aspects that link social media and Instagram to the tourism and hospitality industry. As both the social media sphere and tourism sphere has uncountable academic literature pieces written about them in many different contexts, this literature review will focus on the correlation between them and how older research within the visual aspect of tourism can also be applied to today's digital world such as the circle of representation (Jenkins, 2003) and its relevance in a digital space.

2.1 Social Media and Tourism

As an industry, tourism and hospitality are considered an immense socio-cultural as well as economic phenomenon that is essential for regional development and economic growth. Successful investment into the tourism sector can boost a country's economy, and create better infrastructure as well as create job opportunities (Dinis et. al., 2021, p. 243). In order to have a thriving tourism industry it is crucial that a destination market themselves and attract visitors. Since the development of the internet travel information has never been easier to obtain. Before the invention and normalisation of the internet, booking, planning, and finding travel inspiration could often take a significant amount of time. The way information was spread was vastly different and required more effort than with the usage of the internet. However, after the implementation of both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, a surge in social media activity has effectively revolutionised the tourism and hospitality industries (Law et al., 2014). A study conducted that travellers are increasingly relying on digital services and that 80% of travellers are relying on reviews from people that have already visited a certain destination and search, on average, more than 20 websites and more than 2 hours searching for travel information on social media platforms (Lam et. al., 2020 p. 1). Moreover, in a study conducted by the transport company Arriva, it was revealed that nearly one in three travellers use social media for holidays and travel (Ong, 2022). Social media has had an influence on consumer behaviour as travellers are turning to social media for finding and searching for travel information rather than going through traditional options such as travel agencies.

Social media platforms, which are also known as social networking services (SNS), can be defined as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd and Ellison 2007, p. 211). According to this argument, social media is at its core simply a communication tool that creates easy access to ‘connections’ or communities in which people share the same interests. These features, are what have made social media so widespread in today's society, and influence every single industry, and have most certainly had an impact on the tourism and hospitality sector.

Social Media has since its early days in the 2000's become one of the most used internet applications on the planet, and according to a report from Statista, in 2022 more than 4.5 billion people were using a social media platform (Statista Research Department, 2022b). This extensive and profound usage of social media has aided the tourism and hospitality

industries and has transformed the “diffusion of tourism-related information and the way people plan for and consume travel” (Buhalis & Law, 2008 as cited in Dinis, et al., 2021, p. 121). In other terms, social media has revolutionised the way travellers plan and search for travel-related information. Social Media has made searching for travel information easier and more convenient than ever before.

However, since information has become too widespread and easier to find also means that there is a lot more information to filter through to get to what you specifically want to find. Social scientist Herbert A. Simons (1971 as cited in Valentini et al., 2018) once argued that “A wealth of information creates poverty of attention” (p. 362) While this was stated before the emergence of the internet and social media, it still has significance today. The spread and usage of digital technologies and social media have created such a vast sea of an immeasurable amount of information that user’s attention is being strained and challenged since it can be hard to pinpoint where one’s attention should go due to the amount of information available (Valentini et al., 2018, p. 362). While the internet and social media have made searching for information easier and more readily available, it can be considered a double-edged sword as it could also hinder information searching as there is so much of it that it can leave users unable to decipher the sheer amount of information available to them.

As of 2023, there are hundreds of different social media platforms and each one is different from the others. They might share similarities, but one is never the same as the others. This paper will focus on the social media platform, Instagram. Here, sharing pictures is the main feature of the platform. Sharing is a very big factor in how tourism-related industries and social media benefit from each other. According to Sigala (2012, as cited in Sotiriadis, 2017) through social media tourists become “co-designers, co-producers, co-marketers and co-consumers of tourism experiences” (p. 180). This essentially means that anyone who participates in the sharing and interacts with the content on Instagram becomes a part of the tourism and hospitality industries. When a user posts a picture from a holiday, they are co-creators of tourism experiences. This exact reason is why social media revolutionised the tourism and hospitality industries as the consumer had gained power in creating and producing tourism content that was once exclusive to DMOs and other organizations within the tourism industry.

This also means that tourism organisations had to adapt and implement social media into their promotions and marketing campaigns. Because sharing one's experiences such as pictures online, tourism organisations must market themselves in a way that catches the attention of travellers. According to Chan & Guilett (2011, as cited in Dinis, et al., 2021), it is

important that tourism destination marketers try to “comprehend the tourist decision process, in order to develop effective marketing strategies since consumer behaviour is the primary structure which marketing has to be based on” (p. 122). Since many travellers use social media as a part of their decision-making when it comes to finding travel inspiration as well as booking holidays, it is of utmost importance that tourist organisations meet their consumers on the platforms which they use as a part of their decision-making process in relation to travel inspiration.

2.2 UGC and Influencers

When it comes to Instagram, there are different types of content on the platform. User-generated content, otherwise known as UGC makes up the majority of content posted on Instagram. According to McKenzie et al. (2012, as cited in Santos, 2022), UGC can be defined as “content that is voluntarily developed by an individual or a consortium and distributed through an online platform” (p. 99). UGC can be created by anyone who has an Instagram account and tends to be the primary content that is seen on Instagram. Fernando (2007, as cited in Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015) argues that UGC is the exact opposite of traditional forms of marketing and media since it is content created by users/consumers as opposed to a marketing professional. (p. 1093)

Platforms such as Instagram, have created an opportunity for users to take the matter into their own hands and create their own content to which people are more informed than ever, in terms of being able to comment, like, and interact with others' UGC content. As a social media platform, Instagram emphasizes the aspects of visualisation with the addition of ‘geo-tagging’ being immensely popular within UGC. ‘geo-tagging’ allows for easy access to information as to where a certain picture was taken and is the optimal resource for the promotion of a destination (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015, p. 1093) Throughout the literature, UGC is often described as being more reliable sources of information compared to traditional marketing material that destination brands, DMO’s or other tourism organisations post on social media (Lam et. al., 2020 p. 1). UGC can also be argued to be a part of a ‘co-creation’ as it is a “dynamic, interactive, non-linear and often unconscious processes between the users and other parties.” (Payne et. al, 2008 as cited in Lam et al., 2020, p. 2) Pictures or reviews generated by other users can be argued to create a foundation for tourism co-creation and allows for peer-to-peer interactivity.

There are many forms of UGC on Instagram and while any user can create UGC

there certain creators that stand out from the general user. According to an early, but often cited within the academic literature, by Freberg et. al. (2011) social media influencers (SMI) can be defined as “a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” (p. 90). Abidin (2015 as cited in Enke & Borchers, 2019) expands on the definition from Freberg et al. (2011) and presents the argument that influencers are to be considered “everyday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in digital and physical spaces, and monetize their following by integrating ‘advertorials’ into their blog or social media posts” (p. 262).

Influencers can be categorised as ‘regular people that have created a community that shares common interests. Influencers make a living from showing their personal life and often stand as a middleman between traditional brands and consumers. To this it has been argued that “Many organizations have identified social media influencers (SMIs) as relevant intermediaries, most notably because they provide access to and might even influence hard-to-reach stakeholders, e.g., teenage and young adult consumers or special interest groups” (Enke & Borchers, 2019, p. 261). Influencers have quickly become a specialised tool for digital marketing, because of their reach to stakeholders that might be hard for brands to reach on their own. Influencers also create a gateway into certain communities, such as travel influencers, to which companies and brands have a higher chance of reaching consumers that are interested in travelling. Influencers have in short, created a new type of marketing that is very relevant for organisations and brands.

Being attracted to sharing your interests with others is not a new thing on the internet. While people now talk plenty of the technological advancements found on and through the internet. Then it is not a new phenomenon for people to create communities and environments online. Though it is a lot more widespread now with social media and devices readily available to use the internet. Then the Bulletin Board Systems, Usenet, and forums that popped up on the internet from its conception of it showed the same enthusiasm for sharing passions with others on the internet (Dahl, 2021, pp. 96-97).

It has been pointed out by Dahl (2021) that there through the usage of the internet has been a lack of utilization by companies of all the functions the internet has had to offer. Such as being in closer communication with the consumers (p. 100). This is a gap that is more easily bridged by influencers who make a living off of being in direct contact with the people, their followers. It is the engagement of their following that is making them money. This also

bridges the gap for businesses or organizations if they collaborate with an influencer since they will do the work for them in creating engagement.

These influencers in their respective niches are also people who can be seen as ‘experts’ in their field. When they are showcasing how they are making a living out of doing the thing they are constantly posting about such as travelling. It makes them appear as a trusted expert. By primarily focusing on talking about products or businesses that are related to what they post about, influencers create credibility which both makes them seem more likeable and helps in making them appear as experts. This trust is easier built-in influencers than it might be in celebrities since influencers are considered to be closer to the users than celebrities. This is also how people might develop a para-social relationship (Dahl, 2021, pp. 78-79).

When it comes to what travel influencers bring to the table, then there are three core things that hold worth that they do through the marketing they bring. The first happens through the connection they are making between themselves and the previously mentioned good credibility they have and the brand they engage with. By making the connection between them and the brand they are giving the brand their celebrity status. The second is the continued telling of the brand and its story through their social media, and the third is making the connection between their status as some sort of epitome of travel and the brand known, thereby making it an inspiring place to visit too (Dahl, 2021, p. 79).

There is a rough definition when it comes to the amount of followers and what size the influencer is: nano-, micro-, or macro-level. An influencer will need to have under 1000 followers to be considered a nano-level influencer, whereas a macro-level influencer can have a million or more followers. Micro-level, the in-between stage, can have around a 4-digit number of followers. However when it comes to engagement, then the nano-level influencers see more of it than the macro-level. These mid-level influencers are seeing the most connections of parasocial relationships being formed with them, considering their engagement is higher than the macro-level, but they have more followers and are seen as more credible than the nano-level (Alassani & Göretz, 2019, pp. 252-253).

When it comes to what holds the most value for the influencer, then source credibility is valued higher than the strength of the argument they present. This is because influencers tend to have a longer relationship with the people engaging in their content or following them. The credibility they build up is what is going to keep people checking in (Dahl, 2021, p. 81).

Additionally, then the word-of-mouth that influencers engage in makes them

effectively function as ‘gatekeepers’ of information when relaying information to their following. People are more likely to believe what the influencer tells them than what the mass media tells them. This would indicate that the information a travel influencer brings to their followers is more likely to be listened to than what a travel company or DMO might say (Dahl, 2021, p. 83).

Dahl (2021) pointed out how currently “Instagram as the lead in influencer marketing with 89% of marketing executives using it” (p. 84). This shows just how influential Instagram is on a marketing front since it is used considerably more than other social media sites were used by marketing executives. Likewise, then travel content is abundant on the site. Making it an influential site when it comes to consumers seeing travel marketing.

Dahl (2021) further mentioned some of the ethical issues one can run into with social media posts. When it comes to ads in Instagram posts then people have had issues with recognizing what constitutes an ad and what does not. Additionally, then the disparity between how much disclosure and what wordage people are required to use on social media posts has only recently been updated. For example, then teenage girls have been shown to have a hard time recognizing an ad in a post (p. 86). However, since teenagers are not part of the data set in this analysis, then this is less of a consideration for this paper.

2.3 Visual Communication on Instagram

Instagram is known for having visual communication at its core. Sharing pictures is the main form of communication on the platform. Whether you would like to post a picture of your afternoon walk or your lavish holiday to Spain, Instagram provides the best platform to do so. Here, all forms of communication are required to be visual. While photo-sharing was once upon a time done face-to-face with physical photocopies, the emergence of the internet made photo-sharing exclusively online (Serafinelli, 2018, p. 41) and Instagram has become the go-to social media platform for visual communication.

Instagram became widely popular as the 4th generation of Apple iPhones were released, and featured better technology and a front-facing camera. The option to do multiple things such as taking pictures, editing, and sharing photos on a singular device was one thing that steered people towards Instagram in its early days of the 2010s. (Serafinelli, 2018 p. 44) Instagram was liked and loved by many and users found the application very rewarding as not it not only created a space for testing out new technologies but users were also able to interact with other users in the form of comments and likes. While the core of Instagram is

sharing pictures and is a platform for visual communication Leaver et. al. (2020) argue that “Instagram is a social media platform, but we argue that the visual focus is particularly important in the success and relevance of the platform.” (p. 1) Leaver et. al. (2020) then continues to argue that Instagram is more than ‘just’ an app, but is an “icon and avatar for understanding and mapping visual social media cultures...” (p.1) Instagram has become a leader in visual communication platforms and while the application is considered a social media platform, its heavy focus on photo-sharing has made it stand out as a communication platform for many users, and the visual aspect is what makes the platform so popular.

Instagram is the home of an unimaginable amount of visual information as well as different genres and communities. Many use the platform to post about their interest and everyday life. Travel and tourism are among the many different categories people choose to post pictures about. Instagram can be argued to be one of the better platforms to post about travel content as the visuals of travelling and tourism are perfect for a visually heavy platform like Instagram. It is known that visual content is vastly more effective in stimulating affective emotions while verblity influence on cognitive reasoning (Kim and Pan, 2018). When it comes to the visuals of travel and tourism Kim and Pan (2018) argue that the affective construct has a bigger impact than its counterpart of cognition. This argument shows that the visual aspect of tourism is extremely important when it comes to stimulating emotions in the recipients of a specific image. Tourism and Instagram, therefore, complement each other very well. Instagram's format of visual communication, alongside the traditional aspect of face-to-face sharing of travel photos, has helped popularise the act of sharing travel pictures on Instagram.

Visualisation within the tourism industry has been prominent for decades. While it started out with analogue brochures or advertisements, the visual aspect of tourism promotion has always been prominent. The visual aspect of tourism has inspired research about the impact visualisation of destinations have on consumers and how they perceive destinations. The original inspiration for this project stems from the study of Oliva Jenkins (2003) and the circle of representation. While the paper that was written about this is from 2003, it still has relevance and can be applied to modern-day media. The impact of visual images and the study of the circle of representation is the base for what this project has set out to investigate.

Social media platforms, especially Instagram, rely heavily on visual aspects such as photographs. Photographs have always been well represented in tourism before the digital age in the form of brochures and traditional travel advertisements found in newspapers, bus commercials, and so on. What these all had in common was the

visualisations of destinations and imagines to help people become interested in a certain destination. Within tourism visual images can be a powerful tool within the marketing sphere and pictures of landmarks and scenery dominate many forms of tourism promotion and create a pulling power that impacts tourists' behaviour (Jenkins, 2003, p. 305).

The circle of representation was presented by Olivia Jenkins (2003) in which a figure had been made to visualise how images are perceived with a circle that repeats itself over and over again. As Figure 1 illustrates the circle of representation provides an insight into touristic behaviour and how images are perceived.

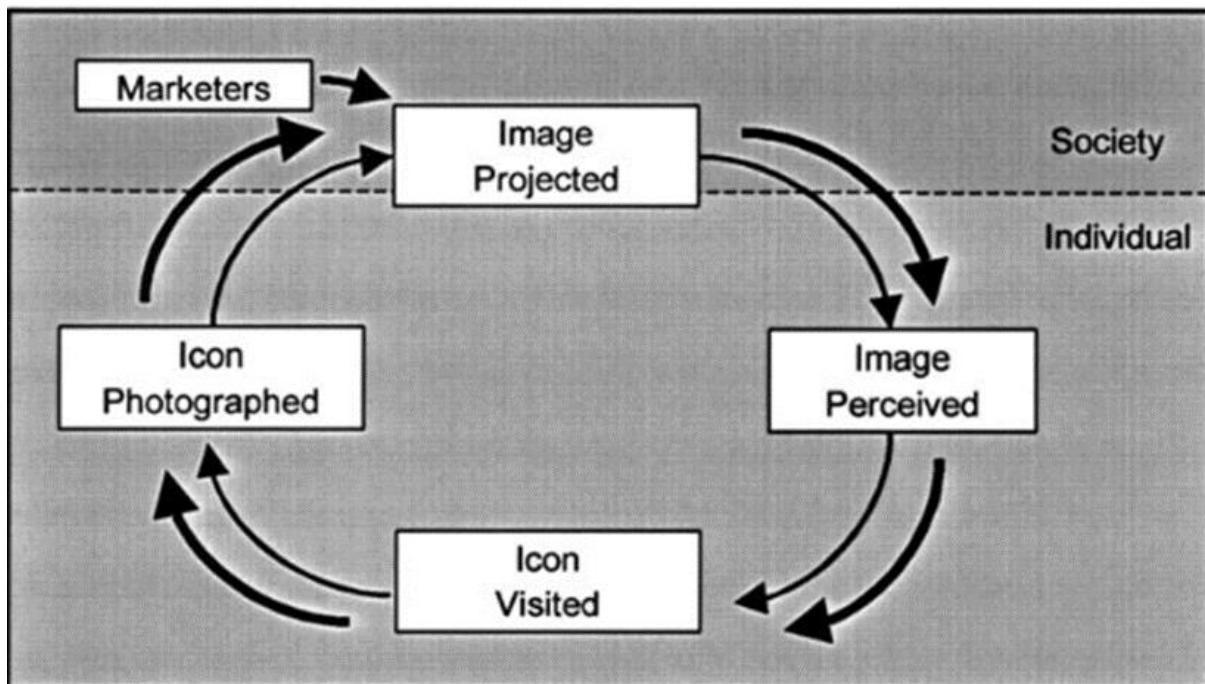


Figure 1 - The Circle of Representation as presented by Olivia Jenkins (2003)

The circle represents travellers and how pictures can influence their behaviour to which an endless circle is created. Jenkins (2003) herself states that “visual images chosen for photography by a tourist are often selected in the destination and reproduced from the perspective of images already seen in travel brochures, postcards, personal photographs, films and television shows at home” (p. 308). This means that when an image is projected onto a platform, such as Instagram, the image can be perceived by the individual to which the individual would be motivated to visit the destination/icon in the original image, take a picture themselves of said destination/icon and finally project the image again by posting it on Instagram themselves. This is then repeated, creating a never-ending circle of visual tourism content that affects tourist behaviour.

One of the main points that have formed a base for this project stems from this piece of literature as according to Jenkins (2003) visual representation of icons/destinations has a vital influence over touristic behaviour. The visual aspect of tourism has always been prevalent in the forms of advertisements and other travel content such as postcards and travel brochures. The emergence of social media has simply increased the volume of visual travel content and made sharing pictures less about advertisement and more about personal sharing between, friends, family, and other communities on different social media platforms.

While Jenkin's study about the circle of representation was made in the early 2000s and used products such as travel brochures to conduct the circle of representation study, the idea that a projected image, perceived by, for example, an Instagram user would lead to them wanting to visit the location of an image is very relevant when applied to modern technology. A quantitative study of 150 Indian users of Instagram conducted by Bilquees & Tholath (2019) concludes that Instagram travel influencers have a significant impact on travel intention when a destination image is the mediating variable (p. 255). Pictures, specifically from Instagram, of people travelling have a great impact on how people perceive a certain destination which could lead to consumers to be inspired to travel to a specific destination themselves. Through both Jenkins (2003) and the study conducted by Bilquees & Tholath it is evident that destination images have a profound effect on consumers and their motivation to travel.

2.4 Persuasion

Previously in this study, we have brought up trust as a core notion bringing people in to listen to influencers and in this section, we would like to elaborate on the role that persuasion takes next to trust. When it comes to how an influencer can be a persuasive person for their audience, then there are different models that show different ways it presents. The Elaboration Likelihood Model was used in a study that showed how when somebody frequently engages with the content of social media personalities (the study in question was used with bloggers) then they tend to start trusting them more. This trust can then be used to enhance the influencer's persuasion. Ultimately meaning that the audience that continuously sees that influencer's content will be less analytical of the message in it than they would be of a less trusted influencer personality (Chu & Kamal, 2008).

Additionally, then there might be a subtle level of persuasion to be found in the frequency of product placements, which is easy to incorporate into pictures or videos featured

on Instagram. Which there can be added to by reading the photo caption/description that includes the product names or how the influencer enjoyed them. When somebody excitedly shows that they are going on vacation by posting a picture of their suitcase then it can also show the brand of that suitcase, which might be implicit from an influencer or might be accidental from a friend. Nevertheless, seeing a trusted source using a brand for their illustrious travel photos can be persuasive. Especially considering the subtlety that product placement can have versus something that is a paid sponsorship or a direct ad (Dahl, 2021, p. 159).

Another model that explains how the persuasiveness of influencers comes about is the Heuristic-Systematic Model of Information Processing. The model ultimately offers the notion that if the person consuming the content sees the person as an expert then without considering the directive from the content creator, they might believe it. This is a thing that happens in situations where the user consuming content is of little to no inspiration at the moment or did not fully comprehend the directive. This then leads to them finding an easy decision in the trust and persuasion of the familiar content creator who is seen to be an expert on the matter. When it comes to something like understanding fully somebody's explanation as to why over-tourism has negative consequences can be difficult, but hearing your favourite travel influencer say it makes you more likely to take them for their word (Dahl, 2021, p. 159).

2.5 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Outside of being persuasive enough to keep people interested in the content created, one of the most useful things a social media influencer can get out of their engagement is word of mouth (WOM). This is likewise, something that is of significant interest for marketers who are trying to get their brand to travel through WOM. WOM and eWOM are also something that has been useful when it comes to travel destinations. Going to the places that you have heard about from the people around you, is something people do now when they see their friends post their holiday photos online or when reading notes about a destination on the internet. This is also something people have done when they got a postcard from a destination and told their co-workers about it. The prevalence and hope for WOM is not based in nothing. WOM has proved itself to be an effective way of getting positive words and actions out. This is why eWOM is likewise an attractive prospect (Dahl, 2021, p. 199).

As reiterated by Woodside and Delozier (1976) then WOM is something that happens

between people when they are discussing a brand, some form of merchandise, an experience, a business, or a type of employment they take under. But more specifically then WOM is something that happens when these exchanges are happening for a non-profit-making purpose (p. 13). However, when it comes to eWOM then this is something that is less applicable directly to when influencers try and get their own 'brand' out themselves since they will be gaining something commercially from it. However, people discussing their channel could be engaging in WOM. However, what the influencer can do to engage in eWOM themselves is by starting the conversation regarding a brand, a company, or a destination that they are not tied to. This will then carry on to their followers who can further engage in that conversation with people they know. The influencer can be the place the WOM starts. eWOM also means that it can be brought further than regular WOM since it is not limited to the interactions physically possible for somebody to have. They can reach a broader audience both with things that people like and dislike through online media.

Furthermore, then eWOM is especially something that has been found to be valuable within the tourism sphere as seen with TripAdvisor, a website for travel reviews. On TripAdvisor people have the option to leave their reviews, thereby contributing to the eWOM for whatever place they are reviewing. Additionally, then because tourism products are often based on experiences and living them out yourself, they can be hard to market to people without them already being certain they will enjoy them. This is why (e)WOM can be super helpful since it allows people to get a gauge on whether they would enjoy the thing or not through a review or hearing their friends discuss it online (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008, p. 458).

