



# **Instagram's role in youngsters' travel decision-making: How does IG content inspire you to travel in your twenties?**

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Abstract:	
<p>This thesis examines how Instagram content influences people in their twenties to travel to destinations. The aim of the study is to achieve a clear view of what type of content catches the interest of young Instagram users. The research questions are; "Is it about the high-quality photography/editing skills that make a destination look so appealing?", "Are travel trends manipulative and affect the focus group's decision-making?", "Are influencers' destination suggestions and opinions important to youngsters?". These research questions together with some theories chosen, complete the purpose of this study. The Cultivation Theory, The Source Credibility Theory and The Selective Exposure Theory have inspired the method of this study. The research is done with the method Surveys in which twenty participants are chosen to take part. These respondents are part of the target group and are asked to give their most honest answers to each question of the survey. The survey contains fifteen questions on the subject and it is anonymous with no time limit. All questions were motivated by the theories of the study, the research questions and the aim. This study mainly concluded that most of nowadays' youngsters have knowledge on online manipulation and know how to keep their own opinion. It is seen that there are some specific characteristics that indeed drag attention but when it comes to the travel decision-making, our target group is mostly focused on their own interests and feelings.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Social media has a huge impact on human beings. The high-speed development of social networking has acted on every aspect of humans' lifestyle and impacted utilization habits as well as purchasing decisions. Social media content affects or even generates thoughts, feelings, needs, beliefs and decisions. Humans are highly responsive to imagery which is why social media content has become a top source for them to process information from. Especially Instagram, which is currently one of the largest social media platforms with various types of content that attract and draw the attention of users. This photo sharing app is exceptionally popular among people in their twenties. Statistics have shown that as of February 2021, 71 percent of U.S Instagram users are aged between 18-29 (Statista Research Department, 2021).

Looking at the travel industry in Instagram, the platform plays a huge role in how people choose their next travel destination. Instagram has become the so-called modern-day travel agent; people might see content of a travel destination on their feed and decide to book their flights minutes later. Four years ago, a Facebook study found out that 67 percent of "travel freaks" use Instagram to find inspiration for new places to travel to (Facebook IQ, 2017). While numerous years ago people who sought for advice on travelling, used vastly dissimilar sources to get it. The simplest way was to ask people in their circle to give them feedback on destinations they had been to or by watching movies. Another way to learn about destinations was via travel agents.

However, the benefit that we have today of being able to see how any destination looks like through the media was not the case years ago and this shows how much importance a platform like Instagram has for people. In this study, we only focus on the travelers. The upcoming research is done observing from the youngsters' (people in the age of twenties) point of view, finding out how Instagram content influences their travel decision-making. This research is done due to professional interest, aiming to attach the outcomes with future marketing opportunities in the Tourism field.

## 1.1 Problem statement

The determination of what it is about Instagram's content that inspires youngsters to travel to a destination is what is being problematized. Is it about the high-quality photography/editing skills that make a destination look so appealing? It is stated that fine-tuning content to perfection is especially important. Using high-quality images and refining them with complimentary photo-editing tools draw more attentiveness (TeamUnbox, n.d.)

Furthermore, are travel trends manipulative and affect the focus group's decision-making? In an article written by an Instagram travel influencer, it is mentioned that there is nothing wrong with photomanipulation and that one should not choose to travel to a destination because of the content (Schee, 2017). Looking into that and how the younger audience trusts influencers more than traditional celebrities (Summer, 2021), it is also targeted to find out; Are influencers' destination suggestions and opinions important to youngsters? Most importantly, what are the characteristics of the content that youngsters

find travel-wise inspiring? The final question leads us to the overall aim of the study which is stated below.

## **1.2 Aim of the study**

With the upcoming research, it is desired to achieve a clear view of what type of content catches the interest of young Instagram users. Since this content has an affect on a person's willingness to travel to a destination, it is aimed to find out what the type is and why it has this affecting ability.

This research can be used by people who want to successfully market a destination in order to increase its tourism focusing on the younger generation. With the result of identifying the aimed findings, individuals and organizations are able to take advantage of the provided information. Individuals and organizations that share the same target group and goal, can apply these findings into their social media content creation and develop the interaction accordingly.

## **1.3 Demarcation**

Using a cognitive perspective, focusing on people in their twenties and their mental process of decision-making, the research is focused on what leads them to this action.