There are different elements that eWOM can bring when it comes to what kind of electronic service it stems from which can be websites, reviews, or direct messaging. When it comes to virtual communities or blog-like sites then they can bring and inspire eWOM through users checking out these sites and leaving comments or similar types of engagement. Likewise, then the original poster has the opportunity to facilitate the conversation regarding whatever they are promoting. That goes both for a travel company promoting their tours, or an influencer that talks about the trip they planned and posted about. They have the opportunity to see comments and respond to them both if they are positive and encourage that kind of discourse or rebuke any undesirable comments. Additionally, then they also get feedback directly from the users when they can see the discourse left in comments (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008, pp. 463-464).

This then can be furthered if one takes into account that an algorithm of a social

media site can bring the content further and spread it more widely. Arguably then a social media algorithm itself can be seen as a form of fully electronic ‘word-of-mouth’ where the popularity and engagement that the posts are seeing are then spread to more users because it is being talked about on the post. Thereby, the algorithm functions the same as how WOM would spread. This paper talks more about the Instagram algorithm in the section named as such.

2.6 The Instagram Algorithm

Having a social media account is free (outside of some platforms that charge extra for certain special accounts). This means it can look like it is a cheap and easy way to get your content out for people to see. However, the job is easier said than done, since after you have created the content and posted it it will be at the mercy of the algorithm.

The algorithm is what determines who gets to see your content. This means that if you want your content featured on Instagram user’s feeds, on different pages, or on people’s explore pages you will need to learn how to manage it. The algorithm means that ideally the content that people are interested in can be brought directly to them. So people ‘only’ see what they want to see. This means it is important to get your content correctly through the algorithm, so it is not wasted effort that goes into the production of making it, by having it be shown to too few people, or to people who do not care (McLachlan & Mikolajczyk, 2022).

The algorithm on Instagram has seen changes through the years, as any social media page probably seeks to optimize the experience for the users. However, this also means that there is a constant need for brands that use Instagram to learn how to manipulate the new algorithms. This means there are different rules to follow depending on where you want people to see your content. To get the posts across to your followers focussing on the information directly in the post (geotags, likes, the time it was posted) and the engagement it sees, as well as how often you post all matters. However, if you want to be on people’s explore tab the general activity and engagement that the post sees factors in, but especially the speed at which these aspects are happening. The purpose of the explore page is for people to see content that they do not already seem to know of, though people who have engaged with the account posting in some capacity before would be more likely to see it on the explore page. The posts or searches somebody has done on the app before also matter here, if they are frequently liking or looking for content similar to the stuff a business seems to be posting about it will be more likely to be featured. Additionally, then the general level of

engagement that the posting channel sees as a whole and supposedly its interactions with them also plays a role. (McLachlan & Mikolajczyk, 2022).

Which means that when it comes to getting new people to see the content a creator makes, a lot of it is based on the engagement the post sees, and how quickly it gains it. These are aspects that are outside of the creators control. They lie wholly with the users of the app. The creator will have to make content that will inspire frequent check in to their account, or quick likes. Though they cannot do anything to actually get these things directly to happen.

Additionally, to that, then McLachlan and Mikolajczyk (2022) noted that creators need to keep in mind the community guidelines that Instagram uses since, not adhering to them will make it unlikely for the content being made to reach very far. Furthermore, then there were better times to post than others depending on when the app saw the most activity. Meaning that if posts are put up when people are online, creators will be able to get that bit more out of the algorithm since it would technically take the same content out to more people, simply by having more people be online.

Furthermore, then it is pointed out by Warren (2022) that it is better to not recycle content from other platforms, as well as not to post it in low resolution when posting to Instagram reels. Which means that ideally accounts need to put the time and effort into making fully new content for the reels if they want to get the most out of them. This is something that is a costly event for most business' if they have to make completely new content for every single platform that they are on. Since a business seldom only operates with one social media platform.

When it comes to getting the most out of the algorithm then it is necessary to understand how it works for the specific platform being used. As previously stated, then there is not just one algorithm working on Instagram depending on where on the site that you post content to there are different ones. Similarly, then algorithms are not the same across all social media sites. Therefore, when considering the cost and effort that goes into producing content and ads for a social media site it is indeed a necessity to understand the algorithm. Which likewise can explain why some businesses want to partner up with an influencer who make a living off of working the algorithm for the content to be shown. Thereby both putting the 'burden' of producing content and spreading it out to people on the creator.

Nevertheless, then even after effort has been put into working the algorithm in your favour, then there is no guarantee that the content produced and uploaded will be brought to the right people. There is no answer key to look up (though advice is available) in how to get your content out there. This can make it an expensive and potentially frustrating experience

for a business, brand, or influencer, when they are trying to further their opportunities through social media.

The issue with being dependant on the algorithm after the work has gone into the content for the platform is that it is at the hands of the users. They have to like it enough to engage with it for the algorithm to prefer it and spread it further. However, this problem becomes more difficult to manage when the content is barely even pushed out to those who would normally see it. This concept is often called being ‘shadow banned’. Commonly then platforms have a form of security measure for the content on their platform and will cite these as a reason as to why content might be suppressed. This is something that sex workers as well as activists have experienced often due to the nature of the content that they engage with (Savolainen, 2022, pp. 1093-1094). However, it can be frustrating to know what content creators are supposed to do when they do not know for what reason their travel content is not being shown to people. Thereby, making it difficult to be at the mercy of the algorithm.

Furthermore, then it can be challenging to specifically determine what is the cause of the content not getting out there. The study by Savolainen (2022) reported an Instagram user thinking they had justifiably nice art, but it was not seeing engagement. This was noted to be something that was hard to dismiss for them (p. 1099). Which is where it can be difficult to measure if the content is shadow banned or if it is simply not what people want to see, when there is not quantifiable measure for these things.

2.7 Tourist Motivation – Push and Pull

Push and pull factors have been talked about as useful identifies when it comes to travel motivation since the 70’s. There has been a difference in which of the factors that researchers have focussed on, some both, some only one. Though neither are ignorable. Push and pull factors are helpful when it comes to identifying the reasoning that draws people to a specific place, and why they might have picked that place rather than another. The typical pull factors might include the culture and history of a destination, relaxation, a specific interest to indulge in: a sport or food, or entertainment. Whereas the push factors tend to be escaping everyday life, social reasons, and prestige (Said & Maryono, 2018, pp. 2-3). Especially the notion of prestige is something that can be found when it comes to why people go to or want to recreate Instagram photos. Being able to show that you can live the same kind of life as these influential people with large social media presences is a great way for somebody to show off their prestige ‘effortlessly’. Which again shows that the destinations that the social media

influencers pick for their pictures do have an impact.

Specifically, then when it comes to the motivations that drive people to post pictures with travel relevant content to Instagram then Daxböck et al. (2021) pointed out how “enjoyment, self-esteem, social ties, recognition, interests, social norms, goals, self-efficacy, outcome expectations and prestige” (p. 252). Showcasing that a lot of the same motivational push and pull factors for travel in general can be found in the content being posted on Instagram when going on holiday.

Daxböck et al. (2021) also noted that those elements were present as well as the general want for a large following and the status of that on the platform, additionally then it adds that posting to Instagram might function as a way to preserve own's own trip, functioning as a sort of online album for personal use. Ultimately, they suggest that four types of people post on Instagram when it comes to travel content: The people collecting memorabilia for themselves, people who mainly post for themselves, people who post for the ‘community’, and people who are influenced and posts with an expectation of the reaction they get (p. 252).

Hanifah (2019) pointed out how millennials are especially likely to have their push and pull factors shaped through Instagram when it comes to their decisions on where to have their holidays (p. 246). Which given the fact that this is supposedly also the generation that has the income to go travelling since they are of working ages, means that millennials travel decisions and inspiration are worthy to consider.

Likewise, then generation Y has been shown to care about the visual aspect that Instagram brings, especially when it comes to influencers who can give the picture quality and a truthful review of a destination. Which is also why it is suggested in the study that the social media knowledge that people hold now gets taken into account, since something like Instagram clearly holds an impact when it comes to people's decision making especially in tourism, where the visual aspect is something that is valued (Hanifah, 2019, p. 246).

2.8 Impression Management

Another important aspect for people on social media, whether that is brands, companies, organizations, influencers, or personal users is the knowledge that they are being perceived. After all, the purpose of posting pictures on Instagram would be for people to see them. This also means that when you are aware you are going to be perceived since that is the point of what you are doing, then there is as high probability that you will consider how that

perception is coming across.

This is something that is prevalent for people using social media as advertisement for their brand or themselves, since their self-presentation is how they will make money. However, it is also prevalent when it comes to people wanting to showcase that they have had a good vacation since this is often a push factor for why people go travelling: the prestige of the trip. Therefore, having good self-presentation is an excellent way of showing off your prestigious trip.

These are aspects that people are concerned with despite the fact that being seen as cognizant of your outward appearance (in looks or personality) often comes across as ego-fuelled or conceited. Notions that people who are trying to manage how they come across would often likely want to avoid. Even if most people are often concerned with these aspects in some capacity (Leary, 1996, p. 40). Which also means that even if somebody has a good reason as to why they would like to manage the impression they give off for business reasons or for personal peace-of-mind, then doing it successfully is important for not making the impression worse, by coming across as concerned by your ego.

When it comes to social media, then there is not just the engagement of a one-on-one or face-to-face interaction. It also opens up more easily for the opportunity for people to have more social identities simultaneously with each other, which might be the online-persona, the in-person persona, and potentially a difference between personas on social media accounts. Additionally, then it brings in and muddles the distinction between personal appearances and what is shared with the public, which is done through the simultaneously muddled real world interactions and what is done online (Picone, 2015, p. 472). Which means that while social media accounts, might not dramatically alter your personal identity and the presentation thereof, then it opens up for there to be a difference between them. The fewest people show everything that they are on their account, which makes it possible to give a curated idea of who you are to be posted. Which might vary slightly from how you can present yourself in a face-to-face conversation. Though the posts on an account remain something that you can show to the public and therefore impact the impression you give to others.

However, posting on social media also means that the performance that you are giving through your impression management needs to be consistent. There are multiple different people following your content at the same time, which is a lot of different people to perform in front of and to manage the impression you give to. Which then considering that they might have wildly different perspectives then managing a sort of narrative unity can be a difficult task. This also means that there has been some debate about whether the social media

performance is for the perfect self or if it functions as more of a complimentary layer to ones already existing performance. Though given that social media and internet communities have created their own sort of cultures, then they cannot be said to be principally for presenting the perfect self (Picone, 2015, pp. 474-475).

In addition to this then Picone (2015) raises an important though complicated question in regard to what it means for this performance that is happening on social media when it comes to copyrighted content. On Instagram, which is what this paper is concerned with, then there is the possibility to use music in the reels, likewise, then lots of people post pictures where others are clearly visible in the background. Furthermore, then people have the option to share these reels to their own account if they are made by others, which then raises the question regarding the possibility for these performances that are happening in the posts being “exploited” by others in a sense. Which does not even include the considerations of the information that companies can get through personal data and how people who are managing their online identity are often through this given away exactly the kind of information that these companies want (p. 475).

This paper does not aim to answer the questions if some type of exploitation is happening of performances, nor is it trying to focus on the potential instances of copyright on Instagram. However, keeping in mind that people can use music to narratively enhance a feeling or setting when going on holiday, or showcase a place characterized by the amount of people there (places like Times Square or Shibuya scramble) is something that happens in travel content on Instagram. Which is something that is often done in order to enhance a performance and to help feed off the associations of the place they travel to, which in turn can help with impression management.

When it comes to who have benefited from online self-presentation then Krämer and Winter (2008) pointed out how people deemed extraverts have been seen to flourish in social online spaces and how introverts can find the online setting less overwhelming to post in, though they have been found to be a little less likely to use self-presentation (p. 113). While this study is not new, then it was done utilizing pictures posted to social sites and with profile descriptions. Both things that are relevant to Instagram today.

Likewise, then the study showed that people who find themselves to be competent engaged more with an open performance of themselves, which has been linked to impression management particularly when it happens online. However, there was no correlation between people with low self-esteem and how they engage with self-presentation in either a negative or positive direction (Krämer & Winter, 2008, p. 114). Which ultimately helps this study

understand that there is no reason for it to be concerned with the personality aspects of the people being interviewed as some of the aspects of self-esteem or need for socialisation has not been deemed ever important for the online presence.

3. Methodology

This section of the project will contain the methodology. This section presents the chosen data collection method of semi-constructed interviews. This section also talks about why Instagram was the chosen social media platform and why other platforms were not chosen. Furthermore, the target demographics of the interview participants are also discussed. Additionally, this section also contains the section of thematic analysis which describes how the interview data has been processed in the analysis.

3.1 Data Collection Method: Semi-structured Interviews

This paper utilises semi-structured interviews, this is done in order to get the most out of the interviewee's personal accounts (Galletta & Cross, 2013, p. 9). This is a process that has informed the project from the beginning. It is not just present in the questions that are being asked, the interviews themselves, but also present in the literature review that informed the process.

Since this paper is concerned with the experiences users get out of the travel pictures uploaded to Instagram, getting their personal accounts is ideal. With a semi-structured interview then it means that the prepared questions are not the only options in the interview. There is the option of getting more information out of the interviewee by asking clarifying questions regarding their experiences. Something the researchers of this paper cannot prepare for in advance. This is likewise why the goal of the questions is to be open ended. In order to allow for the narrative of the interviewee to be prevalent (Galletta & Cross, 2013, pp. 47-48). Though whatever type of questions that makes the interviewee feel comfortable and open up will be used. The objective is to get their answers, opinions, and experiences and the form of the questions is the means to this end.

There are negatives to utilizing semi-structured interviews. However, the method was still picked because the benefits would outweigh them considering the problem formulation at the heart of this paper. Semi-structured interviews tend to be a longer process. There needs to be time for the preparation before the interview, the number of interviews, the transcriptions, and analysis of them takes time. Because of the time they can take to undertake it also means

there is a limit to how many interviews can be realistically conducted within the time frame of this paper (Adams, 2015, p. 493). This paper is interested in people and their narrative or experiences, being able to ask questions directly to them in the moment is ultimately going to make the process of obtaining answers smoother and more likely to be successful in the moment.

This is something that could also be obtained through fully structured interviews though it was not picked as a method for this paper. While it might serve to give you options to get comparative and standardized answers (Given, 2008, p. 838). However, the leeway and options with semi-structured interviews will serve to getting people to talk about their own experiences and opinions better since it allows for follow up questions specifically to what the person has been said. It allows the researchers to take advantage of the information given when it is showcasing particularly interesting data. Which can potentially lead to a more fleshed out analysis when there has been the option to get the most relevant information out of the participants.

Additionally, then because these interviews are regarding something that people often do for their own pleasure (travelling and social media use), there is the possibility that interviewees might get side-tracked with the retelling of their own stories. This might not be the most relevant information for this paper, even if the participants are enthusiastically sharing about it. Then with the freedom of a semi-structured approach the ability to redirect will be valuable for the researchers.

While the interviews help shed light on an interesting topic, then they are not questions that are high stakes for the people being interviewed. The questions are not regarding their personal information or of a matter of personal controversy or of a sensitive nature. Which means there is less of a likelihood that the people being asked for the interviews would back out later if they had initially agreed.

An interview guide was constructed for the interviews, which will be used to aid in getting to the interests of this paper. However, the order the questions are in will be undetermined. They will be asked after what makes the most sense and will hopefully yield the best results (Adams, 2015, p. 496).

When it comes to conducting interviews then the questions that are asked are not the only thing that matters, the way in which the interview is conducted is likewise important. Being aware of how you are as an interviewer, your ability to communicate, and ability to read people are helpful tools when it comes to facilitating interviews. Likewise, then the interviewer needs to have adequate knowledge of what they are trying to accomplish with the

interview while it is being conducted. Keeping the ‘goal’ of the interview in mind as to ask for clarification or further explanation when a subject touched on key pieces of information (Maison, 2018, pp. 157-158). The ‘goal’ of the interviews will never be to obtain a certain conclusion, but understanding what the goal of the interview is will give the ability to navigate the interview in a more optimal way.

When it comes to the manner in which the interviews has been conducted then some of them have been in person and other were conducted online. This means that the online portion of the interviews did not get to have the same face-to-face interaction as the people who got the in-person interviews, which might make for a difference in their interview experiences.

The in-person interviews do make it easier to make the interview setting a comfortable environment since you can talk directly with the person without the potential interruptions of an unstable internet connection.

Krouwel, Jolly, and Greenfield (2019) found that there was a little bit of a difference in the in-person interviews, mentioning how they could be preferred over online interviews. however, the difference could be considered insignificant in the face of potential reach and opportunities that could be reached with online interviews. Such as in cases of limited time or funding or when it is not possible to reach somebody otherwise (p. 7).

Which in the case for this paper means that the online interviews allow for people to be interviewed regardless of international placements. This paper is not specifically interested in answers given by people of the same regionality as the authors, as it puts an unnecessary restriction on the data collection when it comes to the content of the interview. Both travel and the usage of Instagram are international interests. They also allow for more flexibility when it comes to people’s schedules as there is no need to travel to where the interview will be held. Likewise, then people might feel more comfortable with the interview when they are in their own space instead of a foreign place.

Which ultimately means that while there are positives and negatives to either placement of the interviews, then the conditions for them are also different. Nevertheless, then the data has been handled the same way regardless of the space in which the interviews were held. There has been no reason to handle the data differently given the fact that the paper is interested in the personal accounts of the people being interviewed, which can be obtained online as it can in person.

After COVID-19 people have also become more accustomed to the ease of the online formatting of meetings. Which has also increased the people who find the online space to be

the preferred option (Parker, Horowitz, & Minkin, 2022). Which means there excluding it would also eliminate a lot of potential interview candidates.

This is also why both online and in-person interview have been included for this paper. The data will be dealt with in the same manner, people will have just as much opportunity to give their own answers in an online interview as they will in a face-to-face one, and it affords people the comfortability of the option to do the interview in whatever format that fits their own preferences. If the interviews would have to be only in-person, it would only have to be done with people who are in Denmark at the time. This is where the researchers are located and they do not have the opportunity to travel to every willing interview participant. Therefore, excluding online interviews would mean that the restriction of only taking interviews by people in Denmark at the time would not be a restriction born out of necessity but out of choice, one that seems redundant when people internationally might have just as much to say on the topic of this paper.

Additionally then three of the interviews were conducted in danish, which means that they had to be translated. This has been done both for the analysis and for the interview summaries provided with this paper. Halai (2007) has made some rules in order to aid when translating interviews and how to best handle the data (p. 353). Which we kept in mind when translating. Though the subject of this paper being Instagram and travelling, which are of international interest, meant that a lot of terms were used transnationally this made it an easier feat for us to translate than it might have been for other researchers. The interview summaries that have been provided alongside this project contains all the questions that the interviewees received to which the answers are not transcribed but summarised.

3.2 Data Collection

The aim of this study, as mentioned before, is to explore how UCG created by travel influencers on Instagram affect the mindset of travellers and its impact on tourism organisations. The reasoning behind this is because influencers in general have been proven to have a major impact and influence over any given sector (Enke & Borchers, 2019, p. 261), and that the travel industry is highly susceptible to be impacted and influenced by social media content. Travellers are leaning towards user-generated online content as it is perceived as more trustworthy, reliable and authentic than regular corporate campaigns (Dinis, et al., 2021, p. 136). The influence that Instagram content creators have on the tourism and hospitality sector is one of the main reasoning for investigating how they impact travellers

and tourism organisations alike.

This study will use Instagram as the social media as a main source of data. While no analytical data has been pulled from the app itself, the app will be the focus point of interviews that will go in-depth about Instagram as a platform for tourism content and how individuals perceive travel influencers and other travel content found on Instagram. While there are many other social media platforms that also engage with travel content such as Youtube and TikTok, we ultimately choose Instagram. We did this because Instagram is a well-established social media platform that has been around since 2010. With 13 years behind it, Instagram has been on the market for long enough time to have generated billions of pieces of content, to which people already have a long-standing relationship with the platform. When it comes to travel content, Instagram has amassed plenty of content. As of April 2023, the hashtag #travel has more than 679 million posts to which the next most popular hashtag with the word travel in it #travelphotography has more than 207 million posts. These numbers show how much people use the app for travel content. Therefore, as Instagram is well established as a platform for sharing travel content, the platform will perform well in academic research as there is many different opinions surrounding the app about how it has affected both digital marketing as well as society as a whole.

Moreover, according to survey conducted by Statista, in 2021 Instagram had 1.21 billion users, making it the fourth most used social media platform in the world behind, Facebook, Youtube, and WhatsApp (Statista Research Department, 2021). Instagram is also an app whose primary users are between the ages of 18 and 34. According to Statista, as of 2023 30,8 % of users are between the ages 18-24 and 30,3% between 25-34 (Statista Research Department, 2022a). These two age groups make up for more than 60% of the platforms userbase. This age group consists of a younger audience that is still old enough to be able have the means to travel by themselves. This is an essential trait to this project as traveling is a major part of it. If we were to choose a different platform such as TikTok, which has a younger audience, we would not be able to gain any fruitful data, as a younger audience than 18, logistically, may not be able to travel without parental supervision and will not be able to contribute to this study as much as other age groups.

While social media platforms are plentiful, Instagram has established itself as leading social network for sharing information, communication networking (Rajeb et. al., 2022, p. 72) Furthermore, Instagram is a platform whose content is heavily focused on photos and visual aspects, to which the tourism and hospitality sector thrive with on the platform. Compared to many of it counterparts, Instagram, as a new type of social media that,

especially at its release, had not been seen before that is based in picture interaction and help people establish connections and networks based on visual communication (Yang, 2021). Other platforms such as Facebook, while also using visual communication to some degree, it is much more text and community/group based.

Other social media platforms were also considered for this study such as Facebook and TikTok. Facebook, however, does not have the same focus on visual communication as Instagram does. Moreover, a survey found that Facebook usage among younger people and adults in the US has been declining in terms of active users' engagement and new users. Facebook usage had dropped from 60% of young adult and teens using it once a month to 27% (Leonhardt, 2021) Further studies have also shown that younger adults are fleeing Facebook for other social media platforms such as Instagram (Hou & Shiau, 2020, p 273). Studies show that younger people tend to prefer to communicate through visual means such as pictures and feel the need to share with friends immediately rather than using traditional texting to which Instagram has become more preferred (Hou & Shiau, 2020, p 273). These arguments and statistics solidify why Facebook would perform less ideally than Instagram in a study that focuses on visual communication in the tourism industry through travel influencers.