The first area of the study looks into the factors that are effective in polishing content into the perfect image of destinations. The investigation will begin with what these factors are and how or why they are successful in creating this perfection in the eyes of the focus group. Thoroughly, this area identifies what this focus group authorizes as perfect destination content.

The second area of this study explores online manipulation and its outcomes when looking at popular trends. This area also focuses on how public faces and influencers suggest and share opinions that could be false or over exaggerated but convincing enough. This area will give a clear view of how the focus group views and processes this type of content. It defines whether it is verifiable that there is manipulative catchy content which creates unnecessary needs, wishes and desires. The third area of this study concludes and discusses the actual in-depth IG content characteristics that are inspirational to youngsters in the process of deciding their next travel destination.

This thesis will not cover information on how social media affects people's psychological state (depression, anxiety, wellness). Neither will this study cover the positive and negative sides of Instagram, its functions and effects. This research is simply and only focused on the areas listed above.

## **2 THEORY**

To establish the theoretical basis, the key concepts of the topic will be identified while relevant theories will be explained and evaluated. Now that Instagram has become an

especially important source of travel information for many, it is visible that the travel industry has changed dramatically. Not only companies in certain destinations or hotels or airlines but also celebrities and IG influencers post destination content on Instagram giving their audience the best possible picture of a place. As mentioned earlier, users in their twenties are more common on the platform and more dragged into the imagery, meaning that they get influenced by the content they see and get inspiration for where to travel to. This research will specifically identify what is the perfect destination picture for the focus group, how important are the suggestions and opinions of popular faces and what characteristics make travel content successful in gaining their attention and lead them to make travel decisions.

To give authoritative credibility to this topic and research aim, the following literature will be used. Four previous studies on the topic have been looked at. These studies' outcomes give a helpful basis on this research aim and purpose by providing a well informative understanding of the two aspects in the study. In addition to these studies, three theories will be used to identify the psychology-based explanation behind people's acts and behaviors that are in interest throughout this investigation. The cultivation theory describes how people view the world and their surroundings due to long exposure to media while the source credibility theory describes how people are more likely to trust individuals who are seen as credible.

Finally, the selective exposure theory describes how individuals unconsciously prefer to focus on information in their environment that is confirming their present frame of mind. Another piece of literature used for the research is an article written about types of content in Instagram that get the most engagement.

## **2.1 Previous studies**

In this subject area, there has been a study examining if social media influences an individual's decision to visit tourist destinations (Parsons, 2017). The purpose of this chosen study was to uncover if social media impacts a person's decision to visit tourist destinations. This study concludes with the statement that social media plays a key role in the motivation of a tourist and in turn influences tourist decision-making behavior. It was also stated that social media influences the younger generation due to their constant presence on the platforms. It is believed that social media and its pressuring energy has created a trend in the younger generation to travel to destinations.

Another study done in the subject area is the Instagram content study where the examiners looked at 7,433,417 IG posts to discover the recipe for the most engaging Instagram post (Lozan, 2019). In this Instagram study, the purpose was to find out what are the content rules and how a perfect Instagram post looks like. The researcher examined the research aim by looking at Instagram engagement from all aspects, investigating the platform's power to concept the perfect post. This study's conclusion includes numerous key findings. Focusing on the ones that will be useful for this research include the following statements. Currently, the engagement rate per post is around 2% and approximately 76% of company posts are using images instead of videos/carousel posts. Carousel posts have a higher engagement rate per post (1.65% - 5.13%) depending on how large a profile is. Profiles with over 100000 followers have posted an average of 240 posts this year, while accounts with under 5000 followers only posted around 50 posts. Companies/brands do

not use many hashtags when posting videos. Last but not least, short captions that do not exceed 10 words and include at least 20 emojis make for more engaging posts.

Thirdly, there has been a study investigating how young tourists really trust Instagram travel influencers (Anuar, 2021). It examined the aspects of Instagram travel influencers' posts that can successfully catch the attention of their followers and lead them to visit a destination promoted or recommended. This study concluded to the fact that the attributes of Instagram influencers' posts and the followers' trust towards them truly influence the intention to visit the places featured (Anuar, 2021).

Lastly, a study was done to measure the instant impact of user-generated content in Instagram that changes viewers' perceptions towards a travel destination (Shuqair, 2017). This research was done by using an experimental design and subsequent t-Test in SPSS. The viewers' perceptions of Lebanon before and after exposure to selected Instagram images were investigated. This study led to the conclusion that Instagram content is effective in changing the users' point of view about a destination. It was stated that since Instagram provides users the opportunity to share their experience with others, many destinations collaborate with influencers as part of their promotional campaigns. They create appealing destination content, increase the exposure to their destinations and attract prospective travelers (Shuqair, 2017).

## 2.2 The Cultivation Theory

The Cultivation Theory is a theory which suggests that long-term exposure to media forms how the users of media perceive the world as well as how they behave in life (Nabi & Riddle, 2018). The cultivation theory has been broadly used in the study of violence in television, it has been used to explain how children who watch violent cartoons are more likely to become violent themselves (Kanwal, 2012). The theory argues that the media in general presents an image of the world that does not reflect reality. The authors of the theory state that people interpret reality according to how they are portrayed in the media.

Similarly, this research contains the argumentation that youngsters pay great attention to how a destination appears online and rarely hesitate on whether a place is going to be exactly how it is presented. *"Don't believe everything you see, even salt looks like sugar"* (Obaid, n.d.). It is an extremely common thing nowadays that not everything is as it seems online. Imagery editing tools and image filters are used in almost everything seen online which make content more appealing. It all begins with the youngsters' exposure to a type of media focusing on social media. They start "storing" everything they see in there into their minds and create an image of a place by connecting their actual experiences with what they have seen in TV and other media as well. With this image created, the world starts looking identical to it due to the judgement and attitudes youngsters obtain and believe in through this Cultivation Process as presented in Figure 1 below.

Connecting the theory to this research, young Instagram users explore destination content often on the platform since many hours are spent on it. It is questioned which are the numerous ways of ‘perfecting’ travel content to see what exactly make this type of content so convincing and appealing to youngsters. This connects to the argumentation stated before. Due to these programs and photography skills, youngsters get a view of a destination presented on Instagram and feel amazed about the beauty of places without thinking or considering the possibility that a place might not be exactly how it is presented. These feelings lead to travel decision making as well as other factors that will be mentioned in this theoretical framework.

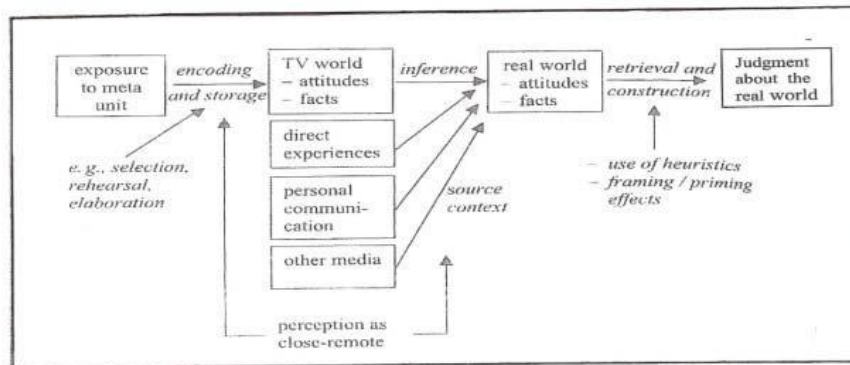


Figure 1. The Cultivation Process (Mosharafa, 2015).

### 2.3 The Source Credibility Theory

The Source Credibility Theory describes how people are more likely to trust individuals who are seen as credible (Hovland, 1953). To elaborate, humans tend to listen and believe people who are or seem to be smarter, have higher status or are more informative on a topic than themselves. The Source Credibility theory also states that people are most likely to be persuaded when a source presents itself as credible. The credibility of a source can be created by various features like; authenticity, fame, strength of arguments, connectivity to a person, matching emotional reasons, common experiences etc. Most importantly, people look at attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness (Serban, 2010). Attractiveness includes similarity, familiarity and likeability just like in the examples mentioned above. From the expertise aspect, people seek for experienced and knowledgeable sources that are qualified and skilled. The trustworthiness of a source is judged by how honest, dependable and sincere a source appears.

This theory supports the research topic and aim since it will also be examined if influencers’ and famous people’s opinions impact the travel decision-making of youngsters, considering how it is natural for them to. Statistics have shown that high social status makes people more trustworthy in the eyes of society (Ohio State University, 2011). To be more specific, a higher socioeconomic status of one can lead to an increase in a person's level of trust towards them.

Taking this theory in connection with the research, the fact that people tend to trust credible people more than others is something that will definitely be important to keep in mind throughout this research. Since credible people seem more trustworthy and are usually chosen as a resource of information for all kinds of subjects, the research target group is more likely to trust the opinions of Instagram influencers and celebrities. These two groups of people are continually active on the platform and very often share their thoughts with the audience.