Another platform that was excluded as an option for this study is TikTok. TikTok is a social media platform that has taken the digital world by storm and has become one of the fastest growing online medias on the planet. While it took Facebook and Instagram, respectively, 8 years to reach a billion monthly active users it only took TikTok 5 years after their launch in 2016 (Dellatto, 2021). Even though TikTok has been very successful and acquired many users, Instagram still boast more users, which, in this case, will increase the likelihood of finding users to interview and collect data from. Another reason that TikTok was not chosen is because of its very young userbase. The two biggest demographic groups on TikTok are 10-19 making up 25% of users and 20-29 making up 22.4 % of users (Shepherd, 2023). The younger userbase raised a concern as to how well collected data would perform in this study as a younger audience may not have as much travel experience as an older demographic or be as aware and be able to reflect on travel influencers influence.

Based on the arguments presented in this section, we have therefore chosen Instagram to be our main source of data our interviews and main area of study. The interviews will be focused around Instagram and their personal experience with the platform. We will interview about how the participants personally use the platform, and how the

participants come about seeing travel content and how prominent travel content is in the participants personal experience with Instagram. We will also investigate how much interaction and knowledge they have about Instagram travel influencers and their opinions about them. The interviews will be the main source of data to which an analysis will be conducted through thematic analysis to which codes based on the collected data will be made.

When it came to data collection and figuring out the demographics that we as researcher would like to target, we decided that the best course of action would be to require that the interviewees must be users of Instagram. Their activity level are allowed to differ and as one can still passively use the app and not be an active poster, we did not have an activity or posting requirement. Other than being a user of Instagram, we also required the participants to be between the ages of 18 and 34 as that is the primary user group of Instagram. Our participants are between the ages of 23 to 31. We deemed this age group to be the most appropriate as it is the group that is the most represented on Instagram with over 60% of the Instagram userbase being between these ages. Lastly, we wanted to look at Instagram and travel content from a western perspective. By narrowing down the target group of we get a much more concentrated outlook on the topic as geography can have an impact on opinions especially in terms of traveling and what countries are in closer proximity in terms of travel mobility and opinion on certain destinations due to the distance. Therefore to get a more balanced outlook on traveling and the role Instagram plays, we felt it was the best course of action to keep the geographical location of the interview participants within the western hemisphere. As the researchers are also from within the western hemisphere it was a logical step to focus on this demographic as we have greater possibility to access people that are willing to be interviewed.

3.3 Thematic Analysis

This project will seek out and analyse the collected interview data. To analyse and process the data that the interviews have provided one must have a way to analyse it. For the purpose of analysing the collected data, the researchers of this paper have chosen to use thematic analysis to analyse and process the collected interview data

Thematic analysis (TA) is a method used to analyse qualitative data and can be used to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes across a set of data (Braun et al. 2006, p. 79). TA is often used in research for describing data, but it also requires some form of interpretation as TA requires the construction of themes and codes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p.

847). In TA a theme can be defined as something that “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun et al. 2006, p. 82). Themes or codes is something that can analyse a qualitative data set and find and identify important patterns that will help answer a research question.

The construction of themes and making of codes across a dataset through thematic analysis allows the researcher “see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences” (Braun et al. 2012). This is then used to make sense of commonalities across a dataset. However, not all commonalities or patterns hold the same amount of importance when analysing a dataset. According to Braun et. al. (2012) what is common it not necessarily in and of itself meaningful or important to the analysis. The patterns that are found with a dataset needs to be important to a particular topic or questions that needs to be answered. Analysis is the gateway to answering a question, and therefore the patterns and codes identified across a dataset should be created with the goal of answering a research question within a field of research. Since there are bound to be numerous patterns throughout a dataset, the purpose of thematic analysis is to analyse and identify the patterns that will produce an answer to a question. For example, if multiple interviewees talk about that they went on a trip to Paris, it becomes a pattern. However, this pattern will not be able to help the researchers in answering the question that has been sought out to answer. Therefore, while there may be many different patterns across the dataset, the codes that have been created are created to help ro find an answer for the chosen question. In the case of this project, the purpose of conducting thematic analysis on the interview dataset is so find and answer to the problem formulation that this project has sought figure out. Moreover, Gibbs (2008) describes coding and the act of making codes as a way to identify passages of data that are linked together under one idea – a code. All the data that can be linked or has resemblance to each other all go under the same code. Gibbs (2008) describes the idea of coding to be a way to index or categorise data or text to create and establish a comprehensive framework (p. 38).

When it comes to what a theme is, then Mishra and Dey (2022) how “themes are abstract and subtle expressions/patterns/processes that explain a phenomenon“ (p. 187). This means that in order for us to be able to make sense of these themes we need some kind of pattern in the data. This is how we find our codes. Saldaña (2013) explained how often then “a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” (p. 3). In our case, the language-based data would be interviews.

Themes and codes exist in a sort of hierarchy. The more a code might repeat itself in the data, the more there can be a pattern that will inevitably create a theme. This is also where the notion that Braun and Clarke (2022) explained can be found, that codes and themes are not to be considered the same, themes contain multitudes, and codes are focused on capturing the essence of a particular idea. This idea might be as expansive or as precise as needed in order to answer the research question posed (p. 54).

The concept of TA is often described as being a very flexible method (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p. 847) and there are different approaches that one can take with this method. As researchers, you can either take a deductive, inductive, or abductive approach. A deductive approach to TA would mean a ‘top-down’ approach where the researcher “brings to the data a series of concepts or ideas, or topics that they use to code and interpret the data.” (Braun et al. 2012) This means that a researcher has created a pre-determined set of codes before knowing what kind of patterns are within a dataset (Delve, 2021). In contrast to the deductive approach, the inductive approach takes a ‘bottom-up’. In an inductive approach, it is what is in the data that drives the codes and themes, to which the codes closely match what is in the dataset (Braun et al. 2012). With the inductive approach, a researcher would wait to create codes and themes until one could identify any patterns that might occur in the data. Gibbs (2008) also describes this method as data-driven coding or open-minded coding due to how it is conducted with no pre-made themes or codes as the data is the driving force behind the creation of codes. However, while there are two very clear ways of using TA, in reality using TA often uses a combination of the two as it is according to Braun et. al. (2012) impossible to be either purely deductive or inductive (p. 3). Of the two approaches one tends to dominate, it is impossible for a researcher to be a hundred percent as researchers always bring some sort of knowledge when we analyse, and researchers cannot be purely deductive as researchers rarely completely ignore data when constructing codes and themes. Just as Braun et al. describe the impossibility of using purely one, Gibbs (2008) also mentions that no one starts off with absolutely zero ideas as to what to code. Especially due to empirical research and theoretical ideas that we as researchers have conducted.

Moreover, a deductive approach is more critical in its framework and works within a constructionist theoretical framework as it focuses and examines the way the world around us is constructed. Inductive however, is more essentialist in its theoretical framework and will often research a world we already know and strive to give voice to the experiences and meanings found in a dataset (Braun et al. 2012). However, it is important to consider that the epistemology tied to the different approaches are not a given or necessary for that matter, as

the most important aspect of TA the “consistency and coherence of the overall framework and analysis that *is* important” (Braun et al. 2012). Ultimately, TA is used for analytical purposes and it is a way of creating a framework around a qualitative dataset and can help understand patterns by creating themes to include in an analysis that will help researchers achieve information that can help them answer a specific research question.

While deductive moves from theory to data and inductive from data to theory, the last approach, abductive, moves in between theory and data, which effectively combines deductive and inductive (Saunders et. al., 2019, p. 155). According to Kennedy and Thornberg (2017), the abductive approach is all about discovering new ideas and concepts that cannot otherwise be explained by pre-existing knowledge (p.52).

This project will take an abductive approach to TA. The data that will be presented in the analysis is the product of interviews which are based upon an interview guide which is based on pre-existing knowledge and theory. However, as researchers we have tried to let the data, and the patterns found within, to be the main force behind the construction of codes. By doing this, we as researchers have allowed ourselves to familiarise ourselves with the data content and patterns within, before creating the codes. Data collection has therefore gone in between and combined both theory and the data as the interview guide is theory-based, while the codes are as closely as possible data-driven. Many of the interview participants were asked the same questions which will unavoidably lead to obvious themes as the interviewees had been asked, somewhat, the same questions. For example, we have read in the literature that many young people use Instagram as a source of collecting travel inspiration (Ong, 2022). Therefore, we as researchers, were interested in asking people about this notion during the interviews. This will inevitably create a pattern as the participants were asked the same question. By moving back and forth between theory and data, the abductive approach allows for the best interpretation of patterns to create the best explanation to the proposed problem (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2017, p. 52).

3.4 The Themes

For this project we have conducted a thematic analysis consisting of 17 themes. These 17 themes are representative of the patterns and otherwise important points and themes within the interview data. The codes have been created through what, we the researchers, have determined would help us answer our problem formulation. This is where the inevitability of being slightly subjective comes in. This is done and necessary to do since not all information

that can constitute a code is equally important. As Braun et. al (2012) argues, the method of TA is done to reach an answer to a specific question to which not all patterns found within a dataset is relevant enough to construct a code for it does not aid in the answering of the problem formulation. For example, multiple interview participants mentioned the leaning tower of Pisa when we talked about instagram hotspots, this however, does not make for a fulfilling code when it comes to analysis. Likewise, a point made by a singular individual might (and have) shed light on interesting and worthwhile analytical avenues. Which means that while it might not be a quantitatively comprehensive code, it is still worth our consideration and inclusion. Ultimately, the data that is being presented in this project is done so with the intention and goal of answering the problem formulation.

3.5 Interpretivism

This project will take an interpretivistic approach. Interpretivism is both an ontological and epistemological approach that can be traced back to Weber (1864 - 1920) and Schütz (1899 - 1959) (Blaikie, 2004b, p. 510). Furthermore, interpretivism is a scientific approach that studies social phenomena and try to understand “patterns in social life, and how this meaning can be assessed” (Blaikie, 2004b, p. 510). This means that we, the researchers of this paper, recognize that the experiences a person themselves goes through in the social world are part of what creates the ‘reality’ they are in. This inherently means that the experiences and the world that they are in are socially constructed and therefore subjective to the experiences that person has had. This includes the people we have gotten the data from and us, the researchers, ourselves.

Interpretivism is often the theoretical framework for qualitative research and sees “sees the world as constructed, interpreted, and experienced by people in their interactions with each other and with wider social systems” (Antwi & Kasim, 2015, p. 219) Interpretive researchers put heavy emphasis on first-hand experience to which Antwi and Kasim (2015) put it will “enable rich and detailed, or thick description of social phenomena by encouraging participants to speak freely and understand the investigator’s quest for insight into a phenomenon that the participant has experienced” (p. 219). This can then be connected to the data collecting methodology of interviewing, which this project utilises. The semi-constructed interviews allows for participants to speak freely and therefore collect data through the participants own personal experiences.

The ontological stance of interpretivism of subjective experiences leads to the belief that there is no singular correct route to obtaining knowledge as well as there being no 'correct' or 'incorrect theories' but rather that different theories serve as a device for a comprehensive study of the social phenomenon that is of significance to the researchers (Antwi & Kasim, 2015, p. 218). As interpretivist researchers, the aim for this study is not to make broad generalisations for the population but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of a research problem. However, that does not mean that patterns cannot be found within interpretivism. The purpose of the patterns that can be found is for them to be created out of the socially constructed world of the people that engage with them (Neuman, 2003, in Antwi & Hamza, 2015). Furthermore, This project will use the analysis method of thematic analysis, which identifies patterns within a dataset, and as we take an interpretivist approach, the creating of patterns and codes is not to generalise, but rather to understand the deeper meanings within the dataset. As explained by Blaikie (2004) then interpretivism and abduction are connected. This is something that is reflected in the research design of this paper.

4. Analysis

This part of the project will contain the main findings and analysis of the interview data. This section is comprised of 17 different subheadings that represents themes and patterns that occur within the data. Here, we present the data, as well as analyse and form sub-conclusions to the individual themes. The researchers of this paper have chosen to present the data and findings in a manner to which every opinion and point that was deemed interesting and helpful in understanding and achieving an answer to the problem formulation has been presented. The researchers deemed every interviewees opinion upon the matter of traveling and Instagram to be important to which everytime they mentioned their personal experiences with traveling and how they use Instagram in relation to travel will be included in the analysis. By presenting the data in this way, we as researchers hope to achieve a fair and nuanced look into the world of tourism and social media and therefore minimise bias to create a balanced and deeper understanding of the data itself.

To summarise, this analysis is based on 10 interviews. The participants are all users of Instagram, however, their activity level and usage of the app all differ to which you can use the interview summaries for clarification. Some people use it for pastime and entertainment purposes, while others use it to post about their lives and travel adventures. All participants

were asked questions from the interview guide, to which a natural conversation then flowed and questions that were not on the interview guide were also asked, as it was semi-constructed interviews that were conducted. The data that you will find in this section are the results of the interview process and are presented in a way that shows each individual's opinions about the different topics as best as possible.

The interview participants are as follows:

Fake Name	Age	Nationality	Gender	Instagram Usage
Emma	26	Danish	Female	Daily user, but she does not post very often.
Jessica	31	Danish	Female	Daily user, but does not post, she only passively watches content.
Marcus	26	Danish	Male	Daily user, he is a very active poster and post very often.
Martin	24	English	Male	Daily user, he posts occasionally
Lily	27	Canadian	Female	Daily user, but does not post often.
Evelyn	26	English	Female	Daily user
Peter	26	English	Male	Not very active
Ethan	25	English	Male	Pretty active, has a sizeable following
Amelia	23	Danish	Female	Daily user
Lucas	25	Danish	Male	Uses it once a month

4.1 Inspiration

One crucial thing that was asked to the participants of the interviews was the notion of inspiration. As the literature states that many people use social media as a source of travel inspiration (Ong, 2022) we as researcher of this paper found it to be important to ask the participants whether they used Instagram for inspiration and how they felt the platform aided in their search for travel information. Many of the participants expressed that they do indeed

either gain or use Instagram as a source a inspiration when traveling and many of the participants see travel content on their Instagram feeds daily, which aids to being exposed and gaining travel inspiration from the platform.

When we were interviewing Emma, she mentioned that if she sees someone traveling, specifically from the ‘stories’ that features a geo-tagged location, that catches her eyes and her interest, she would be more inclined to click on it to pinpoint the location herself. Emma also mentioned that she has saved posts and stories to her Instagram account because “Ah, this looks really pretty, I would like to go there” or “Wow these are some nice tips and tricks they are sharing from their travels”. She then continues on to mention that when she looks at the posts in the moment, she might feel inspired, but will most likely forget them when the time for her to actually travel comes. During the interview, Emma mentioned that she would like to visit South Korea with her sister after having been there a few years prior with a friend of hers. She has since the trip with her friend then discovered many things to do and see through Instagram to which she felt regret that she had not discovered them for her first trip. She then continued to mention that because she did not know about the many things that you could see and do and see, she is more inclined to save South Korean travel content for her future trip with her sister to make sure that she gets to experience some of the things she has seen other people post about on Instagram. For Emma, Instagram as a platform is a great tool for first impression travel inspiration, but nothing more than that. Since she mostly uses Instagram as a pastime and entertainment outlet, she often does not think further about the travel content that she sees on her Instagram.

During the interview with Martin he expressed that he sometimes uses Instagram as a source to find new restaurants to eat at when traveling. Specifically, for more local restaurants he normally checks for their business Instagram to figure out opening hours. He found that for smaller and more local restaurants Instagram is a great tool for finding new and exciting restaurants when traveling. This statement by Martin does provide an insight into how users like Martin uses the app to search for activities and places to go eat when traveling. Instagram is indeed an app that can be used as a form of search engine and in Martins case, as a way to discover local restaurants. He also mentioned that he follows only one person that could be categories as an influencer, which is a person who travels around the world to eat at restaurants.

Martin has also gone to restaurants because this person had recommended them and generally finds a lot of inspiration for future restaurant visits from this person. Further into the interview Martin mentions that he thinks seeing an Instagram picture might inspire him to

go somewhere but it will not seal the deal. Seeing an Instagram picture is for Martin the first step, and then you do more research afterwards. This statement further solidifies that Instagram is a useful source for information, but it might not be sufficient enough as a research tool as more research is required in other places for, in this case, Martin to travel to a destination or visit a specific area or restaurant. During Martins interview, when asked about the influence of Instagram on the travel industry he answered strongly with a “Yes, it has definitely affected travel, definitely think that people have chosen were to go based on posts. I’ve chosen were to eat [when traveling] on posts. He thinks that Instagram is a great source for inspiration and that you are more likely to find places to visit on Instagram than any other social media platform.

When asked about how Instagram could be a source of inspiration, Jessica during her interview mentioned that “It is rare that I see someone be a specific place, and then think ‘oh I wanna go there too. It [inspiration] doesn’t work like that for me, because I don’t have the financial means to do that, but it is more when I beforehand know I have to go traveling that it becomes a source of inspiration.” She then provided an example of, how she had a short summer trip planned to London and she had to find hotels, activities, places to eat and places to see, to which she used Instagram as a source of inspiration. She finds inspiration through other people’s reviews on the platform as well as exploring different hashtags related to the destination that she is visiting. She then continues to emphasise that it is not the act of seeing someone travel on Instagram that gives inspiration to future trips but rather it being a source and tool of inspiration for a trip she is planning. She also mentions that in regard to food when traveling she does indeed use the search function on the Instagram explore page to find inspiration for food when going on trips. She mentions that when she went to London, she searched for specific keywords such as “London food” and “London restaurants” to which she looked at different pictures to find inspiration for places to eat.

During the interview with Lily, she mentioned that she does indeed feel inspiration from watching travel content from influencers and friends on Instagram. She continues to talk about how she would be even more inspired or interested in a travel post is if she has never heard about it before. Lily states that if it is an influencer going to, for example, Ibiza for the 50th time she would be less likely to check it out and feel inspired. She herself feels the most inspired if the content is about niche destinations or historical sights. She states in her interview “I guess it is down to the feeling of me feeling jaded about something, even if I’ve never been somewhere but I’ve seen a billion people post about it, I’m less likely to check that out, because I know it is going to be very popular with tourists.” Lily herself expresses

that touristy and popular destinations are not something that she is interested in, so she does not feel any travel inspiration from popular and regular posted destinations.

Lily does, however, feel general inspiration when she sees Instagram photos that pique her interest. Lily expresses that she likes to travel around to different renaissance fairs and find enjoyment and gains inspiration from seeing such content on Instagram. During the interview she stated “I would love to do that [at the renaissance fair]. What would I wanna wear to Ren fair? And like, if I was to go, what kind of experience would I want? And what ways is it similar to what this person is doing?” Through this statement it is clear that Lily uses Instagram in a way to make her feel inspired for her next trip to the point where she is thinking about what experience she may have when traveling to different renaissance fairs. Lily often finds herself daydreaming about the travel content she finds interesting and would wonder what her own experiences would be like if she were to travel to a place or destination, she finds interesting. She also mentions that a trip she would pique her interest would be to travel to Scotland and see the different Harry Potter landmarks and states that after seeing that content on Instagram her reaction would be “Oh that’s so cool! I wish I could do that or that is so beautiful I wish I could see that.” Instagram as a platform has given Lily the opportunity to engage and consume content that fit her travel interest and make her feel inspired along the way.

During the interview with Marcus he expressed that he has indeed used and gained inspiration for future trips he would like to go on. Furthermore, while he travels a lot and meet many people during his travels, it is more the conversation he has around a destination that inspires him to go rather than just a picture or through geo-tagged locations. He prefers to talk to the person behind the picture and get a more nuanced outlook on the destination that he feels he cannot get through pictures. However, while he appreciates conversations more so than pictures, he still finds Instagram to be a good platform for travel inspiration. He also mentions that he does use Instagram as a form of search engine to find travel information about different destinations that he would like to visit. Marcus will use the search bar function to search for pictures and information regarding destinations, locations, and activities. He then further explores the destination on Instagram through hashtags to make an estimate of the popular things to see and do.

Ethan mentioned how he will use Instagram to directly find content in and around an area that he is visiting or plans to visit when travelling. The searches on Instagram will function as a point of inspiration for what to see/do. He also stated how he has seen pictures on Instagram and then proceeded to go seek it out and see it for himself on a family trip.

Which shows that this inspiration is not just something that exist as a starting point or a point of interest but is also something that has caused physical action to be taken.

While Amelia mentioned how she uses Instagram for travel inspiration a lot more generally. This is done by looking up activities to do in a country more at large to learn more about what options for what to do exists. Though it is not something that she specifically searches for herself, primarily it is inspiration that will be brought to her through the algorithm. Additionally, then Amelia also mentioned that one of the positives of seeing the pictures that influencers or travel agencies post (when likely edited) holds a lot of power to inspire people to go see new places they might otherwise not have considered. Therefore, if people use Instagram as a source of inspiration more so than a source of looking for the exact trip that they want, it can function as a great tool for traveling. This is something Amelia mentioned that she herself had felt, the Instagram posts had not influenced her so much to go to a different destination that what she already had planned, however it helped with inspiration for what to do while on the planned trip.

Through the interviews and the statements made by the participants it is evident that many of the participants find Instagram to be a useful source and tool for finding and gaining travel inspiration. While they all have their individual approach to inspiration, they all have in common that Instagram provides inspiration for traveling. Some may use it as a tool to search for things to see or do at a destination they have already decided on while others use it as a first hand impression source, to which they feel inspired to visit a destination they have seen on Instagram and would conduct further research on, which would lead to them visiting a location, activity or destination. However, it is important to mentioned that there are different nuances of inspiration. As Instagram is often used as a past-time or for entertainment, for many of the participants Instagram only served for inspiration in the time they were active on the app, to which they would close the app and forget about what they had seen. In some cases, however, travel inspiration can also result in physical action being taken such as going to a restaurant that they had seen on Instagram or activity when they are out traveling. It is however rare that travel inspiration from results in an actual booking of from just seeing a few Instagram posts.

4.2 Cross-Checking

Cross-checking is something that came up through the interview participants themselves and felt worthy to include. It ties in with the previous point of inspiration (section 4.1) though does not reflect the same points and expands on what people do after they feel inspired.

During the interview with Jessica, she expressed that while she uses Instagram as a source of inspiration for hotels, restaurants, and activities. However, it is not the only platform she uses to find travel information. She mentions as an example about a trip she went on to London and how she after using google to find a hotel, she then afterwards used Instagram to crosscheck and find more pictures and inspiration for hotels for her trip. She continues on to mention that while she uses Instagram as a big part travel inspiration, she also uses different social media platform to cross check information. She especially uses TikTok alongside Instagram and uses the two platforms in a form of cross-checking harmony when looking for travel inspiration. She also mentions that she would never use just one picture, one source or one influencer to base her travel decisions on. It often becomes more of an extensive research bucket of multiple websites, reviews, and platforms that Jessica uses to plan and find travel information.

When interviewing Marcus, he expressed that he often uses Instagram as a search engine to find travel inspiration. However, he also uses other platforms such as Youtube to investigate and conduct research about a destination. He mentions that if something catches his eye, such as a thumbnail or title description on Youtube he will then afterwards go to Instagram to crosscheck the information and create a larger understanding of the destination and what it has to offer.

Lucas mentioned how he did find some inspiration on Instagram when it came to what could be interesting to see on a trip. However, he disclosed that Instagram was not his primary inspiration source. Which mostly came from him checking information on Wikipedia.

Ethan mentioned something similar, where he does actually say that he has used Instagram to search up travel information and not just for inspiration. Which is something he mentioned doing when he had gone interrailing. However, he does also say that he also uses google, putting it into the conversation to underline that Instagram is not the only place he searches for this kind of travel information. He also cross checks. He does mention that he uses Instagram and values the visual aspect that it brings to the table instead of something

like articles.

Lucas mentioned how the cross checking is something that often comes naturally in the sense that even if a place pops up as an advertisement, then he would likely not go through any link the app provides but instead search up the place separately himself.

Similarly, then Evelyn mentioned how if she felt herself be influenced by an influencer, she would probably look up the thing in question elsewhere before making a decision herself. She did find Instagram to be something she might look into if she personally knew of someone who had gone on a trip and posted about it. Since she could then see what they had done or if they had tagged any places that she too could go see.

Someone like Peter mentioned how he appreciated longer form videos than what Instagram allowed, which meant he sought out information on YouTube more so. However, he would get see himself/others get inspired by the short of beautiful videos on Instagram.

A big part of Instagram as an app is the scroll feature that allows for users to continuously scroll for new content on both one's personal feed, as well as the explore page and reels. In the interview with Martin, we asked him how he feels about the continuous scroll mechanism and how it affects his view on travel content. To this he answered "It [scrolling] gives a very shallow representation of travel, right? Because I mean it's, the content itself is already either a still image or like a short reel, and people who make these reels are pressured to make them even shorter because they know people don't have the attention span to sit through like a 'longer' reel, even though a longer reel is only like one minute. So, they tend to cram in as much stuff as they can, so that gives it kind of a shallow representation" to which he continues to mention that "So, yeah I do think that the compact nature of Instagram content does give like a tapered view." While Instagram might provide a place of infinite content and opportunities to discover the more travel information, the compatibility and limitations that picture or a short video, does in Martins optic, create a shallow visual representation of travel content as the limitations of the app forces content creators to cram as much or little information into just a picture or short reel to which he feels as if the content becomes shallow and too tampered with almost as if content creators and influencers are fighting for peoples attention and not so much giving a destination the proper representation in their posts.

This displays this tendency people are showing to cross check information and use Instagram as one of the sites where inspiration comes from. Which suggests that Instagram, with its graphic appeal that fits well with travel content being enjoyed visually, sparks the attention that leads people to do further research themselves. Which would also suggest that

any editing that happens in the pictures is only enhancing this phenomenon of inspiring people to look up more information.

Few of the participants used Instagram fully as a method of information gathering, often people saw something that they then felt the need to look up further. This might be because the short form content or limited amount of pictures they come across at a time (if they do not look up places but simply scroll through the app) does not give them all the information they want. Other sites offered longer form content (YouTube) or more detailed information regarding the points of interest (articles). The need to have more information to make an informed travel decision is an understandable one, especially since this might be an expensive adventure for somebody to engage in.

Additionally, then this need to cross-check information might also be a reflection of there being some anticipation that the posts the interviewees are seeing are not fully authentic as a source which will be further explored in section 4.4 on trustworthiness/authenticity.

4.3 Editing

Instagram as a platform is heavily picture and video based. The app itself has an editing function where users can put filters, which is an editing tool that can make pictures look more professional with the help of tint and colour. With the help of in-app editing tools users have the ability to alter their pictures on their pictures and edit them to look different than the raw initial picture. Before one can upload a picture onto Instagram, one is met with this editing feature. While users can choose to omit the editing their pictures, it is common practice to use filters on Instagram to make pictures look 'perfect'. While Instagram has been linked to a decrease in mental health in younger people due to bodily editing and gives unrealistic body expectation (Moreton & Greenfield, 2022, p. 6) we as researchers also wanted to ask whether the interview participants thought about editing when it came to travel pictures they post themselves as well as content from others and if had an effect on their perception and expectations when traveling.

During the interview with Emma, when she was asked about editing, she initially talked about how she does not really think about editing when she is using the app. However, she then continued on to talk about how editing it "is always in the back of my mind, that pictures are in some way edited". The things that are always in the back of her mind is how either people edit themselves or colours to make them look more vibrant. However, it is not

something that she thinks about unless it really exaggerated to the point where it is impossible to notice whether something has been edited. She also mentioned that she thinks users of Instagram have learned to hide the editing very well. As the conversation went on and Emma was asked about her opinion on editing, she responded “I think it’s a shame if you start to edit yourself. Like, I see on the news, that a new celebrity has been caught photoshopping themselves. I think it’s a shame, because I think it gives a wrong ‘picture’ of everything and how you view yourself.” She then continues on to comment on editing colours to which she states, “when it comes to make colours more exaggerated, I just think it makes it look pretty”. This comment by Emma shows that there is a distinction between editing a body versus colours. When editing a body, it may give of false bodily expectations while editing colours seems harmless. However, Emma provides an example as to where she think colour editing might be a bit ‘too much’. In the example she mentions that she has seen many pictures on Instagram from Cappadocia in Turkey where it is very popular to fly with air balloons. She continues on to say “in a case like this I feel like you would make the sky a little bluer than it is, and make the colours on the balloons a little more powerful”. Otherwise, Emma does not really notice colour editing as scrolling on Instagram is often a very quick thing, as you just scroll from one post to another. It is only when she spots a very specific type of travel content she really notices and thinks about editing in travel photos. This piece of content is when she spots post about comparison of pictures you see on social media versus what they look it real life.

In continuation on the topic of editing, we asked Emma if she would feel disappointed if the were to travel to a destination that she has seen on Instagram and it did not look the same to which she answered “No, I don’t think I would feel disappointed, because there is something in my head that says, maybe I just didn’t show up on the right day.” She also mentions that there may have been other factors that had made the water look less blue or the flowers less vibrant. Emma emphasises that she would not feel disappointed even if what she saw in real life was different than what she saw in Instagram. She would not blame the user that posted the picture even if the destination did not live up to the photo she had seen on Instagram.

When asked how Emma feels about the importance of showing an accurate representation of a picture with editing in mind, Emma answered “I don’t feel like they have to show the whole truth” to which she continues on to say “It just a ‘little’ [insignificant] picture that has been taken at a very specific time and day. Of course, there is an angle on the picture. It’s been looked at afterwards before it was posted anywhere”. She expresses that she

would feel as if it was okay if she showed up to the destination and it did not look the same as she saw on Instagram, due to the factors that was just mentioned. She also expresses that she herself would not feel disappointed, but expressed empathy for those who do.

In the interview with Emma, she mentioned in relation to editing that there might be other factors that come into play when people edit their photos, which could lead to disappointment within other people but not her specifically due to equipment. She states that while the destination might be pretty it might not be as pretty when she herself takes a picture of it simply due to her phone not being able to portray the beauty of the destination. She elaborates by saying “It might be my phone that is just too old, and it can’t ‘catch’ the destination”. To which she continues to mention that other people that have newer phones will be able to take better pictures than her, and that those pictures will look better on Instagram than the pictures that she takes. This indicates that equipment also has a lot of influence when it comes to the quality of pictures portrayed on Instagram and that editing can be a tool to make it look closer to real life.

As we were interviewing Martin, the notion of editing came up multiple times, to which we directly asked him what his opinion about it was in relation to its usage on travel content on Instagram. He quickly stated that he thinks editing might tamper with people’s expectations, and generally refers to it as a negative aspect. He mentions that he has become extremely aware of editing in travel content after continuously seeing videos and photos comparing social media posts to real life and how they never look the same. Martin mentioned that he himself have visited many beaches in southeast Asia that he often sees people post about on social media, to which he says “I’ve been to like these beaches in southeast Asia, and they are beautiful, but some of these pictures are insane, like water should never be that colour. I don’t know why they [content creators] are taking pictures of the water and make them like an unhealthy level of blue”. Martin mentions that he thinks editing is the most prominent in nature photos and photos for nature tourism because it is so visual and that it can be hard to for example describe a beach, to it is easier to tamper with the visuals of it. He also mentioned that, as he has spent time traveling in Japan, he recalled an instance when he was disappointed after seeing pictures of Japanese cherry blossoms on Instagram and remembering that they were a very vibrant pink colour, but when he saw them in real life they were almost white and not vibrant pink as he had seen on Instagram which led him to become disappointed.

Martin continues to emphasise that editing can tamper with one’s expectation, as well as general oversensationalising of a destination can led to disappointment and unreal

expectations. He also mentions that people should take what they see with a grain of salt and that you cannot expect Instagram to be a perfect representation of real life. He also mentions that just as how a Bic Mac burger never looks like its promotion pictures at McDonalds, people should be aware of it on Instagram, as that is just what marketing is most of the time and that people will exaggerate the features of a product. He then continues on to mention how he finds this unfortunate, but it is more up to the consumer, in this case Instagram users, to differentiate between what is real and what is not.

Through Martins interview it was very clear that he has a negative view and relationship with editing on Instagram and generally finds it annoying and a shame that we find a need to edit our photos too heavily. Furthermore, he also states that it depends on the individual's media literacy and travel experience to lessen the disappointment, and that he can easily see that other people might get misled by Instagram content and that he would not be surprised if it happened frequently. Instagram can therefore be said to have a bad reputation when it comes to editing with travel content to a point where it has become a negative aspect of the app and that people will get misled often.

During the interview with Jessica, we asked if she knew about or thought about editing on Instagram to which she stated "Yes, but I guess I primarily think about it when it comes to bodies or faces. I don't think about it when it comes to attractions or restaurants and so on." She then continues on to mention the reason she thinks mainly about it when it comes to bodies and faces is: "There is a pretty big focus of retouching, filters and so on human bodies." While she mostly thinks about editing in terms of bodies, she also mentions that she deep down also knows that people edit their pictures by putting filters and tampering with the lighting in non-body pictures. However, she states that "I think its really hard to make something look drastically different than it does in real life." Her opinion shows that while she is aware that editing takes place in most pictures that are posted on Instagram, she feels as if it is most damaging and negative when it is done to human bodies and faces and not so much nature and attractions. She also mentions that the good thing about Instagram, is that it allows you too see many different pictures of the same destination or attraction, which means that you can, according to Jessica, get a good sense of what a destination looks like as through multiple pictures that have been taking by thousands of different people. Furthermore, she also states that editing 'too much' on colours can lead to disappointment, but that she herself tend to hold realistic expectation when she goes traveling as you should never truly believe what you see online is what you will get.

During the interview with Marcus, it became apparent that he himself post a lot of

travel content on Instagram due to the fact that he travels a lot more than your average person. He mentions that he sometimes to edit the pictures to look more presentable in terms of making collages or editing a video. He does not put filters or enhance colours as he feels like he does not have the editing skills to make them look nicer, frankly he thinks he makes it look worse if he tries to edit the lighting or colours. We then asked him if he thought about editing in other people's pictures and how it makes him feel. To this he answered "Yes, I do [think about editing in other people pictures]. And damn, I judge them a lot". He mentions that he especially judged people based on how much they edit themselves and their appearance especially if he knows them personally and know what they look like. While he would never confront people about the editing, they do on themselves he does think about it and see it a lot on Instagram that people edit themselves and their appearance and generally see it as a negative thing.

Furthermore, when interviewing Marcus he also mentioned that he also thinks about editing if a location or landscape picture look exaggeratedly beautiful and would often question the picture and think to himself "Does it really look like that?" he continues with an example of the sunrise that he has witnessed in the Philippines and that sometimes pictures on Instagram are an okay representation of the phenomenon to which he continues "But other times, the phone almost creates a scenic beauty, that obviously is there, but the phone somehow makes it look nicer than it really is." Marcus then continues to mention how it creates a false narrative through the pictures that people post on Instagram and finds it to be a shame. Marcus then mentions that he appreciates and like raw and truthful pictures a lot more than overly edited pictures. He continues to mention that Instagram often gives him a twisted picture of reality as it is mostly the fun and exiting things that he sees people post about when traveling. He gives an example of traveling between cities on Asia and the long bus rides that he has been on. The less exiting part of traveling is something he rarely see people post about even though it is common knowledge to him that there are ups and downs to traveling. He therefore sees the way we interact with Instagram when we travel and how some people edit their photos to show an unrealistic perspective to traveling as a shame.

When it comes to editing then Lucas mentioned how he did not consider editing when he was looking at other people's posts. He even mentioned that he did not believe that he thought about editing 'enough' which was something he likewise thought the general Instagram user did not either. Lucas further explained how he is aware that people use editing for their pictures, he had mentioned it a little bit prior himself, however he did not operate on the assumption that people edited their photo when he saw these travel pictures on Instagram.

Which is something that might have come out of the fact that he himself does not edit his own photos. People might operate under the assumption that others use the app the same way that they themselves do when they use it. Lucas himself describes this as “a gap between what happens and what I expect”. Therefore, since he does not edit his photos, he does not assume others do. Which might bring about this gap since just because he does not see it, did not mean that editing did not happen.

When Lucas was questioned on why he might say he did not think enough about editing, then he could not pinpoint if it was because he assumed people were honest or if it was because he did not know what options for filters or something similar was on the app. Thereby implying with the honesty point that a sort of honesty or that more authenticity is present when it comes to unedited pictures. Whereas the point about not knowing what editing options exist shows how much of an ‘upper hand’ people who do frequently use these features can have when it comes to presenting their pictures. Especially if people do not assume editing is present then even the edited photos will come across as ‘honest-unedited-photos’ if the user cannot recognize it.

Lucas elaborated that he thought that his feelings towards the editing of travel photos “largely depends on who benefits from it”, stating that people doing minor fix ups on the posts they upload from a private holiday was understandable. However, when it came to people who might benefit financially from the edited improvement of the pictures then it was more problematic. He was off the opinion that if people had to disclose if a filter had been put on a post then it would make sense to apply it to influencers though perhaps not every single person posting a photo from their travels would need to do so.

Ethan mentioned that he did think about editing happening but mostly in the sense that he thought that it would be silly not to expect a major travel brand to edit the content that is being put out. Which is similar to something Amelia mentioned in her interview, where she states that she knows editing happens all the time on Instagram. While she does not think it is fair to edit pictures to the point that they misrepresent someplace (a hotel room), then she also anticipated people editing a sunrise photo on a trip. Which showcases this expectation that people also have when it comes to what they see on Instagram. Because of the expectation that editing happens when people consume media on Instagram then there is also the resignation to simply accept it.

This expectation of editing happening in photos is then battling the expectations that are set up of the destinations. Meaning that if all the pictures a person can see on Instagram of a destination makes the water look bright blue and the houses surrounding it purely white,

and the destination does not actually look like that then people will be disappointed. This was a point that Amelia mentioned she saw as a problem, while she also stated she expected editing. Thereby, she expected to see edited photos on Instagram, but she also expected to see the destination as it would be if she got there. While she herself have worked for a travel agency, then she also knew that it was something that had to work with when they purely had 'bad' photos from a destination. She questioned how much editing was fair to do on those photos.

Amelia explained how she would probably blame the person who uploaded a picture if she felt misled by it. Since the editing or whatever else the uploader used for the picture is likely the cause. Amelia mentioned how she would find it unlikely that others would blame the destination for feeling misled, however, she could see how people might blame Instagram has a whole for it. Which considering the fact that if you find the misleading behaviour to be found in the editing, then the users who did it, or the platform that allows (or even encourages editing, since the platform itself has built in features and software for you to use to edit your pictures) it likely has a part it. While the destination itself cannot change impact what happens to it in terms of editing.

However, there was also differing opinions on what gets edited or what is more likely to be edited in a photo on Instagram. Evelyn explained how she found influencers to be decently dependable in displaying a destination since there was a limit to how much they could really change a nature scene through editing. Though ultimately Evelyn did not think she thought all that much editing when she looked at photos on Instagram, it was mostly along the lines of shade augmentation for the picture. Likewise, then she doubted that others might think of editing. She did agree that people might vaguely keep it in mind, that it happens on the platform, but she thought that travel photos were unlikely to be the main source of edited photos the app would have. The editing that happens in her mind on Instagram relates more to people's bodies or face tune more so than to scenery. Evelyn mentioned how "you are not gonna make the tree curvier", to explain how she did not see editing of a nature picture on a holiday as likely to happen.

When it comes to people's potential disappointment at seeing a destination look different in Instagram pictures versus in real life, then Evelyn thought that it might be something that people could experience. However, since she suspected that she would do so much research about the things she would want to see on her travels and that others would do the same. That people would then come across multiple other pictures and when taking them all into account they could probably get a somewhat reliable image of the place. She also

stated how she would probably still find a destination pretty even if the colours had been augmented for Instagram. Peter asked for clarification when we questioned if he thought about editing, once clarified what we meant he wholeheartedly mentioned that he does not think about editing at all. Which he lamented he maybe should. He clearly understood and explained how he might be let on by pictures because he does not consider editing (not in photos he sees, nor in his own pictures). He did ultimately decide that he thought that the greater part of Instagram users (particularly the daily users) would probably be aware that editing frequently happens on the platform.

It was difficult for Peter to determine whether he found travel photos on Instagram to be authentic when keeping editing in mind. He ultimately settled on him thinking they were unauthentic. Nevertheless, then if he went to a destination, and it did not live up to the Instagram pictures, he thought he would be upset with himself more so than whomever uploaded the image or Instagram as a platform. Stating that he believed he should have known better or researched more. He would be more frustrated with the influencer than the destination when it came to those two. Since the influencer had a hand in editing the photos. This is an opinion he shared when it came to corporate accounts on Instagram, if a DMO had an Instagram account and he felt misled by the images they uploaded, then he would still have felt more upset when the influencer did it. This is because it felt more personal to him when the influencer did it. Since they are more 'familiar' than the corporate account. There is an idea that people think they should consider editing, even if it not something that they personally keep in mind much. Edited photos are seen to be more unauthentic or dishonest than photos that are not.

Furthermore, the interviewees also felt vaguely resigned to the fact that editing would happen on the platform, even if nobody professed a like for the phenomenon of it happening. The editing that happens might also reflect poorly back to influencers or to destinations, however, plenty of people also used Instagram as a source of inspiration. Then if it serves to entice others to look up a place elsewhere, then the edited photo could be considered successful marketing in a sense. Checking to see if people find it more likely to go see a destination if they see photos from it with or without editing, might be interesting further research. Since the negative opinion that the interviewees have toward editing (finding it dishonest), may or may not outweigh the influence of beautifying a photo through editing.

Many of the participants also felt as if editing was a negative thing and that it could possibly tamper with their expectations. However, it is mostly linked to the editing and re-touching of bodies and faces that people generally hold to a more negative regard than when

it comes to editing of attractions or nature as many believed it to be hard to edit a non-body picture out of realistic proportions. Yes, the colours may be exaggerated or clouds may have been excluded from the picture, but the essence of the destination still remains. It is clear through the interview process that some think more about editing than others, but the general consensus is that editing is more of a negative notion in relation to Instagram, and many feel as if they cannot trust any of the content they see on Instagram and have to take it with a grain of salt. However, this has been expressed as more of a natural occurrence and that not believing in the things you see on Instagram has become a normality due to the excessive manipulation of pictures that occur on the platform.

4.4 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

When engaged with social media marketing or the ‘success’ users (both influencers and corporate accounts) then the concept of how persuasive they are factors in. Since the ability to market yourself or your company will be reflected in others perception of you and of how convincing you are in the presentation of your content. This is something that was worth learning if the interviewees consciously or subconsciously paid attention to. It was likewise something that multiple participants had an opinion on.

When asked about the reliability of influencers to showcase a destination, Emma quickly starts to compare them to politicians. She starts talking about how just as politicians, being an influencer is a job and they get paid for it, and that she also knows that she should never expect that a destination is exactly as an influencer has showcased it. She then states “I would not say that influencers are super reliable. Its probably because I somewhat expect that that’s not how it is [in real life]. Because, they might be trained in it, because it is their jobs to show their lives. So, I-uh think that that’s probably not what I am going to get if I go traveling.” To some extent, Emma knows not to fully trust what she sees Instagram influencers post. This could indicate that there is always some sort of doubt in Emma’s mind of whether she can trust what she is being presented. When comparing influencers to politicians she states that “I do not fully trust influencers, because it is their job, just like it is a politician’s job to convince me to vote for them.” This indicates that, just like politicians, influencers try their best to convince people to follow them. They do this through the editing and making things look better than they actually are, which then harms their reliability and trustworthiness.

She also mention that she wishes that people [users of Instagram] are able to read between the lines because being an Influencer is a legitimate job and that not everything, they post are true. However, she also thinks that there are bound to be people that fall for the fantasy that influencers are trying to portray. This further implies and solidify that Emma does not see influencers as a reliable and trustworthy source due to it being their profession and they get paid to sell a ‘fantasy’ to their followers. In relation to this Emma mentioned about influencers that: “I might just have a very negative outlook on influencers. But it might just be because I think that they something that they have to show, and they don’t just showcase something for fun. They never show when something goes wrong [when traveling].” She continues “Maybe they would showcase it more with a video, like ‘see how hard this is for me’. But I don’t think they would ever post a picture about it. They would never show a slightly ugly or ‘normal’ picture of themselves, especially when traveling. That I can’t imagine.” Through this statement it can be said that Emma has a negative outlook on influencers due to them trying to sell a fantasy or not showing the bad parts of traveling.

However, Emma continues to mention that she think people would be more inclined to follow influencers over brands when it comes to traveling. Emma mentions that you might live through the other person and become invested in their content. She herself would also be more inclined to follow an influencer over a brand because she can somehow relate more and that the content is more catered towards her as a young person than a brand that has multiple people and age groups that they target.

Martin mentioned in his interview that he finds friends and or local acquaintances to be much more trustworthy than influencers. In his opinion influencers are always trying to promote or sell you something, while regular UCG content from friends or acquaintances have a much bigger authenticity in his eyes. Continues to mention that he follows only one specific influencer that focuses on food travel, to which he mentions the reason he trusts this specific influencer is because he visits no-name random hole-in-the-wall restaurants that no one has heard of instead of going to extremely popular name-brand restaurants. Because of Martins interest in food when traveling this type of content is more authentic and trustworthy than generic and popular influencers who only visits high-end or popular restaurants when traveling.

Martin also mentions that he feels as if the younger generations are more exposed to influencers over regular travel organisations to which he says that “they [the younger generation] probably also prefers travel influencers.” He continues on to mention that the reason for this is most likely because with influencers, it seems more personal and

“They are just like you and me, so they’ll show me the right places, more realistically.” While he thinks that this is the general opinion for the Gen Z, he adds on to this and says that “But this probably isn’t the case, ‘cause the influencer has more money than me, so its actually very different, they are not like me.” Later on, in the interview Martin states “I mean, influencers will do anything for followers.” These statements create a grey area towards influencers as they both seems as more trustworthy than travel agencies, but to some degree also differs from your average person and cannot be completely categorised as ‘one of us’ or ‘a person just like you and me’. However, Martin continues to mention that he still wholeheartedly believes that Gen Z will have a positive view of influencers more so than travel agencies.