These thoughts include their likes and dislikes about destinations they have visited. Youngsters in their twenties actively scrolling through Instagram, come across content created by their following influencers and celebrities. Viewing them talking about destinations will catch their interest and it is very possible that they absorb what is said due to their credibility. Since these people are viewed as credible in youngsters' eyes due to their social status or life accomplishments, the target group seems to trust their opinions more. By firstly absorbing all the information and feelings of the creator, it leads to the decision making of the target group, specifically focusing on the travel type.

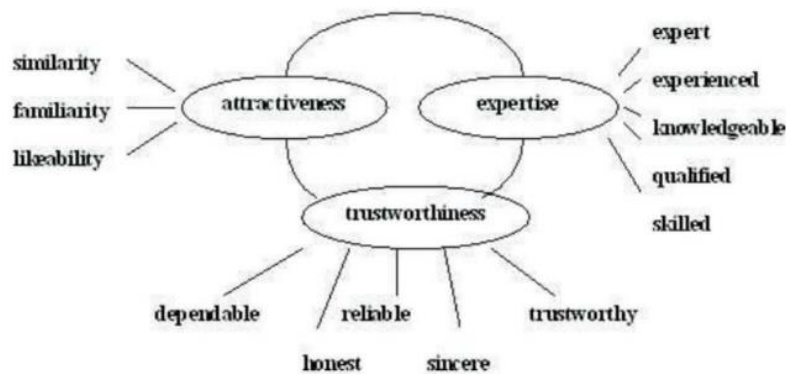


Figure 2. The Ohanian Model of Source Credibility (Serban, 2010)

## 2.4 The Selective Exposure Theory

The Selective exposure theory describes that people choose to bring focus on information in their environment that is fitting with and confirms their present attitudes to stay away from or reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962).

In social media, it is simple to create personalized content and it is greatly beneficial for creators since people who are sensitive to certain topics will be easily dragged. However, in some platforms one can block chosen words from showing up on their feed. This is definitely great for people who are extremely sensitive to particular topics and this protects them from further harm. On the other hand though, it can be detrimental when some users might take advantage of this feature by hiding everything that doesn't align with their personal beliefs(The Decision Lab, 2022). Taking this from this research's focus platform Instagram's view, observing from the travel industry point of view, influencers and destination marketing accounts succeed in winning the attention of users by creating the right type of content.

To elaborate, people who are into traveling and generally explore the area have existing beliefs about destinations they have looked up or heard about. By scrolling through their Instagram feed and seeing various destination marketing posts, it is easy for them to get dragged when they view something they already know about. Whether they only have an idea of a place or simply believe that they are fully informed about it and have the desire to visit it, the specific content will confirm their present thinking. They are also much more interested and focused when something confirms their current state of mind.

Due to the way the human brain works, it is common for people to fall in this “trap” when naturally processing information without the pessimism that their mind might be tricking them. The reason it is referred to as “mind-tricking” is because there is a huge probability that people tend to miss other better-for-them options when focusing on what confirms their present attitudes, but it is not something humans can usually easily control or even realize (Knobloch, 2014).

Thus, Instagram travel content creators possess one more advantage when it comes to catching the attention of the users with a natural way of attraction. The reassuring feeling one has at this time will eventually lead or bring the person closer to the decision-making.

### Cognitive Dissonance and Perception

▶ Theory predict:

people will avoid information that increase dissonance

▶ Perceptual process:

Selective exposure → selective attention → selective interpretation → selective retention

Selective exposure:

Method for reducing dissonance by seeking information that is consonant with current beliefs and actions

Figure 3. Cognitive Dissonance (Disonan, 2014)

## 2.5 Instagram: 9 Types Of Content That Get The Most Engagement

There are certain image types that get shared and liked more than others (Braby, 2016). Rita Braby authored this article about types of IG content that get the most engagement. This article is useful for the purpose of this research, since it is targeted to investigate what characteristics create the perfect IG post for inspiring youngsters to travel.

The author states that inspirational quotes create a lot of engagement and are a fantastic way to connect with people. It is true since quotes express some type of meaning and when multiple people share the same experiences and beliefs, they are likely to connect themselves with the content and give attention.

Moreover, food never goes wrong on generating engagement, no matter the platform and concept of account. Humans love food, humans eat food every day, it is something that is familiar to everyone and there are a massive number of ways to post about food like;

culture based, recipes, healthy tips, calorie-counting, vegan etc. It is a topic that in content it can drag any kind of person's engagement and attention.