During the interview process with Jessica, she mentions that she is a little bit sceptical of influencers and the marketing surrounding them when it comes to sponsored content or advertisement done by influencers. Furthermore, she mentions that if she has an influencer that she trusts, she is more willing to accept and understand their occupation and why they take sponsorship if it is not the influencer’s only content and that is not their primary goal to sell her something. She mentions that her trust is very much linked to the frequency that and influencers posts about sponsored content. To this she says, “you can’t advertise for 40 different things and say you like all of them.” There is a cap of how much Jessica is willing to accept and that her trust is non-existent when an influencer continuously praises product after product with no negative inputs at all, because it is simply unrealistic that none of the advertised products or experiences have all been perfect without anything negative to say about the product. Jessica also mentions that she values honesty very highly in content she sees on Instagram and there is some sort of legitimacy issue when an influencer is paid by a brand to advertise a product or experience.

Jessica also mentions in relation to feeling disappointment after not getting the same product or experience as they saw on Instagram that she would feel anger and disappointment towards influencers in specific situations. She states, “I think I would be annoyed if like an influencer had vouched really hard for a certain hotel, that turned out to be downright disgusting or an expensive restaurant that turned out to be extremely bad.” She continues to mention that she would be extremely disappointed and annoyed if it had turned out to be an influencer, she otherwise had trusted but had then been sponsored to say nice things about a bad restaurant or hotel. Trusting influencer can therefore be said to be a difficult thing because they do get sponsored to say positive things about product or institutions such as hotels that are inherently bad. Trust must be present in order for their

followers to purchase a sponsored item and betraying that trust can only lead to mistrust and anger from their followers.

During the interview with Lily, she expresses that she generally finds influencers to be trustworthy and a reliable source for representing travel content. She mentions that if she finds an influencer she likes and does not get tired of their content after a while she would find them to be a reputable source of a destination or activity. The only reason she feels she would act or think cautiously about influencers is if they were to post too frequently about luxury travel. However, just because influencers would post about luxury travel, does not mean Lily does not find them to be a trustworthy source, she just would not use or see them as an inspirational source of information as she herself cannot afford luxury travel trips.

Lily continues on to mention that there are instances where she had gotten tired of certain influencers which led to her unfollowing them. We then asked her what it would take for her to unfollow an influencer and how she might grow tired of them. To this she answered, "I guess it depends on how authentic they feel. Like, if they feel happy being where they actually are [when traveling] or if it feels like they just treat it like a job." Lily then mentions, while there is nothing wrong with being one's job is being an influencer, it might seem sometimes like their "heart" is not in it and can come off as unauthentic. This alongside too much luxury travel content would prompt Lily to unfollow an influencer. To Lily, authenticity is linked to the influencer's passion and general enjoyment of traveling, whereas if it is treated like a job, then it also looks like it is a job and does not have 'heart' or 'soul' on their posts. If it is visually noticeable that someone is traveling just for the job aspect and does not seem to enjoy their travels it does, in Lily's opinion, take their authenticity away as travel influencers.

Lily also mentioned during her interview that she herself finds influencers more reliable and authentic than traditional brands because it feels more personal. She states that she feels like it is easier to feel as if you are interacting with a person with an influencer rather than when it is a brand name. She also mentions that influencers can feel more honest with a personal touch that brands do not provide. She states in the interview "I feel like I personally would be more likely to want to interact with something if it is a person that is selling it to me rather than a brand." To Lily the notion of the interaction feeling personal is important. This is something that influencers are known to be, as they are their own person with their opinions and experiences. A brand on the other hand is a cooperation that is just trying to sell you something and does not have that personal touch which an influencer has.

During the interview with Marcus he expressed that he does not follow influencers at all. He mostly follows his fellow travel buddies and friends and family. He does however mention that he sometimes crosses paths with travel influencer content as he also uses Instagram to search for information in the search bar, to which he feels it is impossible to avoid influencer travel content. He expressed that he has an understanding of the profession and acknowledges that they have to make money through sponsorships and that he does not have neither a negative or positive outlook on them. He, however, mentions that he feels as if they show a falsehood of traveling and that they are not the most trustworthy content creators when it comes to travel due to sponsorships. He believes in transparency on social media, which influencers are not always the best at, so he has no interest in following them.

Lucas mentioned in his interview how he had made a friend on an inter-railing trip that he now followed on Instagram, who would take pictures on an analogue camera and scan them in to use on the app. Which he described “would look like your mum’s old travel albums”. He assessed that his friend did not add further editing to the photos he would upload, since it seemed to Lucas that the point of the photos were to preserve this air of authenticity to them.

Which then implies that they would be less authentic if they were taken digitally and edited when they were uploaded to the platform. Likewise, then it would seem to indicate that the authenticity is not a reflection on the direct usage of the app, but how it is being used that could determine how authentic the uploaded travel images are.

Lucas, likewise, stated that he himself appreciated authenticity on his Instagram account. He does not edit the picture he puts up himself either, since he does not believe they would “be him” if he altered them. Which shows this want for authenticity is not just something that is reflected in what people seek from influencers or travel companies but also something that some users themselves might value in their own uploaded content.

When it comes to the situation of seeing a picture on Instagram of a destination and then going to the place and seeing that it does not live up to the expectations set by the first image they viewed. Then Lucas found that to be a something he would personally feel ‘tricked’ by. He mentions how he would consider himself to feel lied to by whatever account posted the pretty picture. Even going so far as to say that if it was a company that had posted it as an advertisement for a destination and their picture did not represent it right that he would consider asking for his cash back or “reporting them for misleading advertisement”.

He did put the caveat on the statement that the dissimilarities had to be 'bad enough' for that to happen.

Ethan mentioned, in regard to this point, how it is difficult for somebody to even have the negative consequences of their trip not looking the same as it had on Instagram pictures from a brand or from influencers come back to the people who posted the pictures. There is not directly any form of culpability for potentially misrepresenting the place. Which taking into account that people can edit and editing happens on the app, then what is too much editing? What just happened to be a better day to go where the sun shines more brightly and makes things look better? What is good camera work that means professional Instagram users know how to make it look a little better? And how much of that is then wrong to do? Ethan mentioned how with the growth of social media then the concept of influencers has become bigger.

Likewise, then he mentioned how people do trust influencers comparatively more than they might do travel labels, however, before the exponential growth of influencers as a job they were even more trustworthy. Ethan goes so far as to state that he believes influencers now are a driving force in getting people interested in travel activities. He mentions how it is widespread to be a travel influencer, and that he finds the decline in authenticity to be linked to the fact that it is a more lucrative business to be an influencer now than it was in the beginning of social media. Which made Ethan come to the conclusion that he finds this to be something negative that influencers have brought to the tourism industry since they, according to him, are more focused on making money than on the actual travel experience.

Influencers being paid by a company to post pictures is something that Amelia mentions that she thinks about when she sees content. Making it sound like when she knows money has been involved in the production of the photos being posted, then she will be a lot more critical of what it is she is seeing. Amelia explained how she does feel confident in her ability to see 'branded content' since she has worked with marketing and with a travel company. Though she admits she believes some posts might slip by her, since some people might neglect to disclose in tags on the post the company they work with or that it is an ad. Continuing on this topic, then Amelia mentioned how she understood why, if they were not legally obligated, influencers might not disclose if they got something through a deal, as paid promotion, or gifted by a company. Though Amelia did find it to be misleading. However, since it is a business venture for these people, so if they can gain more without disclosing it then Amelia understood why they would not do it. Which shows this general distrust people have in the behaviour of influencers and what they do/portray in their content, however, it

also couples in this notion that others also had which was that they understood where the influencer was coming from. The fewest people appreciate being 'lied' to and often find the behaviour of influencers disingenuous, nevertheless, it is not something that people find so foreign that they do not talk about it as if the behaviour is not understandable.

Which is something that can be seen more clearly when Amelia talks about how she finds the trade-off of a company offering an influencer a trip for free in return for content made on the trip to be a reasonable deal. While she found influencers being directly paid to be on a 'vacation' to be less so, however, Amelia does state "if they can charge for being on a holiday, I mean, more power to them". Showing this adverse reaction to what influencers do and get from companies while also understanding what draws people to want to get those things, since getting paid to travel sounds good. However, Amelia also pointed out how she found neither influencers nor travel organisations trustworthy. When following either she believes it's making up your mind about what kind of content you want to be fed that makes the difference and not the authenticity of either platform. Companies will likely want to sell you something while influencers are going to supply you with their entire life.

When it comes to how Evelyn felt about influencers making money off trips or sponsored content then she felt it came down to their trustworthiness and their authenticity. She would still look it up elsewhere, in order to make sure the opinion shared was not just something the people were saying because they are getting compensated to do so. If she heard influencers give off a negative review she felt more inclined to believe them and find it trustworthy since it might be more likely to be their own opinion. Showing how there is an inclination to believe people more if you do not believe they stand to gain something financially from an agreement and most people do not get a partnership or something for free if they are going to give a bad review. Evelyn also mentions how it makes it easier to then believe the influencers when they do leave a positive review since they have shown they are not afraid to point out bad things.

The fact that influencers are indeed *a person* making content made them feel more trustworthy to Evelyn, comparatively to brands that are a corporation and do not have the personability of the influencer.

Even when it does not include the cost of the trip, then Peter finds that the people he notices in travel content are incredibly happy and that things look spectacular. Which makes him feel uncertain about the authenticity of the content. The idea of being "travel photo catfished" was brought up. As it looks a lot nicer than it might be, which is what Peter is considering when he sees these pretty posts. Peter also considered that influencers will

probably go to the well-travelled places in the country they are visiting. They would most likely, according to him, also be focussed on getting a good photo. Both of which are aspects he did not find to be compelling in the reliability of an influencer to show a destination.

Amelia thought it important to consider the size of the influencers when talking about marketing. Since a smaller influencer has a much closer association with their following since they have the capacity to reach out and be more active in their own community. Which is something she found to leave bigger impression when it comes to travel content. When it comes to getting smaller influencers to work with travel agencies it is hard to control the level of quality you will get in the product from the influencer. Though Amelia still thought them valuable since they will likely not be written off as promoters in the same way that macro influencers will, because they can facilitate a closer bond with their audience and simply because they have lesser of a following. This is something that Alassani and Göretz, (2019) considered when they explained the different levels of influencers (pp. 252-253).

Amelia also mentioned how influencers might be more less likely to do something for the money, assumingly meaning that they will only work with companies they really like which will make the smaller influencer seem more trustworthy.

When it came to influencer size, then Evelyn thought there was arguments for an against people coming across as reliable and honest in their reviews depending on their following. Since macro creators might risk more in given off a bad review when working or engaging with a company, while there could also be made an argument for the fact that they might have a large enough following that the negative consequences of giving an honest review with a negative outcome might not matter. Since they could have other business opportunities waiting for them.

Multiple participants showed distaste for influencers and the authenticity the participants thought the influencers had. The participants are aware that influencers are professionals in their media and showcasing the best version of the pictures they upload made the interviewees inclined to not find them trustworthy. Since they felt influencers might be inclined themselves to try and gain the most through their posting. Which would also include posting the best and not the worst. Usually then the more professional or the more of an expert you come across as, then the more trustworthy you could be found. However, considering that a lot of the participants said that they did not follow a lot of influencers. Then there has been built less credibility for the participants towards influencers. Which shows that the elaboration likelihood model made by Chu and Kamal (2008) does not impact the persuasion of these influencers towards some of our participants. Since the interviewees

have not built up the prereduced trust towards influencers. Lucas did mention in his interview how he found a youtuber credible in relaying travel information, which given the fact that he expressed that he had seen more of this youtubers content it makes sense. However, we have not examined this since this paper is not concerned with youtube.

Likewise, then the heuristic-systematic model of information processing that was mentioned by Dahl (2021) where a person might quickly believe what an influencer says since they will not be looking the information up further and the influencer can be considered an expert also falls short since many of these participants simply do not follow influencers and have become highly critical of them.

Nevertheless, then influencers were also spoken about as being more trustworthy than brand, since they came across as a person and not just a corporation. Having something that is easier to identify with made influencers more likable.

4.5 The Big Corporate Bad

When it comes to travel content on Instagram, many DMO's, hotels and other travel organisation often make use of Instagram as part of their marketing strategy. It is common practice for any brand or organisation to be present on the platform. Therefore, we found it important to ask the interviewees about their thought about travel brands and organisations on Instagram. It became prevalent through the answers that there are different opinions surrounding the topic of traditional brands and that some notice the presence of travel brands on Instagram more than others. In relation to brands and influencers we also asked whether they found any of them more reliable than the other to which we got varying answers.

In relation to talking about whether Emma thought who is more reliable and trustworthy between influencers or brands she mentions that influencers differ slightly from your traditional travel brand. During the Interview with Emma, just as she thinks that being an influencer is a job, brands also fit in to the same category. She continues to talk about how "It their [brands] job to make it as attractive for other people as possible." She mentions that she feels as if influencers are more likely to show more of a destination than a traditional brand that is very openly trying to sell you something. She states that "They [influencers] might show more, like the everyday behind the scenes of a destination, more so than what a brand would do." She then continues on, slightly laughing that "I don't think I trust any of them. Or I think I trust them both equally." She continues to talk the reason she does not trust

them equally is all bound to money and how they both receive economic gain from their endeavours on Instagram. However, she also mentions that with brands there is no doubt that they are trying to sell you something, whereas it can be a little more blurry when it comes to influencers.

Martin expressed in his interview, in a discussion about travel influencers and regular travel organisation he states that “I think that the general image of travel agencies or tourism agencies for like young zoomers (Gen Z) is that they are like the big corporate bad”. This implies that the corporate side of travel is seen as a bad thing, and almost a perpetrator, to which people find them unreliable solely because of them being affiliated as either a brand or organisation. Being a brand or organisation, according to Martin, instantly makes them less trustworthy as their sole purpose is to influence and sell them products or holidays.

During the interview with Jessica, she mentioned that she except tourism-related businesses such as hotels to have an Instagram page. She states that “I think like a stamp of quality if a hotel has an Instagram page.” We then continue to ask her after this statement if she would feel safer booking a specific hotel if she knew they had an Instagram profile to which she answered “Yes, because I think it says something about them when they are capable of managing their company correctly.” She continues “I expect in a high regard that businesses such as restaurants and hotels are capable of administering a social media page.” This statement in particular shows that for some consumers, Jessica in this instance, expect that a tourism business is on Instagram and almost feel safer booking at a hotel or eating at a restaurant if they see a well-performing and functioning Instagram profile that they can use to determine their willingness to stay or eat there. trustworthiness

Jessica also mentions that she feels it more justifiable for corporations and brands to be doing marketing and advertisement on social media, and that it can be hard as company to have any hidden agendas when it comes to selling you something, because that is their intention is to sell you something from the get-go. Whereas with influencers, Jessica feels as if there may be hidden underlying intentions that she could be blissfully unaware off.

As a counter point to a lot of the negative attention that tourism corporations on Instagram get, then Lucas also thought of them as reliable when it came to showing a destination. Which he stated was because while they want to sell you something (a reason corporations get to be seen as ‘bad’ on Instagram), then they are likely also not interested in showing you something they will not be able to supply. Therefore, then they showed a picture of a place on the app the likelihood of them being a somewhat decent representation of what a tourist might go see would be high. Which makes this negative point of them trying to sell

you something, a feeling that people tend not to like, maybe even more prominent in a space that they are trying to use for recreational purposes is also something that makes what they show off feel like an accurate depiction of the places they might be trying to sell.

This was a point that Ethan also mentioned in his interview. Ethan tagged on that he knew that this point sounded conflicting to how his attitude towards travel brands had been when answering an earlier question. Stating that the issue he had with them came in in regard to marketing. This is where the point raised by some of the participants generally not liking knowing they are being sold something, while also not liking if they are not disclosed that they are being promoted something comes to the forefront. The general dislike for travel brands when they post has little to do with their trustworthiness to show off a destination, since they make their money off of that place or that tourism activity. It is the fact that they are on the app with an agenda to sell something that irks some of the participants.

When it came to the kind of content Amelia preferred to see, then she vastly preferred an individual posting travel content on Instagram over organizations or companies. She stated how she found that more compelling, since she suspected a company is trying to portray whatever trip they might want to sell as good no matter what. Amelia explained how the individual going to a hotel will get the 'real' experience, which is something she values hearing about way more. Given the fact that a company cannot get the same experience and will probably not think about it in the same way since.

Specifically, when it comes to businesses then Evelyn mentioned how she would notice the ratio between page followers and the likes the content they are putting out gets less so than if it was a person. She was of the opinion that the algorithm might be pushing their content out differently and just would not care about the difference as much.

Peter mentioned he mostly saw influencers on Instagram, more so than travel companies. He assumes that companies are more basic and that influencers are more individual in how they come across. Which gives off this notion that companies are somehow lesser because they are a company, whereas influencers can have that more personal touch.

There was a general dislike to being sold something which meant that most of the people who got interviewed inherently disliked companies. However, they likewise also did not expect them to do something differently, Since the expectation that a company will sell you something also means it is likely less disappointing when they see it happening. It also seemed easier to 'like' an influencer because they are a person, whereas a company does not carry the same personability that people seem identify with. Some of the interviewees were more inclined to be positive towards travel brands as they felt it was a stamp of quality if they

could be found on Instagram and generally saw their presence as a positive thing, whereas others thought of them as “the big corporate bad” as brands feel more catered and inclined to only post to get you to buy something and have a more corporate ‘feel’ rather than a personal touch which some of them.

4.6 Travel Porn

Not all travel content is the same, there is a large variety when it comes to preferences such as backpacker trips, business-oriented trips, family vacations, influencer holidays and many more. Amongst them is also the differing price ranges of these trips. A person going on a gap year seldom spends as much money on their trips as somebody who earns a steady and high income. However, the trips can be consumed the same through Instagram and the algorithm. Therefore, learning what the interviewees thought about seeing content involving high expense trips which is something, depending on your network, you might not have been privy to see before was of interest.

In her interview, Emma mentions that she does not really watch or get a lot of luxury travel content on her Instagram. However, whenever she does stumble across luxury travel content once in a while she thinks “Ah, this is entertaining because it is so different from me and what I would do”. Emma does not follow any Influencers herself that post about luxury travel, but when it does show up through the algorithm, she simply finds it entertaining to look at because it is so different from her life and how she would personally travel.

During Martins Interview, when asked about his opinion surrounding influencers that post about luxury travel, he boldly states “that’s like travel porn” and continues on to say “I guess people are curious, like ‘oh I wanna know how a 6-star hotel in Dubai looks like’.” Martin himself does not follow any luxury influencers but can still see some sort of appeal and that the reason for liking and following this type of content even if you cannot afford it is because people are curious and not necessarily for inspiration.

When interviewing Jessica, she mentioned that what she most appreciates in posts and content on Instagram is honesty and self-awareness. She continues on to mention that she has no interest in looking at content of people showing of and going on luxury trips as she thinks it “too much” and lacking that self-awareness she otherwise appreciates. She thinks luxury travel content is showcasing a blindness to one’s privilege of being able to afford and travel in such a manner by showcasing and showing off on social media. The

mentions that even if she could afford these types of trips, she still would not be interested in seeing luxury travel content and would much rather see more 'down to earth' content of people going on domestic getaways to the Danish coast and renting a holiday home as it is something she is more interested in.

Jessica advocates that she is much more interested in more grounded and realistic travel content and appreciates when people are honest with their experiences and are not afraid to share if something 'bad' happened on their holiday, such as whether being bad or one's car broke down the way there. Whereas, she personally thinks, luxury travel paints almost a picture-perfect fantasy, to the point where she has developed an opposition to it and sees it as a negative form of content that does not align with her personal interest and travel goals. Furthermore, she also comments she has been a part of an online discussion group that discuss influencer behaviour to which she has observed that there is probably and some form of underlying jealousy from people when it comes to luxury travels that influencers post about on Instagram and that poorly marked sponsored posts are an example of bad Instagram behaviour. Jessica continues to express her disdain for luxury travel and states that "I think that it [luxury travel] is an unethical way to travel, and even if I had a lot of money, I would never travel like that." She mentions the ethical notion of luxury travel and finds it unethical due to both environmental concerns, due to the pollution that comes with traveling frequently and luxuriously, but also the from a social standing where she does not have any interest in seeing people showing off.

While interviewing Lily, in relation to the trustworthiness of influencers on Instagram, she mentioned how she felt the need to be cautious around influencers that posts a lot about luxury travel. She is cautious about it because she herself cannot afford luxury travel trips and is cautious of following too many influencers with lavish lifestyles that are pushing luxury content too often. She also thinks the reason that this type of content has a large following on Instagram is because people are trying to live vicariously through the one posting the luxury travel content. They might not be able to afford it themselves, but they still find it exciting or interesting to see how other people travel in terms of luxury trips, because that is unattainable for most people.

Lucas called the lavish and expensive looking trips for a fantasy. He also directly states that this type of fantasy is not that different from the same type of thing that might make people want to see partially nude women in a magazine. Lucas mentioned how he did not know if it was something that could be considered a beneficial fantasy. Thought he did not know how one would go about controlling how much money people choose to spend and

show off on their holidays. Lucas thought it worthy to consider why some places would want to create the image that comes along with these lavish trips. Considering these trips can impact how people see a destination. Lucas mentioned how places such as Dubai that have restrictions on headdress for women do not have the same standards for tourists visiting. Which gives the tourist the privilege of paying for their visitor freedom.

Even when it comes to influencers, some participants who mentioned that they had no ill will towards them or did not mean to disrespect the field, still found the posts somewhat disingenuous. Ethan stated how he thought that influencers were great at marketing, but he also suspected that they tailored their travels to get the optimum pictures. Ethan did not dislike influencers, however he directly stated that he would not put his faith in them. If he wanted a more authentic experience seeing travel content, he would look towards friends and family. However, when it came to considering influencers and travel brands or organizations whom Ethan both recognized probably wanted to sell you *something* then he sounded more averse to the travel brands than he did to influencers. Stating that he did find influencers to be more sincere than organizations.

Ethan pointed out that when people see these fantastic trips with budgets that the average traveller might never be able to afford, that people might be watching it and forming this parasocial relationship with the trips. They can live vicariously through them. Ethan mentioned how “It’s kind of like you get to experience it by proxy, in a way? Which is kind of sad” though as he continued talking he also stated that it might be one of the good things that influencers brought to the travel sphere is that they open up for people to see parts of the world they might never have the means to go see themselves.

As an additional point to this, then Amelia explained how travel agencies or other companies might use the idea that going on a nice affluent trip is going to make you interesting. It will serve as a point of marketing that going away on a luxury trip will make sure you will have something to talk about once you go back home. Certainly, carrying this status symbol of a holiday along. This then also feed into the fact that, if people think they themselves are becoming interesting by going on a luxury trip, then seeing influencers go on insanely wealthy trips might mean that they are being seen as even more interesting.