Posting human faces is another terrific way to show the human side of a brand. People will connect in an emotional way to photos of real people. For example, seeing someone at a beautiful location, the viewer can very easily think of himself in the place of the model and as simply as that, a location has been successfully promoted. Human faces also appear in product advertising or in posts where someone is willing to spread awareness about a topic and the audience is more likely to read or listen to something where a human face is seen, that is due to the empathy us humans carry as creatures.

Furthermore, landscapes and scenery always stand out in users' feed even if a business does not have something to do with the outdoors, it can incorporate landscape and scenery images to get any kind of message out (Braby, 2016). This supports the fact that posting destination content including sights, nature, and scenery in general, attracts IG users rapidly. This is something that makes so much sense since we live in this world that is full of places to explore, the first thing we do when we wake up is open our eyes and see where we are, location is one of the top attributes that affect one's well-being (Linberg, 2021). Thus, locations, scenery, places catch the eye of an individual easily.

User-generated images, sharing images from followers is the best way to show that they are cared about. Depending on the account type, the content-maker can share their followers' experiences for example with a product they are selling or if the account is based on destinations, the content maker could share their followers' content at these destinations as well as their own original content. This is a good way to build good and trustworthy connections with followers and gain more audience through time.

Another type of content that gets a lot of engagement is content with animals. People who love animals enjoy seeing cute, funny, lovely images of animals and they are also instantly shareable. Animal-lovers play a big part in Instagram and build communities. In addition, giving followers a behind-the-scenes look into, for example, a business is a wonderful way to show the human side of a company to make human connections and show all the work that goes into making a product or service happen. This can also go to any type of account, sharing the experiences that are not seen brings the audience closer.

Also, exploring what is trending at the time can boost interaction and engagement and using the most trending hashtags too (Braby, 2016). Last but not least, videos are content that catch attention and get people to linger over posts, rather than scrolling quickly through. One can also see how many viewers their video has, as well as the likes, which is a great way to see how far the account and content are reaching.

All these types of content are connectable with destination-based accounts. These are especially useful tips for anyone trying to grow on Instagram, especially in the industry this research is focused on.

## **2.6 Summary of the theoretical framework**

Taking everything into account, the materials chosen for this research will help in building the final answers to the research questions as well as in giving more power to the assumptions in thought. The literature was chosen according to the topic and information importance regarding the research aim and purpose.

By combining the previous studies together with the theories and the article, there is a good amount of confidence created towards the upcoming structured conclusions due to the satisfying mass of information explored. By holding on to this literature, in cooperation with the data that will be gathered, majestic results will be listed.

### **3 METHOD**

It is very important to choose the right method for a thesis. A method helps in determining the success of a research as well as making it high-quality and reliable. This of course applies when choosing the **right** method for a study. Every type of research connects with a method that is useable for the specific occasion, not all methods connect to all types of research. The method section builds up the whole study and possesses a huge importance for the success of a research (Kothari, 2004).

Choosing the right method is one of the most important parts in a thesis since it is the starting point of gathering data (Bhosale, 2022). Data for each research should be collected in a sufficient way in order to get valuable, clear answers for the research questions and fulfill the aim of the study. Fulfilling the aim of the study requires great data collection and analyzing.

#### **3.1 Choice of method**

The choice of method for this study was Surveys. A survey questionnaire was distributed with open-ended questions since the research had a qualitative approach. Qualitative designs enable and encourage flexibility in the content and flow of questions to challenge and probe for deeper meanings (Wolff, 2018).

The survey questionnaire was the right choice of method for this research because the aim was to examine people about how they get inspired by IG content. This means that the choice of method had to be as personalized as possible in order to get appropriate results for the research (Thattamparambil, 2020). The survey met the needs of this study by being as personalized as possible and seeking for detailed and descriptive replies.

This is the reason why interviews would not have been as suitable as surveys. Interviews allow the respondent to only reply on questions with their first thoughts and doesn't allow enough time to elaborate on it. Surveys have no time and respondents can critically think and write their full answer and opinion to each questions giving the research more information to analyze.

Surveys are beneficial due to their uniqueness, surveys are able to gather information that is not available from other sources (Owens, 2002). In addition, the standardization of measurement a survey provides is really advantageous, the same information is collected from each respondent creating a harmonic balance and ease of comparison for the data analysis part.