Amelia did also raise the point that people might get envious over seeing influencers be on these extremely luxurious trips. Since, it might be something that they cannot go on themselves and therefore feels a little resentful towards the people who can. Amelia herself mentioned how she had scrolled past posts she had seen of trips like that because she found them to be too unwarranted. Since it sort of puts an unnecessary pressure on what constitutes

as a worthy trip to go on, since in this narrative, more money somehow means a ‘better’ trip. This is something that Evelyn also voiced, that different people might find seeing luxurious trips to be motivating while others might dislike this kind of lavish promotion.

When it comes to promoting a trip, then part of what the influencers do is also trying to sell something to their audience or influence their purchasing decisions through their own actions. To which Evelyn then raises the point that influencers might have to choose between the virality of a luxurious trip and what their followers could feasibly afford. Which means they might pick between what their followers can afford now, or what potential new followers will be able to afford if you promote something expensive.

Peter brought up the fact that he found some of the fronts he saw on Instagram to feel fake, since it had such a glamorous look. He mentioned a story about people who lived in Bali but had work-from-home jobs in America and encouraged others to do the same which they did to avoid taxes, which he did not particularly like. He did think showing off your travelling for the purpose of letting others learn about or see other cultures that it was nice. Parasocial relationships was something that Peter also thought was prevalent in Instagram content. This is something that can happen since people can form a relationship with the influencer they follow and see an entire trip and follow along. They might form this parasocial relationship and become dependant on these people and this content to see other places. Which can be a way for people to see and experience travelling if they themselves do not have the money for it.

Peter explained that for him, since he lives in England that it might be more feasible for him to go on a trip to Scotland, thought that does not have the same appeal as seeing a trip from half-way across the world that shows a stark difference in the culture. Which might be a part of why people do seek out these kinds of trips even when they cannot go on them. The interest in what lies beyond easy reach and seeing something they will not see back home brings a level of intrigue.

Furthermore, then Peter stated how “influencers are definitely ignorant“ when it comes to posting about their luxury holidays given the fact that most people cannot afford to go on similar trips. Peter mentions how you will not be able to recreate the luxury of those trips if your budget is for two-star hotels. Peter reiterates his point on people living through the influencer when they seek out that kind of content to see.

However, the further we got into the interview and the more Peter explained his answers, then he changed his tone a little. Peter pointed out that if people follow and watch influencers because they have no need to travel themselves that it is quite a nice thing for

them to be able to do. Likewise, if they do not have the means to travel it might be the only way for them to see a destination. Peter commented and said, “It’s a big grey area”. Since he could see why it might bring people joy while also see how it might be problematic for people to depend on what influencers posted on their luxury trips.

Since it is not a new concept that people can show off their privileged financial position to go travelling, or have it somehow reflect their status as being seen as cultured for experiencing other places. Then showcasing these expensive trips through Instagram in the same manner people can post their ‘regular’ holiday photos. Despite it being far from what the average person could afford. Is a fairly attainable thing to do. Being able to see people spend supposedly extreme amounts of money on lavish and luxurious trips can come across as a form of travel porn. Some interviewees discussed how there is curiosity for seeing what these expensive trips looks like and what spending that amount of money will give you. Ultimately finding it fun to see something different from the travels that they themselves would go on or could afford. While others explained that since people have a tendency to be jealous that they then likely would find that kind of ‘boasting’ to be off putting.

4.7 Visualisation

Instagram is known for being a very visual platform that uses pictures and videos and forms of communication at its core. It is apparent in the literature that the visual aspect of Instagram is what has made it such as popular platform (Leaver et. al. 2020, p.1). Tourism, is also an industry that heavily relies on visuals such as pictures and videos to showcase destinations and attractions. Through Jenkins (2003) circle of representation it is also evident that visualisation of destinations can have an impact on peoples travel motivation. Therefore, we felt it was important to ask and include questions about the visual aspect of Instagram and travel and how they felt the two intertwine.

When asked about the visual aspect of Instagram and how it might affect people’s perception of a destination, Martin mentioned in his interview that Instagram has an advantage in terms of social media platforms. Martin states: “Not only is it visual in the sense that it is primarily based pictures and videos but, it is quite easy to digest Instagram content, like it’s very quick. Like you could spend 2 minutes scrolling and you would have gone through many posts” he continues to mention that “As like a majorly visual social media platform, it benefits travel, because people like pictures. People don’t like reading, people like looking at

pictures.” This statement from Martin showcases that the visual nature and aspect of Instagram does indeed, according to Martin, help and aid traveling because it is easy to digest and you can very quickly form many impressions of a destination by just scrolling away on Instagram as the never ending scrolling function makes content easily accessible as pictures only takes a few seconds to process, while reading a blog post would require focus and attention a way that a picture or video will not.

When Martin thinks about the visuals in travel posts that he sees on Instagram he mentions that he often finds them “click-bait” and states “I think that a lot of travel content is exaggerated. Especially in terms of the visuals, again because it is such a visual platform” He then continues to mention that he does not think that most of the pictures he see could be considered “real” in terms of that they might be edited. He continues on to mention that he thinks even if it is not for promotion or advertisement, but a personal picture and especially people with a following will always try to make themselves or where they are look more appealing than it actually is. He continues to mention that he thinks Instagram as a platform has affected the way we travel more so than other social media platforms such as for example Twitter and Facebook due to its visual nature.

During the interview with Lily, she mentioned that she often does not read or notice the caption on Instagram posts. She much more focuses on the picture or video that she is watching. She states in her interview “I am a 100 percent more likely to pay attention to the visuals and the comment or tagline below as like an afterthought.” Through this it can be said that the visual aspect of Instagram is what is keeping their users engaged. Due to the visual aspect of the app, people are more likely to pay attention and keep using the platform for various purposes such as travel content.

Instagram has had an impact on the travel industry considering the catering it has to the visualisation of tourism. Lucas mentioned how it is now easy to go looking for niche and intimate pictures of backstreets in Osaka, Japan if you wanted, or see multiple people posting photos of restaurants they visited. It is simply a search away on your app. Which Lucas suspected has put a larger degree of ‘transparency’ out there. While Lucas also suspected that it had simultaneously also upped the ‘wow-factor’. Since you can see multiple people show their impressive trips on the app.

Additionally, Lucas mentioned that Instagram travel influencers might have influenced destinations to be more aware of their picturesque nature. Since by highlighting these features, they can ‘lure’ influencers to come visit, since they live off of showing places off. Which can be seen when places have made gorgeous lodgings with a view or interesting

design. To which it is safe to say that the visual aspect of Instagram has an effect on how destinations now market themselves to be even more picturesque and visually beautiful.

Ethan mentioned in his interview how “It’s one thing to read about it, it is another to actually see” which is why Instagram is so easy to use and scroll through when it comes to travel content. Ethan also tagged on that it was then another experience to actually go to the destination and see the place for yourself and not just enjoy it from pictures.

Seeing is believing, is the point that Amelia brought up when it comes to travel content. Since it is more likely, people will think something actually happened when they can see it for themselves. Which is then something that is greatly used when it comes to travel content since a lot of that is based on experiences.

Because people can also curate an aesthetic in the content they put out, then it is also likely that people will gravitate towards the visuals that they prefer. Thereby finding content that they like. Amelia mentioned how she feels herself inclined toward soothing travel content. Which is where she can feel that the vibe of the content she sees matters or impacts her experience using the app. This is where there is an intersection between the visualisation, editing, and inspiration: since the aesthetic people visually try to invoke in their content, is likely going to be a source of inspiration for people who would like to experience that vibe for themselves, and these vibes are something that is often enhanced through editing.

However, Amelia points out how the danger in trying to invoke a vibe is often that if it does not fit with the rest of the place it will give off a wrong expectation. Trying to portray a busy street in your travel content as relaxing might be a bit of a stretch even if that is what fits the uploader's aesthetic the best.

When it comes to the importance of visualisation that Instagram brings in then Evelyn brought up how she has an easier time believing what she sees, though she did question her own gullibility on this point. Since you can see the place or even see a date on the pictures uploaded from an influencer from a hotel, it is easier to know that, that is indeed what the hotel room will look like and that the pictures a hotel website might provide are not misrepresenting it by being outdated somehow.

Furthermore, then Evelyn also explained how she notices how attractive travel posts are. Mentioning how “the more aesthetic it is, I feel like, . . . the more potential it has to go viral”. Which she also feels like is reflected in how much money is spend on a trip. With the idea that it might be able to pay for a nicer trip.

Separately, then Evelyn also mentioned how she had an expectation that a business would have an Instagram account. When asked what it is she expects to see on their page

some of it is information regarding the business such as their business hours, but she would go looking at their Instagram to get to see their picture feed. To get the visual confirmation of what it is she will be dealing with when/if she goes to the establishment.

Which is part of what Evelyn states Instagram has influenced the travel sphere in, since there are so many options to see what a business offer on the site, or see what people are up when they go travelling or see destinations quickly and easily from your pocket. This is something that Instagram has brought to people, the ability to see what people are up to in an almost literal sense since its snapshots of them being at a destination. Evelyn mentions how she thinks it is happening “overall, I feel, an authentic way” this aspect of being able to see pictures from destinations you might not have expected and be inspired by them.

As the old saying goes: Seeing is believing. Many of the participants expressed that they appreciate the visual aspect of Instagram and that they prefer to see pictures of destinations, hotels and so on rather than reading about it. The people that were interviewed expressed that they were more likely to pay attention to the visual aspect of pictures as it was more easily digestible than a long paragraph or text. It could be compared to the old saying: a picture is worth a thousand words as people are able to get more impression from a picture and they are able to form their own opinion quicker and faster. However, there is also the negative aspect of visualisation of tourism pictures on Instagram as they can quickly become over exaggerated and ‘click-baity’ as pictures and videos are often competing for the attention of Instagram users which would then affect the reliability of tourism pictures on Instagram.

4.8 Algorithm

The algorithm is both what creators and users are subject to when it comes to content on Instagram. Therefore, hearing the opinions and how they experience the app from the interviewees seemed like a good way to understand how content comes across the platform to them and how that might impact their opinions not just regarding the algorithm itself but also regarding the other themes.

During the interview, we asked Emma if she noticed whether she would be recommended content based on her interest and previous likes, shares and saves. To this she mentioned that when she saves a post to her account that Instagram then send out similar content. As an example, she mentioned that she would like to go on a trip to South Korea in the future, and that when she had liked or saved a post about travel tips to South Korea, she

would get similar content from other creators to where they would also share their travel tips to South Korea.

When interviewing Martin, he expressed that travel content is not something he actively goes looking for, but it is rather something that is ‘brought’ to him. Martin also mentions that he uses the Reel function a lot and for the most part does not really enjoy the travel content he sees within this function. He finds it to be too repetitive and uninteresting, but at some point, he ironically started sharing the content he saw through reels with his friends on Instagram as a joke. This then resulted in him getting more of that content, because the algorithm picked up on him sharing it with his friends. As an example, he mentioned that, since he had been traveling to South Korea, he kept getting content on Instagram about these convenience store drinks that one can buy in South Korea. At first, he found it funny that all of these influencers and social media content creators became so obsessed with them, but eventually after enough exposure, he himself went to the convenience store to purchase a drink. He himself stated “It was a weird thing, ‘cause I was like, mocking it for being kind of inane, but then like, I ended up actually following through with it”. The algorithm and continued exposure to this specific content eventually influenced Martin to do something he otherwise would not have done. In this specific case, it shows the power and importance of the Instagram algorithm and the power it can have on our decision making.

Martin also often finds the Instagram algorithm to be less precise sometimes and ends up promoting and pushing out content that he does not want to see. As an example, he mentioned when he was traveling in South Korea, he kept getting suggestions to go visit and try Korean bakeries to which he states: “I kept on getting food content, but it was recommending, like stuff I wouldn’t eat. Like it was recommending me like bakeries, like I wanna eat Korean food, I don’t wanna go to a bakery.” He continues on to mention that this resulted in annoyance towards Instagram, and that the content he saw was “redundant”, and he had no interest in it.

During the interview with Lily, she mentions that she does go actively looking for travel content, and that it is something that just shows up on her feed and in her recommendation. She herself, said that she has a very curated feed, and does not see travel content on her feed as being out of the ordinary, but simply see it as an organic process since she is interested in travel, she then gets recommended travel content. She herself mentioned that she relies on the Instagram algorithm to bring her travel content, especially because she never personally seeks it out in form of searching for it on Instagram.

When interviewing Marcus, he himself mention that a lot of the content he

sees on Instagram is travel content. That largely has to do with the fact that Marcus travels a lot and follow a lot of other people that also travels. He finds that he gets a lot of travel content even if he does not search for it. He stated in the interview “Instagram isn’t stupid, like it has my data. It knows what I’m up to. It can see that I post from different locations.” As mentioned before, Marcus travels a lot more than your average person and also posts a lot from his travels. Based on that Instagram sends him travel recommendations which mostly shows up as reels on Marcus’ Instagram. He also finds it very easy to relate to his Instagram as he generally likes the content that he sees. Instagram knows Marcus very well and sends him recommended content that he does not find annoying. One thing he does find annoying is that he finds the algorithm to be a bit slow. He usually gets content from a country after he has already been there. Since he is not in the country anymore, the content is not as relevant anymore as it could have been.

Lucas thought about the algorithm on Instagram when he saw content. Starting how compared to the way social media once functioned with simply showing you what your friends were doing on the site, then the haphazard posts pushed in now to try and grab your attention does register as such: a grab for your attention before you close the app down. Mentioning how he thought it made sense since the app is also trying to make money which it will do the best if you stay on the app.

Travel content is also something that Ethan found to come across his feed even if he did not go looking for it, he has used the app for finding travel information or inspiration. However, the content shows up without his searching a lot too.

Amelia specifically mentioned that she follows multiple travel organisations or travel photography accounts. She explained how she thought that the amount of advertisements she saw on her Instagram that involved travel was probably because she followed organisations accounts. In general the interviewees have expressed a dislike for being ‘sold’ something while browsing the platform. Which might be broken up a bit better by given noticeably more travel ads to people who follow companies more, since they might be more open to ads that are similar to the companies they follow.

Furthermore, then Amelia mentioned how she used to work in travel (with a travel company) and she is not that engaged with a lot of the ads that she sees, just moves on past them. However, she will stop if something catches her fancy. Though she does mention that in her opinion “for the most part travel ads just aren’t very good”. Which is a comment that is not said with distain, but with humour. Which does indicate that maybe there is not an expectation for the travel ads that comes across Instagram to be mind-blowing.

Additionally, then Amelia explains how she does not really search for travel content, the content she sees is something that comes across her feed, or in reels, naturally. Which showcases how the algorithm is probably very likely to show Amelia travel content despite her not looking for it herself, because of the accounts related to travel she follows. Amelia also mentioned how she sees a lot of travel content on her feed and in reels, though it is not actually something that she wants that much off. Which might again be a reflection on the accounts she follows supplying or influencing the content the algorithm is bringing to her. She explained how she will often watch the beginnings of a reels and then scroll away from it, since she does not actually care about every single travel reel she sees.

When asked if Amelia thought following influencers might bring her more of the content she said she would like (gorgeous places she had not seen before, personal accounts of holidays, funny anecdotes) instead of travel businesses then she said a hesitant yes. She just does not want to follow influencers since she is of the opinion that she would also see a ton of other stuff from those people that she cares less about. Such as their personal relationships or what they had for breakfast.

Because of how the algorithm works on Instagram, then Evelyn mostly just sees the stuff from the people she follows, since she does not use the explore page. Which means that the travel content she sees is stuff from people she has chosen to follow. Which also means that the posts Evelyn sees are slightly more specific and, in a sense, preapproved because she followed the people supplying it.

The algorithm is pushing out travel content to people, offering it even if someone does not follow anything directly related to it. No one mentioned wanting to influence the algorithm to show them something different even if they did not care for what they were shown. The participants had different experiences with the algorithm based on their personal use of the app. However, they were involved with the algorithm one way or another. Whether the sharing of links or the saving of them brought something more of the same content, was both a noticed. Though being recommended stuff that they did not like, created a space for being frustrated. Which is sort of an issue for the app, since people might be way more likely to close it down when they get recommendations for things they do not want. Which is likely not what Instagram is aiming for.

4.9 (Electronic) Word of Mouth

Instagram is a platform with many different features. While it is mostly a platform for sharing pictures and videos it is also a *social* media. The app offers many different communication features to which people can send messages to other Instagram users and share the content that you see with the click of the share button. Instagram has made it very easy to share visual media and electronic word of mouth has become very important to the platform. As researchers of this paper, we were very interested in how and if people shared the travel content that they see and how they generally interacted with travel content.

During the interview with Emma, she expressed that she does not under normal circumstances share travel content with other people. She does however share other types of content with other people. However, she then continues on to mention that she is planning a future trip with her sister to South Korea. With that trip in mind, she sometimes says “Ah, I saw this in Instagram today, we should go see this [to her sister]”. This implies that she does, in rare occurrences or when she has an upcoming trip, that she does in fact talk with other people about certain travel content that she sees on Instagram.

When interviewing Martin it became apparent that he would often share and send travel food content with and to his friends. As he often goes traveling with friends, it made sense to share the post about a restaurant they could go to as they shared common interests. So Martin does indeed share and show his friends travel content through the direct sharing button that is incorporated in the app, to which he believes that the algorithm picks up on his habits of sharing travel content and therefore recommend him a lot of travel content that he then continuously share with his friends through Instagrams messaging system.

During the interview with Jessica she mentioned that she only really shares travel content she sees on Instagram when she has a trip planned. She tends to then share with the person or people she is going together with on that specific trip to which she says, “I would probably be like ‘Hey I just saw this on Instagram, maybe we could go there while we’re away.’” She mainly shares it through traditional word of mouth, meaning she does not directly send people content on Instagram very often.

During her interview, Lily expresses that she does not very often share travel content with people online or in real life. She does have a few friends or her partner that she discusses or send travel content to, but other than that it is mostly something she engages in alone. She also mentioned that while she herself does not initiate conversations about travel

either online or offline very often, she does get sent travel content from other people, or have friends initiate talks and discussions about travel content in both online and offline spaces.

When it came to who Lucas would be more likely to listen to then he stated that people he had met on his travels, were people whose advice he was more interested in compared to influencers. This is where seeing people post on Instagram and being able to easily follow their account makes this electronic word of mouth incredibly accessible. It opened the door for somebody like Lucas be able to occasionally ask about what he sees in his travel friends' pictures.

Ethan used Instagram more to mention his travel plans. Both to his own followers, but he would also contact and stay in touch with others himself through the app. Ethan mentions that in his opinion then "the discussion for travel has gone online now", since there is easy access to social media for a lot of people then having the talks in online forums is easy. Which considering the visual medium Instagram brings to the travel sphere and the casual means to browse the app. Having easy and simple word of mouth travel on the app become apparent and makes the app an easy place to foster conversations involving tourism.

Furthermore, Ethan mentioned how he was more likely to comment on posts involving travel than he would be when it came to other kinds of posts on Instagram. Likewise, then he might share something in a private message to someone such as a link which did not sound like something he might otherwise be likely to do with other types of content.

Evelyn considered herself to be more likely to listen to something that was told to her in person rather than what she could see her friends online post. Stating that the ability to ask questions in real-time made her more likely to engage in a conversation and then look it up after than something posted in an Instagram reel would. This shows that the in-person discussion does hold some weight when it comes to inspiring decisions, even if Instagram has the opportunity to show the places visually in a post. This means they might have a better idea of what they are looking at or are being met with than if they only have a verbal conversation. She would, however, occasionally send links from Instagram pages if she has suggestions. Since it is a quick and simple thing to do, given that a lot of people have an Instagram account to send a link to, but a lot of businesses or places will also have a page you can link. Which makes it very useable.

It was brought up in the interview with Evelyn how Instagram makes it possible to cater to your interests more, therefore the recommendations that people get through the app or the electronic word of mouth they encounter might be more likely to be of interest. Though

Evelyn also mentioned that she did not see it as being something that people actively thought about. This is something that is worth considering since people also have the opportunity to scroll past things that do not interest them, like a highly active vacation of mountain climbing, if they do not care about that. While if you get word-of-mouth recommendations in person, it is a lot ruder to show your disinterest in what that person is telling you. Therefore, getting to the type of content that shows the things you like and getting recommendations from like-minded people is a lot easier on an app like Instagram.

Peter thought that travelling was something that happened more frequently with the help of Instagram explaining how “Instagram has put an image in everyone’s head of what it is like”. Instead of being ‘reduced’ to a conversation about a destination and what people did on their holiday, you can now easily show people what you have done or are doing on your vacation without having to print your holiday pictures first.

As it can be seen in the data, many of the interview participants share the travel content that they see online with other people both through Instagram's messaging system, but also through traditional word of mouth. Some of them do it more than others, but generally, all participants shared travel content through either electronic or traditional word of mouth. Some mentioned that they share travel content from places they are planning to visit while others send travel content without having a trip planned, simply because they find it interesting. Instagram has also made sharing content very accessible and most interviewees found it very convenient that they could share travel content with friends and family easily through Instagram's messaging system. This could show that it is important that tourism and travel content is being posted to Instagram, some participants mentioned how they tend to share travel content more so than other types of content, which would result in a larger scale electronic word-of-mouth pattern that would eventually benefit the travel industry as content is more easily accessible to share with other people.

4.10 Selling and Advertisement

It has become more and more common for social media sites to also feature marketing from companies. This also includes the use of paid partnerships with influencers. Depending on how those things are handled can be good business given the targeted reach that social media platforms have (Haenlein, et al., 2020). Therefore, getting insight from interviewees on how they experience this can be helpful in understanding how these aspects come across. F

During the interview, in relation to a question about influencers, Emma herself began to talk about how she felt as if she was being sold a fantasy. She states “They [influencers] somehow try to sell you a fantasy if you put it that way. Like, they have to sell something. Not so much about how they want you to purchase anything, but more in the sense that they have to sell a fantasy of themselves.” She also mentions that she is aware that what she sees is not what she is going to get.

In the interview with Emma, she mentions that she finds asked about how she feels how reliable content on Instagram is at showing a destination, she talks about how most people would probably tweak and twist the picture to make it better than it actually is, especially in relation when someone, an influencer or a brand, is trying to sell you something. In relation to being sold something or advertised it is the opinion of Emma, that is normal for her to think that is natural to only show the best and good sides of a product or holiday. She also often thinks about the price of the places that people post about. She talks about how it does not matter whether it is luxury travel content that she comes across or a friend that went on a lower budget holiday she always thinks: “I wonder of expensive this trip has been” because she also wants to travel herself and wonder what places and destinations she can visit on her budget.

In the interview with Martin, he mentioned that the way he perceives a post becomes different if he finds out it is either sponsored or an advertisement. He himself has never purchased anything sponsored or advertised by an influencer. However, while he might have a general negative outlook on sponsorships, he mentions a food travel influencer that he follows, and how he has been sponsored by a travel organisation before, which did not bother him. In fact, because he saw him as a trustworthy and likable person sponsored posts from this specific influencer do not bother him. Furthermore, he adds that “It’s not like if I see someone was sponsored by something I’m immediately like ‘This is terrible, this is wrong, I hate you’, but I’m definitely more judgemental on the product that they are trying to push.” He mentions that likability and the personal relationship one might have with an influencer would impact one’s perception of sponsorship and find them trustworthy.

During the interview with Jessica, she mentions that around 20 percent of the people she follows could be classified as influencers. She also mentions that she follows different types and size of influencers and generally does not see influencers as a negative thing and believes that social media influencing is a legitimate occupation, but still tend to feel more negative emotions towards influencers that continuously get sponsorship is not something she is interested in seeing and feels as if when an influencer is overly sponsored it

becomes too commercial and overly advertised which she has no interest in seeing. She would be much more interested if they had a healthy balance of sponsorships and regular content, so it did not feel as if they were trying to sell her things and products all the time. In relation to a discussion about luxury travel Jessica mentions that she does not have any interest in it and downright hates it if someone were to try and sell her or advertise a luxury trip. She states, “It [luxury travel] has no value to me if someone is trying to sell me something because I have no interest in buying it.” However, if it was something of a different nature and posted by an influencer that she otherwise finds interesting or trusts, she would be more inclined to purchase a product or experience and be inspired to travel on her own.

During the interview with Lily, she mentioned that she is more likely to question and be sceptical of travel ads and the contents within the ads. She tells us that it is a very rare occurrence that she feels compelled to interact with travel ads or sponsored content. Furthermore, she also thinks a lot about whether she is the targeted audience for ads that she comes across on Instagram. Moreover, she also thinks that Instagram is good at giving her ads that she feels as if she is the targeted audience, too which she would be more inclined to be interested in the ad itself.

During the interview, we also asked how Lily would feel about being advertised as a tangible travel product like a suitcase versus a trip or destination. She talked about how she felt like she would much rather like being advertised as a destination or trip rather than an actual travel product. She mentions that the reason for this is because a destination never disappears and will always be there while a product may disappear, or a new product will release leaving the other product redundant. With a destination, she can just put it on her ‘travel-bucket list’ and not feel as if she is missing out on anything because the destination will still be there in the future when she has the time and means to go travel there.

Lily expressed during her interview that she finds influencers that she pays more close attention to content that has been sponsored. She states, “I am aware that it is an ad, I’m not judging anybody, but I am aware that someone is getting paid to say something.” Lily then continues to mention that if a post is sponsored, she interacts with it differently than if it was a non-sponsored post. Lily states “I am taking in what they are saying with a grain of salt. So, like are they being paid to say this particular sentence or is it their actual opinion of something.” Lily does not think that sponsored posts take away an influencer’s reliability completely as she has an understanding of the influencer profession, but she also does not trust them wholeheartedly as she is forced to view their content with a grain of salt as you can

never know whether someone is actually telling the truth about a destination or their experiences or if they are just getting paid to say positive things about a product or destination. Lily also expressed how she might think Instagram has affected the travel industry to which she mentioned that she feels that the act of a travel agency sponsoring an influencer has created new possibilities for travel organisations and travel agencies as Instagram and its influencers have created a new way to market themselves and create an online presence for them that would have otherwise been hard to achieve.

Lucas brought up as part of his interview how influencers might be willing to go back to a place (a hotel) they had been to before solely because they had a partnership with the place. Which in turn might make them more likely to say something positive about the place, because they got something for free (the stay). This would also likely influence the social media person's posts about the place to be more positive since they might not be likely to be invited back if they said something negative. Lucas stated this was something that was seen with journalists since primarily leaving harmful reviews would cause people to not be invited to other opportunities.

This indicates some level of awareness of the process of the content influencers are pushing out for people to see. This puts a question towards how easy it is to recognize if an influencer is coming back to a place because they truly love it or because of their continued affiliation with this place. This is an impact that might affect smaller influencers more since the desire to be invited back to spaces might be stronger given they might want to hold on to the opportunities they got to grow their channels and their partnerships with corporations.

Lucas mentioned how he felt that he was a lot more aware of advertisement when it came from an influencer than when it came from a travel company. He expected a travel company to advertise for people to choose them when picking their next holiday. Whereas he felt more annoyed by influencers since he did not recognise the same willingness to just state that their agenda included an advertisement. This shows that the awareness that he puts towards advertisements is probably something that he pays more attention to when those feelings are negative. Additionally, then he mentioned that even if he gets a travel ad for something less relevant to his interests then he would probably not be annoyed by it, he will simply just scroll away.

When it came to whether he felt compelled to take the travel advice of influencers, then Lucas was disinclined. Stating that since he knew they had an 'agenda', it made him reluctant to listen to them. Mentioning how he found knowing he was being sold 'something',

did not sit well with him and that he would much rather visit a place because a friend had posted about their positive experience on Instagram.

When working with a travel agency, Amelia did not have a lot of personal work with influencers however she did describe her experience working with it as “it felt a little bit leech-y, in both ways”, stating how both the company and the influencer wanted to get the most out of the other. She explained how she does believe maybe it is better now than when she had experience with it. Since it has become more common, and more experience has emerged in how to handle that relationship between influencer and company. However, she also states that the working relationship between a travel agency and an influencer is kind of a mixed bag since you have a hard time predicting what it is you will be obtaining from an influencer.

Additionally, then Amelia explained how she thought that people were more likely to know that a post made by a macro influencer was an ad since they might see them suddenly post about a new brand while travelling or pop up with a new partnership. This means that people might essentially be more on the lookout for this kind of thing in a bigger creator than they might be in a smaller one.

Ethan explained how he does think about paid sponsorships or other forms of paid collaboration when he sees content that shows off stuff really well, whether that is a travel product or a hotel or something similar. He notices it with the thinking that this is something that is being uploaded for some sort of gain, whether that is paid promotional stuff or if it is direct monetary gain. This he finds negative since that means it might lead to a very different experience for the average user if it comes to something like a hotel visit. The influencer might have gotten something extraordinary out of their partnership which will lead to a representation of an experience that is hard for somebody who is not an influencer to replicate.

Furthermore, Ethan mentioned how he did not think every Instagram user might know or think about paid partnerships or ads in the content they were scrolling through, a point which he thought was reasonable. Considering that if they are not fully engaged with that side of marketing, why should they then know to think about it? Though he did think that more and more people did consider it when seeing posts.

When it came to whether influencers were responsible for giving reliable recommendations when they had a partnership with a company, then Peter explained how he understood that they would not be doing anything other than praise the company. While he was even sympathetic to them, explaining that this was a great source of income for them,

and they could not be expected to give other options if they had a deal with a certain luggage brand for example.

Peter also explained how he believes that influencers have been more successful when it comes to marketing than companies have. Since they feel much more personal than a company, people are more willing to listen to them. He himself, would 'recoil' more when he saw content promoted by a company than if an influencer brought it up. Since there is just that bit more of an interpersonal connection by seeing a person than by seeing a company logo. Peter also assumes that it is lucrative for influencers to sell these destinations, or products, for companies.

It got to a point in the interview where Peter commented that it does sound pretty nice to be a travel influencer, making money travelling, and seeing new places. It all sounds quite good. So, he did not want to criticize influencers for doing a job that he too thought looked enjoyable to have. It was brought up in the interview that people can also scroll past content they do not want to see. So, if you see advertisements through influencers on Instagram then you are responsible for being influenced yourself. Since you stuck around to see the content and take it in.

Some of the interview participants generally disliked knowing they are being sold something, which is reflected in their opinion on the advertisement they see on Instagram. So while social media marketing has opened up in recent years, and Instagram has seen its fair share of this, then not all ads are seen as equal. A reason as to why the participants might be defensive in regard to travel advertisements on the platform is the uncomfortable aspect that comes with seeing a certain form of travel be advertised as good/relaxing/valuable and not being able to afford it. Likewise, then they have a hard time trusting information they are being advertised when they are not certain what or how much influencers stand to gain when it comes to promoting it.

4.11 Hotspots and 'Do it for the 'gram'

In 2023, then Instagram is not just something that is confined to the online media forum that it is. It has had its mark in the world with destinations and particular places becoming synonymous with the app in the form of an 'Instagram hotspot' or phrases such as 'Do it for the gram'. This is why the researchers found it interesting to learn what people thought of

these aspects when they could tangibly see the influence Instagram has had on travel behaviours.

In the interview with Emma, when asked about the terms Instagram hotspot and ‘do it for the gram’ Emma talked about how she did not know these terms. After a brief explanation, she talks about how she personally does not think about wanting a specific picture from her travels to post on Instagram. She continues on to describe an instance where she had a bad experience with the notion of ‘do it for the gram’. She describes that when she went on a trip to the South Korean and North Korean border, also known as the DMZ, she found herself wanting to take a picture of the border, not only for herself but also for others to see. She describes how she felt conflicted about wanting to take a picture and share it due to the circumstances. She mentioned “I was looking over at people that were oppressed” and feeling conflicted about sharing that type of content. This implies that there should be some sort of line that should not be crossed and that sharing other people's misfortune on a personal social media account is something that one should think twice about before doing.

Emma also talked about how she does not have an issue with the notion behind ‘do it for the gram’ normally unless it becomes excessive. When asked to give an example of what she would categorise as ‘excessive’ she provided an example from when she went on a trip to London. She and her sister were visiting the National History Museum. There they experienced a woman, dressed up in a very fancy dress, hair and make-up posing and taking pictures on the main staircase of the building for more than an hour to which Emma thought to herself negatively that the women taking pictures would not experience the museum for its actual purpose, and just use it to take pictures was a shame. She also mentions that in order for someone to come to an attraction with fancy clothing and styled hair that it must have been something that was thought about from the start of that person’s day, that she had to wear fancy clothes to the museum to take pictures for social media to be excessive. However, on the other hand, she also talked about how she would only notice it when seeing the behind-the-scenes, but if she were to see the picture on Instagram however, she would not think about it and just think “That’s a pretty dress”. It would only be if she saw it behind the scenes in real life.

Emma also mentioned that she on one hand, finds the notion of Instagram hotspot or ‘do it for the gram’ to be humorous, especially when she sees it from behind the scenes when she herself is travelling, and that people are generally very organised and polite when many people wish to take a similar picture and have personally experienced that people understand and accept that you should wait for your turn to take the picture. She continues on

to say that she does not mind the queues and that people are willing to stand in line to get a good photo, but she would never participate herself and would prefer to go away from the crowds to take a picture at a different angle that is not as prominent represented on social media.

During the interview, we asked Martin whether he had heard about the terms Instagram hotspot and ‘do it for the gram’. To this, he answered that he had indeed heard of those terms before. When thinking about these terms he thinks about very generic and exclusively for tourist destinations and people who always take the exact same picture. He mentions in extension to this that “It is so popular to take a picture there to the point where it is almost like a cultural thing if that makes sense? Like a bucket list thing that so many people do.” Martin himself has travelled through Thailand before and has experienced this picture-taking behaviour at multiple locations such as the Ratchada Night market, where he mentioned that people do not visit the market to take pictures, but a building next to it to get a good angle from above, where you can see all of the stalls lit up. He also mentioned that he has seen people outside of a Thailand McDonalds location taking pictures of a Ronald McDonald doing a traditional Thai ‘Wai’ greeting.

However, he mentions that he felt somewhat indifferent to the act itself, as he himself does not take that many pictures when travelling and does not have a strong opinion about other people taking pictures for Instagram. However, Martin also thinks that the popularity of a destination can tamper with people’s expectations as social media platforms such as Instagram can increase one’s expectations about a destination to which Martin states “I think that has happened to everyone. I think everyone has been to a tourist spot and been like ‘was that it?’. I think that Instagram might perpetuate this idea of like, over-sensationalising certain touristy aspects of a place.” While Instagram might prove to inspire people to travel and taking pictures seem like a harmless thing, the over-sensationalising of tourist attractions or ‘hotspots’ can create false expectations for travellers which then leads to disappointment. Martin also states that this is not necessarily a negative thing as Instagram can also introduce people to new destinations and areas that they were unaware of before.

Martin also mentioned in his interview that there is a correlation between Instagram hotspots and feeling the need to post it on social media, to showcase to everyone that you have personally been there. He states “It’s like a repeating cycle, right? Like it gets promoted [travel content] a lot so people feel like they have to pictures and push it out [posting], which means it gets even bigger, it just keeps on growing.” This statement made here from Martin has a strong comparability to the circle of representation (Jenkins, 2003).

The phenomenon of a cycle being present on Instagram is prominent according to Martin as people firstly see pictures on Instagram, to which they feel compelled to take pictures and post them, themselves. This then results in the creation of an Instagram hotspot, to which the circle only grows bigger and bigger.

When asked about Instagram hotspots and ‘do it for the gram’ Jessica admitted that she has indeed heard of those terms before. She mentions that she herself has been subject to Instagram hotspots. She herself lives in a major capital city where tourism is very high and places or locations often become famous on Instagram, to which she has visited places due to their popularity on Instagram. She also mentions that she is actually more susceptible to Instagram popularity when she is in her home city of Copenhagen than when she is out travelling as she is there for a shorter period of time and is, therefore, more critical of what she spends her time on to which she does not engage with Instagram hotspots as much. She mentions that while she would be okay with standing in line for a famous Instagram bakery in Copenhagen, she would not be willing to stand in line for either a picture or place if she deemed it too redundant. She mentions a trip she went on to Berlin, where she had seen on Instagram a very famous food stall that only sold french fries on Instagram, to which it had gained a large queue, that she opted out of because she wanted to spend her time differently and not stand in queue for french fries.

Jessica also mentioned that she herself does not take a lot of pictures when travelling, and she never actually posts on Instagram, so therefore she does not feel the need to take pictures of famous landmarks or Instagram hotspots. She also does not feel there is anything wrong when other people do it and indulge in Instagram hotspots or specifically take pictures for Instagram when travelling. She expects that when visiting famous landmarks, there are undoubtedly going to be many other people there, and that is just something that is unavoidable and not necessarily something negative.

Lily mentioned in her interview that she does indeed know about the terms Instagram hotspot and ‘do it for the gram’. She states that she feels these terms are “reductive.” She thinks that if a place or destination is beautiful and people are “flocking to it” it is obviously popular for a reason. She mentions that a negative thing about Instagram hotspots is the foot traffic that it creates and that it will often lead to overcrowding at the hotspot, but other than that she does not see or have any issues with the terms themselves, but more about the impact that it will have on the destination. She also thinks that the term ‘doing it for the gram’ is a little bit “dumb” but has an understanding for people who do it or say it. She mentions that she has experienced what she feels is excessive picture-taking behaviour at historical

destinations such as the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The leaning tower of Pisa has long been a prime picture-taking location from before Instagram was even invented. However, Instagram and social media have just intensified the behaviour and made it easier to share online. Lily feels that at certain historical locations such as the Leaning Tower of Pisa seeing people lining up to take pictures makes it feel like an amusement park attraction and takes away from the actual historical significance that the place has.

When it came to the idea of taking a picture and posting it to Instagram on your holiday in order to be able to show that you had seen the location and been there yourself, then Lucas found it to be a perfectly fine thing to do. Neither showing any kind of enthusiasm or contempt for the notions. However, he did mention thinking about whether or not the picture would be harmful. Stating how it might be an irritant for the locals if the picture involved would somehow damage the environment they were in, things like crossing a path that states to not go beyond this point or taking a piece of fruit from a field without permission because it would look cool for the Instagram post.

This shows that some people might not be ignorant to the circumstances around the picture. Knowing that more goes into it than just the picture that they see posted. However, Lucas recognized that it would be difficult to tell if you just saw the Instagram post the ramifications that came with the photos since they do not include the damaging behind-the-scenes. This also means that going beyond the point stated you are allowed to, might even bring about better pictures since you can get closer to the object of interest. Thereby this negative behaviour could potentially be 'rewarded' with a better picture.

Amelia could mention how she had felt herself directly impacted by these hotspots where people show up to take a picture, she had gone to them on previous trips but directly avoided them now. Clearly not enjoying the experience of having to wait in line for the ability to take a photo inside a tower. She had mostly gone because other people wanted her to (her parents), but it was not something for her. She stated she does not like tourist crowds. When people simply want to get a photo and not be present at the place they are in but are there for the photo opportunity it does not sit well with her.

Amelia stated how she was familiar with both terms and that she did not feel compelled to go to a place just for a picture, though she understood that a lot of these pictures are probably taken in order to show others that they went to this place. Amelia voiced how "it's like you have to have evidence of the things you did" mentioning how that is what a lot of travel content feels like it is being produced for.

Contrarily then Evelyn explained how she was not impacted that much by seeing a

line of other people wanting to take the same picture, “I don’t think it is that deep” is her opinion on it. She could not see herself feeling any type of way about it, outside of whether it might make her late for something to wait in line. However, she did also state that she believes people should be going travelling in order to see new places or enjoy what is in the picture, instead of just going to take the picture. Though she also said in the same statement that it is not doing anybody any harm, to indicate that it also does not matter in the grand scheme of travelling. She believes people should remain respectful and kind in their interactions when it comes to obtaining a picture.

Evelyn could not see herself being bothered by the fact that others would want to take the same picture, stating how she might just feel like it means she has “good taste”. This reaffirmation that people might get from seeing others take the same picture or see similar pictures on Instagram does feed into the narrative that if you have something similar to post that you have travelled ‘rightly’ since others have done the same thing.

Which sort of raises the question if people feel the need to show that they have travelled ‘correctly’ by being able to show these destinations or this particular photo off on social media, or if social media is making people feel at ease with the success of their trip because they can show that their trip was spent well through images.

When these places become almost a tourist attraction in their own right, by the amount of people who prioritise to go and get a certain picture, then Evelyn explained “as long as it is not like a chore and you actually wanna do it then I think it is fine“. Additionally, then since it is a free activity to go take a picture and post it on your holiday then it also gives people something free and easy to do while vacationing. Evelyn had previously put her travel pictures in her story, where they disappear after 24 hours, which you can then add to a highlight reel on your profile where they stay indefinitely as a way to look back on her trip later. Which she found quite enjoyable. Evelyn in general quite liked the terms ‘Instagram hotspot’ and ‘do it for the gram’. She liked that if people wanted to achieve this “Instagram aesthetic” through these pictures they could.

Peter brought up a different point to seeing the same photo over and over again from a destination, he was incredibly bored with it. He also mentioned that the attention span on Instagram according to him was quite low and that people should be trying to push out new content in order to capture an audience. The more he got into the topic Peter mentioned how he did personally want to see new content from places, nonetheless, then he recognised that some people might find comfort in seeing the content they expect from a destination.

When asked how he thinks he would experience seeing people lining up to take a

photo if he was at a destination, then Peter was thoroughly unenthusiastic. He did not like that whatsoever, he quite thoroughly stated his opinion when asked as being “ew” to the concept. He did also say that he understood that people might feel pressured into feeling the need to take the photo, since Peter summed it up as “it’s just a picture, let me just do it”. It is quite easy and free to take a photo for a lot of these locations, so people might do it just to not feel disappointed later. The pressure of seeing a lot of other people deeming it necessary to take a photo at that location might also compel somebody to feel the need to take the photo themselves.

Peter was not familiar with the term ‘Instagram hotspot’, but he had heard of ‘do it for the gram’. When asked his opinion on the terms he said, “Instagram hotspot, makes me cringe a little I guess”. He felt sort of embarrassed that people would refer to a historic or cultural landmark as an Instagram hotspot. He assumed that if that was your view of a place, you thought of it as a hotspot, and then he doubted that person’s ability to be present at that moment.

Not everybody had heard the terms before, though none of the participants struggled to understand what they might mean. Since this is something that is a lot more personally impactful for many since they have experienced it themselves then it also ranged a lot in opinions. From the annoyance of some since it is the fewest people who find it to be a fun time to wait in line for a picture, to people who found it harmless since it does not hurt anybody, and it is free to take a picture.

Some interviewees did bring up this dislike for presumably not being present at the location when focused on taking a picture. It was never brought up that these things might not be mutually exclusive. There might be a tendency for people to carry the negative perception that succumbing to the influence of Instagram brings which means people suspect you cannot do both.

4.12 Picture Perfect

Instagram has long been around and established itself as a leader of digital visual communication platforms. However, while the app is a convenient and accessible tool that people can use to share pictures, the platform has developed a certain perfectionist culture. As it is said in the literature, Instagram is a platform where users often try to portray a perfect life or only present the best version of themselves (Moreton & Greenfield, 2022, p. 6). Many participants also expressed their concerns with this notion and many felt that there is a certain

pressure to post 'perfect' pictures.

In the interview during the topic of editing, Emma mentioned that besides editing she also thinks about 'the perfect picture. She as a consumer of Instagram mentions that she has no idea how many pictures that have been taken to get the "right" picture besides the one that she saw on Instagram. Emma knows from her own experience that she takes multiple pictures and the picture that she then chooses are what she would consider the "best picture". This indicates that there are 'good' and 'bad' pictures and that the 'bad' pictures are not good enough to be shown on Instagram. Due to the mannerism and thought process that Emma herself goes through she suspects that other people do the same, and only the picture that is considered 'the best' will be shown on Instagram. This mentality indicates that there are certain angles or aspects that users of Instagram do not wish to show on social media, as it is only the most curated 'good' pictures that will even be considered as a potential pictures to be shown on Instagram. This is an aspect that was talked about in impression management (2.8) that then has to be balanced. Since you want to show perfect pictures but do not want to come across as conceited. The person uploading also has to pick pictures that are not just aimed at being seen as good in a one-on-one interaction, but good in the eyes of multiple people who might see your post. This can be quite a pressure.

During the interview with Emma, the notion of pressure and status of taking pictures on holiday came up in the conversation. Emma stated that "Yes, I think there is [a pressure]. Sometimes I, myself think, that 'this [picture] needs to go up' [on Instagram]. Not because of, if you don't post it you didn't go, I don't think I care about that, but I think there is something about wanting to post or show a picture about that you actually went." She then mentions that she thinks the younger generations are obsessed with wanting to take pictures of everything and showcasing all the things we experience, especially when travelling. Especially because travelling can be expensive and you now have the opportunity to show it off on Instagram. In relation to this, we asked Emma if she thought there was some kind of status associated with posting about travelling. To this, she answered "Yes, I think so. Most definitely. 'Try and look at me, I can take time out of my calendar. I can pay a lot of money to go travelling.'" She continues to talk about how she on one side thinks that she thinks it is fun to follow along with other people's experiences, especially friends. But on the other hand, when she herself goes travelling she finds herself stressing about trying to find or take a picture to showcase and post on social media to which she finds that it is a pity that we put so much pressure on ourselves to take the 'perfect picture' when on holiday and that there is a pressure to only show the good parts about a holiday, even if the holiday itself was bad.

During Jessicas' interview, she mentions that she thinks Instagram was and still is a platform that encourages you to only post picture-perfect pictures. She states in her interview "I started as like a 'perfect' representation of the world. Where you posted the best pictures of oneself and your activities. And that has kind of continued, there is still something fantastical and picturesque perfection about the things that occur on Instagram." This statement indicates that Instagram is a platform where only the best version of our world gets posted and represented. Nothing about the bad parts of life and our travel behaviours is represented on Instagram.

When interviewing Marcus he expresses, without being asked, that he believes Instagram is all about getting that perfect picture. He states "Instagram, yeah is all about getting that perfect picture." He also mentions that he feels as if there is a form of pressure when it comes to posting on Instagram, and that most people would do many things to achieve the "perfect picture." Marcus continues to elaborate on this through an experience he had while travelling on the Indonesian island of Bali. Here, he mentioned that he saw many people trying to achieve the "perfect picture" and they all tried to make it look as if they were the only ones in said picture, while in reality, you had to stand in line with hundreds of other people to take that specific picture. He then continued to mention that "I think that it is showing the destination in the wrong way." Through this statement, it is evident that Marcus feels as if the culture that Instagram has created with the idea of a "perfect picture" is ruining the way that we see and view destinations and creates a sense of falsehood and can tamper with one's expectations which could lead to disappointment. As he has a lot of travel experience from various countries and destinations, he knows what these places look like in real life and feels as if they are not well represented as they really are on Instagram. He states in the interview "Okay, if I go to Instagram, you'll see one thing, but when I go to see it in real life, I'll see something different." Marcus believes that pictures for Instagram most often are made to look prettier and more isolated than they really are. He himself, does not engage in the queuing to take a specific picture as he feels it hides the experience he had at that location. He mentioned that he is more likely to take a picture of the queue and all the people there since that was his genuine experience.

Through the statements of these participants, it is evident that they themselves feel the perfectionist culture that is very prominent on Instagram. The participants mentioned that they felt pressure to only post the best angles and 'perfect' pictures that they took on their holidays and generally withheld 'bad' pictures, such as blurry pictures, rainy and cloudy or if they felt they themselves did not look good enough in the pictures if they themselves were

present in the photograph. Many also felt it was a shame that this culture is so prominent on Instagram, as everyone secretly knows that travelling sometimes can be bothersome or it might not be sunny or 'perfect' the entire duration of the trip, but they still feel that those are instances that are not fit to be posted on Instagram.

4.13 The Pressure of a Good Trip

The interviews showed that multiple people could recognize that there was a need to show off something good when it came to their trip. Recognising and commenting on the fact that if you are going to post something for others to see it is probably going to be the good photo or the interesting parts of the trip. Lucas mentioned how he himself did not feel the pressure to do so, but he highly suspected that a younger audience of teens or tweens might see the posts on the app and be susceptible to it.

This is the interception of where the luxury trips and the posting of a photo that others have put up before meet. The lavish and expensive trips being shown off as a form of travel porn carries this air of exactly that: showing off. Whereas the photos of an Instagram hotspot are an easily recognisable way to show people with just a glance when they are scrolling through the app that they have successfully visited this well-known place. Both displaying the same 'need' to show off their successful travels. However, instead of them simply coming with the notion that it is nice that some people can go on these trips, then they also feed into peoples feelings of pressure to show something off from their holiday.

This is then a question of how much do you have to show off in order for it to be a good enough status symbol. Lucas explained how "in some aspects travelling to expensive destinations is just a way more palatable way of like presenting this '[look at how much money I have]'". Lucas goes on to further state that when people who might even be used to seeing through intentions in an influencers post, knowing that they are trying to make everything look the nicest, then they might still get subtly influenced from constantly seeing impressive posts about travel and have it impact their view on it. This could lead to the pressure of having a good trip.

Evelyn explained how in her opinion she can see people get incredibly upset if they do not manage to get their Instagram-able picture. Which she finds to be a shame since you should be focused on what you are going to see on the trip you are going on. However, the pressure of having something nice to post on your holiday might make people feel compelled to be upset if they cannot show something nice off. Evelyn herself did not feel obligated to

post a picture or would feel bad if she did not get the right picture. She did mention that she had felt the pressure of not wanting to post a bad photo, but she also thinks there might be a shift coming with the activity she has seen on the internet with the next generation posting less and less perfectly curated photos. Which might mean the hunt for a perfect picture is less prevalent for them.

Peter pointed out how when you are on vacation “you want other people to think you are having a good time as well, you know? Like I didn’t regret this decision going somewhere else, so I need to make people believe I am having a good time “which is his explanation as to why people might look overly happy in a photo and post it to Instagram even if the trip was not as good as it looked. Peter assumes some of this behaviour stems from wanting likes or other forms of social acceptance. That the attention that comes with it feels good. He further talked about a scenario he had seen on Instagram where someone commented positively on another person’s picture, to which the person shared that comment for others to see presumably in the story feature. In order to showcase the recognition, they received. Peter goes on to explain that this sort of behaviour says “please know that I am having a good time”, the pressure to have a good trip is really prevalent in that kind of performance. Peter also explains how he is not immune to this kind of thing himself, even if he does not post as much. This is something that goes further in impression management, Picone (2015) mentioned how the ability to have your performance exploited by having others share your reels. Peter’s example of somebody sharing a comment on their story feature to presumably boost their own performance.

It also got pointed out how easy it is to take a picture and then upload it to the platform, making it a quick way to show off that you are having a good trip. Which then, likewise, will mean that it is easy for others to just open the app and see that you are having a good trip. It makes for an efficient way to fuel the narrative that you are getting the most out of your trip.

Peter did explain that he too had felt the need to post a photo from a holiday, to which he himself said that he knew he sounded “defeated” when he said it. He liked having pictures to look back on, though he did not like the pressure that came with wanting to post online for validation or attention. Peter said how “we are all trapped in the system”, which shows that while he himself is critical of this behaviour that comes with wanting outside validation from an online source, then he knows it is not like he is immune to the same kind of behaviour.

There is also the aspect of the prestige one might feel from posting about a trip online. Prestige being one of the common factors that draw people to travel as seen in the push/pull

sections of this paper. Peter recognises that people are probably expecting to receive from kind of acknowledgement from posting pictures from a destination that would be costly to visit. Peter assumes that this phenomenon of status is rooted in the travel industry and has then been amplified by Instagram. Having the money and ability to travel is a privilege and the ease at which you can post about it on Instagram makes that effortless to show off.

Whether the pressure of a good trip comes from people going on holiday once a year or from influencers that live off of the activity. Then Peter's answers reflect the same need for people to put their phones down in order to be present at the destination they are at. This arguably can also bring in the prospect that influencers might not be the best presenters of a destination if they are focused on how their photos come out instead of what they gain from the experience of being at that destination. It can also be seen in another light and be considered to not matter if an influencer is present and can enjoy the moment since their well-taken pictures serve as a source of inspiration for others and not as a guide to what the experience is actually like.

When seeing what other people are up to oftentimes then people might reflect on what they themselves are doing. It is seen time and time again with discussions of people's self-worth in the view of social media. This is likewise something that might be reflected when it comes to people's holidays since they can be impacted by what others post on Instagram. This was mentioned by the interviewees when they talked about the pressure of showing that you had a good trip, the need to show good pictures, and to make sure that it looks like they had fun on it.

4.14 Influencer Intentions

There are many different types of influencers and many of them share different intentions. Some can be categorised as travel influencers as their intentions are to share their travel experiences, while others might only focus on travel a small amount. One thing they all have in common is that for many, influencing is a job and that has consequences on their intentions which affects their audience. Influencer intentions were something that a few of our participants mentioned during their interview and expressed how it affected their view of influencers and the travel content that they post.

Lucas felt confident in his ability to recognise what an Instagram travel influencer would want to 'gain' when posting on the site. This is something he later in the interview stated he also thought the biggest user group of Instagram could probably recognise as well.

He mentioned how being an influencer is a job and recognizing what they are doing when posting emphatically about a certain hotel on a trip then it would not be hard for him to know that they are probably trying to promote to us the same idea.

Likewise, then Lucas felt that the intentions of the influencer mattered when it came to how reputable they are. If they used their social media presence to promote ‘good’ things, economic growth in areas that needed it and could use the boost from tourism or promoted ecological awareness on trips then it would be respectable. Whereas Lucas thought if it was treated “as a job-job” meaning as simply a means to make money and the influencer would make it by any means possible also damaging in their pursuit of it through travelling that he disliked it a whole lot more. This was a view brought on because Lucas stated that an influencer might not provide something vital for people to consume by posting pretty-looking pictures on a social media app.

Amelia regarded influencers and their impact on Instagram to be both positive and negative, they have had an impact on how often we see these luxurious trips and the pressure that comes with trying to live up to them, but influencers have also made more people go travelling in her opinion. They have also impacted the travel industry in the sense that they have influenced marketing going on for travel organizations since they are now a part of it. Where ultimately it sounds like the intentions of the influencers hardly matter to their negative or positive perception, since they might mean well with posting a trip that others cannot afford but they can then see or live vicariously through, then they do not know if people will take it as bragging. Which means either can be taken in any direction.

Not all influencers are travel influencers, but they might still show themselves going on vacation. This is the case for Evelyn who sees some content from influencers on her Instagram but does not follow any travel influencers. Evelyn commented how they both have an influencing effect on when it comes to travel and influencers who are not specifically travel influencers might still get sponsorships from hotels or the like and therefore do some of the same things/experiences as people who are solely travel influencers.

In general, then Peter decided that he mostly thought there were “good people” on Instagram, good people meaning that they seem authentic.

Through this data, it can be said that influencer intention matters and their audience does take their intentions into consideration before deciding whether they like the content or not. Travel influencing is seen as a more positive thing when the influencer takes their time and are clear about their intention and use their following to improve the tourism industry around the globe rather than just treating it as a job that gives them a lot of financial gains.

4.15 Media Literacy

Media literacy was another point brought up by a couple of interviewees themselves. It makes for an incredibly pertinent point when it comes to people's 'responsibility' when consuming content.

When it comes to using Instagram as a source of information or inspiration for travelling, then Amelia mentioned how it comes down to a person's media literacy. Since she believes that you cannot believe everything that you see on the internet, travel brands are likely to try and sell you something which is why they post. Amelia goes on to say that it is not likely to be a good solution to ban travel agencies from Instagram even if you know everything that they say might be imbued with the best reputation they can make up since they are not going to change the narrative of their marketing on or off the platform. People need to have the media literacy to see through this.

Furthermore, then when asked if she thought if people who had the means to travel also had the media literacy to see through the marketing on Instagram then Amelia answered: "yes and no". She explained how a younger generation who grew up utilising social media and have become used to seeing through these things probably had a decent amount of media literacy to see through this. However, in her experience working with a travel agency "if you go to the boomer generation, the people who are 50+ now, like they don't necessarily know cause they didn't grow up with these things " which showcases this difference there might be between the generations and their ability to navigate social media, furthermore, then Amelia goes on to state how "[Boomers] may be highly educated and they may have high income, but they don't necessarily know about what is genuine and what is not genuine on these mediums", meaning that being highly educated will not be 'enough' to intuitively know social media literacy.

This showcases this difference in the age group for people who might be able to have the means to go travelling but come at it with a different background. Where people who know how to use Instagram or how it functions are better equipped to know to manage their expectations accordingly to the fact that they are seeing an edited Instagram post.

Amelia goes on to question where the burden of responsibility falls when it comes to media literacy, since expecting everybody to be highly sceptical of everything they see all the

time is a bit much, while there is no way of knowing or teaching people to just instinctively know what to trust and what not to.

Considering that a lot of the interviewees find the trustworthiness of influencers and travel brands a hesitant decent at best, and non-existent at worst and the fact that they are not just looking at things that they will have theoretical knowledge on, it might be something that they directly act on since it might be their next holiday. Then having the media literacy to be able to understand what information you are being fed by users and why is important.

Social media literacy was something that was found by the participants that mentioned it to be extremely important and thought difficult to navigate. Given the fact that it makes for a difficult thing to teach or even know if you have mastered. Though it is important since it affects how the interviewees perceive the information coming across their feed. This is something that is needed if someone is going to give action to what they see, such as when they get inspired by travel content and want to go see these places.

4.16 Communication

While many of our participants use Instagram as a way of communicating with friends and family through pictures, sharing and liking content, one participant stood out. Marcus uses Instagram in a way that none of the other participants expressed much about. Marcus travels about half the year on both solo-backpacking trips and work-related travel within the watersport scene. He was the only person we found that we interviewed who consistently posts every single day which is mostly travel related. He has found Instagram to be an excellent outlet and platform for communication with people he meets during his travels, whilst also communicating with friends and family back home. Marcus puts a heavy focus on Instagram as a communicative platform and all the expectations that come with it

During the interview with Marcus, he expressed that while he uses Instagram to post often about his travels, he also uses it as a communication device. As he travels quite frequently, he tends to meet many people on his journeys. As most people around him use Instagram as a mutual platform, he often uses Instagram to follow along with what his other travel buddies are up to. He uses Instagram to determine if an old acquaintance is close to his location to which he can contact them and ask to meet up. He finds Instagram to be an extremely helpful tool when it comes to reaching out to travel buddies that share the same interests as him. He uses the platform as a sort of diary or blog, to collect his own travel memories but also to communicate with his travel buddies and friends and family back home

so they can collectively see what he is up to. Marcus also mentioned that in the past he never used to post or use Instagram that much but after posting a few pictures from an old trip he went on and came back home, his friends started to ask about the pictures and found it interesting to follow along on his adventures. During the interview, he stated, “I do it mostly for myself [posting], but at the same time there are also people following along and find it interesting to see my travel activities.” He mentions that getting that verbal response from his friends at home meant a lot to him and encouraged him to post more and communicate through Instagram to his friends and family about his travel adventures.

When interviewing Marcus, he expressed that he is a daily user of Instagram and that he actively uses the platform to post and share with his friends and other people who follow him. He feels as if Instagram is a great way to connect to friends all over the world. One thing that is important to note about Marcus is that he is an avid traveller and has travelled almost 4-6 months out of the year consistently for the last 4 years. He mentions that he posts almost daily and surrounding the act of posting he stated “I think it's cool to post things. I think it is cool to get recognition and acknowledgement through posting on Instagram.” When he posts from his travels, he finds it comforting and exhilarating that people are willing to follow along and finds acknowledgement of his travels through reactions and engagement from his following in the form of likes and comments. He mentions that he puts in a lot of effort to make his content engaging and spends a few minutes every day either editing pictures or short videos that he posts.

Marcus continues to mention that while he posts a lot about his travel adventures, he also tries to make an effort to post about everyday life moments, such as waking up at 5 am to go to work or that he is doing laundry or all the travel preparation he does before going on a trip. He is very careful to communicate different aspects of his life and not just the exciting trips that he goes on. He mentioned in his interview “I see a lot of people that never post and then suddenly they post about a trip that they have been on” he continues “That kind off makes me think that there is nothing else going on in their lives and that everyday life is horrible.” He finds it much more interesting and likes it when people post about every aspect of one’s life because it can not all be exciting travel adventures. In Marcus’ opinion, there needs to be some sort of balance which is why he also focuses on showing the more mundane things in life such as work or laundry. He very beautifully stated in the interview; “To me, I think it is cool to see that there is an everyday life ‘dryness’ that everybody has to live through but is also important that we can be happy in that dryness. This is why I find it nice to capture some of those moments that everyone struggles with such as

work.” Instagram can sometimes become an “everything is perfect” kind of platform where people only post about the good parts of life. Therefore, it has become almost a mission of Marcus to make sure that he communicates with his followers that, yes, he goes on many backpacking adventures and does water sports in Asia, but he also works hard to earn money to that when he is not travelling.

Marcus finds that communicating honest everyday struggles is an important thing and he takes the time and effort to show the more mundane things in life alongside his travel adventures. Furthermore, he tries to create a nuanced and balanced rhythm in what he posts, and he acknowledges that he puts a lot of thought and effort into creating posts that are engaging and shows every aspect of his life. When he travels, he likes to post different types of images, such as landscapes and activities he is doing as well as just pictures with him in them. He also mentions that he does a lot of water sports to which he finds it interesting and fun to post about him doing water sports when traveling to show off not only his skills but also the landscape around him. He also mentions that he does filter out what he posts and what he does not. If he personally cannot stand behind the picture or he himself does not find it entertaining or amusing, he will not post it. He believes that he should be able to stand behind the content that he posts and tries to keep positive vibes throughout even with the more mundane everyday things that he does.

Marcus found that Instagram has its ups and downs, but is ultimately the best platform for posting about his travel adventures as it has all the features that he needs. He is able to showcase his travel adventures whilst also using the messaging feature to stay close to old travel buddies and friends and family. While he thinks there are some aspects of the app he does not like, he tries his best to provide people with a nuanced and balanced outlook on how it is to travel most days out of the year by showing all of the different aspects and not just the perfect and exciting parts.

4.17 Conflicting Opinions

An interesting, though isolated, incident occurred while interviewing Peter. He, during the course of the one-hour interview, changed his opinion from being thoroughly adverse toward influencers to being more open-minded, which was something that he himself noticed and commented on.

Peter did not believe that people who felt themselves being influenced by influencers in their travel decision-making had a strong sense of self. He explained how he followed

people because he thought they were funny or brought some form of entertainment to him. He found it a little weird how people could hold an influencer's opinion in high esteem when they do not technically know that person very well.

He thought people might be likely to make purchasing decisions for their holiday, about where to go, and what accommodation to stay in, based on what they see on Instagram and not make further researched decisions. Peter stated that "people are lazy nowadays". This means having an easy recommendation brought to you online makes for easy decision-making. Since you can see influencers post about a place and it shows that they enjoyed themselves, which makes people conclude that they too will enjoy themselves.

Peter fully believes that you are responsible for doing your own research before going to a place. Both in terms of finding something that you will like through your own research and in terms of understanding what place you are visiting for safety reasons.

Furthermore, then Peter at the end of the interview marvelled at the fact that he could feel and see himself become more nonaligned during the interview through answering the questions. He started out being thoroughly against influencers and had a negative view of them, however, the more he talked the more he found himself shifting his opinion. This might be in part because he realized that being a travel influencer might be quite a fun job to have, which means that he could see why people did it. Thereby, uprooting some of the negative bias he had towards them. It might also be because it can be hard to precisely pin down why what an influencer does could be considered 'bad'.

There is this notion of not liking influencer culture since there is the aspect that you do not know them personally. Some of the interview participants also tend not to like being sold something, which also happens a lot with influencers. There is, however, also the aspect present that they can see how it would be an enjoyable job to have, and cannot fault these people for doing it when it is available to them.

This sort of showcases how the more someone might discuss or get into the topic, the surface-level assumptions they have on people such as influencers might shift. Not everybody thinks deeply and hard about these people, since they often experience them in passing through scrolling or through their own leisure use of the app. Though that does not mean there is not more to the debate that the first opinion one formed, as this point shows.

5. Conclusion

This project sought out to investigate how Instagram influencers and the manipulation and editing of travel photos can affect both tourism organisations and travellers alike. Based on the research conducted in this project it is clear that Instagram influencers can affect organisations and travellers in different ways. Influencers can act as a bridge between organisations and travellers and through influencers travel brands can reach out to a larger audience. However, due to a decline in trust towards influencers that the interviewees expressed, it is crucial that tourism organisations re-evaluate their use of influencers. For some interviewees, influencers could be used as a source of inspiration, but they also express that influencers can affect their perception of travel content and find them to be unreliable.

The interview participants enjoyed and used the visual aspect of Instagram when it comes to consuming travel content. 'Seeing is believing' is the point that brings trustworthiness and interest into the content, even if they know this content can be edited. However, trustworthiness is a tricky endeavour when it comes to travel content and influencers on Instagram. We learned how some of the participants thought that influencers used to be more authentic and thereby trustworthy prior to now. This evolution of influencers in marketing has brought more opportunities to them, however, it has hurt their reputability.

The interview participants showed an understanding that being an influencer was a job for these people and that they need to accept sponsorships to earn an income. When the interviewees are met with sponsored posts they are more likely to question the authenticity of what they are being sold. Influencers are under contract and will be paid to say positive things about a brand, which the interviewees were very aware of. There was also a notion of how often and how much an influencer can be sponsored as the frequency of sponsorships can hurt their reliability if they claim to like 40 different sponsored products or experiences. The interviewees always perceived sponsored posts differently and were aware that they were being sold something, to which they knew always to take sponsored content with a grain of salt as they know not to believe everything they see on Instagram to be true.

Through the interview process, it became evident that the interviewees believe Instagram to be a platform of perfection. The interviewees mentioned that it is often the 'best' pictures that make it onto the platform and that they expect pictures to be edited to some extent. Some interviewees noticed editing mostly on faces and bodies while others also notice it on nature especially when it comes to colour exaggeration. This notion of editing and exaggerating pictures on Instagram has led to the interviewees expecting not to believe all of

the content they see on Instagram to be truthful or a 100% accurate representation of real life. The interviewees also expressed that this has in some cases led to them feeling disappointed when they arrived at a destination and it did not look the same as it did on Instagram. It can be concluded that a form of media literacy is needed to understand that the content on Instagram is not an accurate representation of real life. The interviewees also mentioned that honesty is important to them and that they would prefer it if influencers and brands were more honest with their endeavours on Instagram.

Our suggestion for travel companies is to potentially consider what is most important for their brand when utilising social media marketing. There will be the option to get a human element and a connection through to people by using influencers. While the 'honesty' of a company promoting themselves on social media, might bring in a form of respect and appreciation since it can come across as a more honourable advertisement. Since there is a difference in what travellers might want to see on their social media feeds. However, travel brands need to be aware that there is a decline in trust towards influencers on Instagram, and that there needs to be an intervention in how they use them. Our interviewees explained that they value honesty in the content that they see on Instagram and that brand collaborations between influencers would benefit from proving that they are being honest in nature and that brands should allow for influencers' honest opinions even if that means receiving criticism.

When it comes to avenues for further research then options for exploring how influencers who post travel content and their authenticity are being met on TikTok could bring further understanding to this subject. Since it might engage with a younger audience than this paper has, and potentially there will be a difference in how people engage with the content posted by influencers across platforms.

Furthermore, then multiple interviewees mentioned their preference for long-form travel content, this is something that will not be given as much of on Instagram nor on TikTok (though TikTok allows for 10 minutes videos which is at least a longer form of content than some of the shorter one-minute reels). Where an exploration of what people get out of watching long-form travel content vs short-form travel content and how that affects their travel motivations.

Additionally, then another option for future research might be to look into the media literacy of generations growing up with social media as a part of daily life, and how they understand travel content, and what their expectations for vacations are. It might have been an advantage for these generations to be intricately familiar with social media and what goes

into posting on various platforms, though they might also be used to the kind of marketing they see every day and have had their expectations impacted by it.

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