## **3.2 Respondents**

The respondents for this study's Survey were global Instagram users aged 20-25 who are into travelling. This age group was chosen due to the study's aim to find out how Instagram influences travel decision-making and since the platform is more popular with youngsters, they were more confident and comfortable in their answers.

Qualitative samples are small and determined. In-depth interview informants were selected based on unique characteristics or personal experiences that make them ideal for the study (Wolff, 2018). To target the right respondents, the survey was only sent to chosen people according to their age, traveling interest and Instagram use. The respondents were found through the researcher's contact list, reaching them through the platform. They were wisely chosen in order to receive the best honest and accurate results. To structure the responses and analyze the results, it was required to put sufficient time and immersion in the data.

Additionally, intensive reading and rereading were important when analyzing the results in order to determine clear and focused results. (Wolff, 2018). Detailed notes were helpful as well as grouping similarities when organizing the data.

## **3.3 Research Approach**

A qualitative approach was used to answer the research questions. The method that was used to obtain the targeted data was Surveys. A survey was created with a list of questions aimed at extracting certain data from the focus group of the study. The questions resulted in qualitative data since they were open-ended. The technique that was adopted to succeed in gathering richer data was viewing the survey as a conversation with the participants. This process led on to a more lively and open-ended survey leading to sufficient data. The survey was sent to people from the target group found in social media groups and friends/relatives. The study took place online from 25/05/2022.

The data was collected from the final survey results of each respondent using the help of the survey tool. The data intended to be used were opinions on the following: what makes the IG travel content appealing, aiming to receive answers including relatable descriptions of photography and editing skills. In addition, data was collected through the answers that described how trends and influencers play a role in their travel decision-making. Leading to the last piece of data that was aimed to be gathered; named and defined characteristics that make IG travel content convincing enough to decide to travel to the presented

destination. The collected data was monitored manually and critically by the researcher, considering what the research questions are.

### **3.4 Questionnaire**

The structure of the survey was created depending on the order of the research questions. Starting with general simple questions on the subject. The respondents were asked about their daily time on social media as well as Instagram itself. Questions about their travel decisions were asked as well to get to know what influences them. Then, questions started being more specific on the platform this research was focused on. It was determined to find out how this focus group views Instagram when looking at its influence on the audience. Was it an important source to check destinations before traveling?

Furthermore, questions about appealing Instagram content were asked. This group of questions began with investigating things that make a destination look appealing to the respondents. Their opinion on photo-editing tools was asked as well as what they think about high-quality photography and if it is a reason behind a “perfect” destination post. Taking the Cultivation Theory (Nabi & Riddle, 2018) in connection to the survey, since the theory supports that long-term exposure to media affects people’s behavior and general view of the world, the survey examined whether that applies to how Instagram users view destinations after exploring travel content on the platform. This was done by including example content in the survey and giving respondents the ability to remember or re-experience the feelings and thoughts that went through their mind while scrolling through IG destination content. In this way, the survey gave the best possible outcomes when focusing on real and honest data gathering.

The following questions were about travel trends. To be more specific, the respondents were asked to mention a few that they are up to date with. It was also asked from them to give their view of how travel trends affect people their age when it comes to travel decision-making and why. It was interesting to see whether this age group finds trends manipulative or important. The Selective Exposure Theory (Festinger, 1962) was a great influence on this part of the survey. It included content on famous and known destinations together with content on not so heard destinations that are extraordinary. The respondents were asked to choose between the destinations, making an imagined decision on where to travel to next (“this or that”). By collecting their decisions, it was simpler to analyze whether the respondents were indeed exposed to the Selective Exposure Theory and tend to go with the safe and familiar road due to the seek of reassurance.

In addition, there were questions about Instagram influencers. The respondents began by listing a few IG influencers that they follow (if there were any) and why. This part of the survey examined how important influencers’ voices were for the focus group, always focusing on traveling. It is a common thing for influencers in the platform to share their experiences. The question was, how interested were these youngsters in listening to all that and would have they considered these famous people’s opinions/suggestions when deciding for themselves? The Source Credibility Theory (Hovland, 1953) had a clear connection to the planned questions. Unconsciously trusting people who are seen as more

credible than others is not something people want to admit or are proud of. Thus, examining people on a topic like this had to be done anonymously in order to receive the most original answers possible. The survey was anonymous for the reason stated above and it gave the respondents their desired space and time to answer honestly.

Lastly, questions regarding inspiring travel content characteristics. What is found inspiring in this content by youngsters and what are some characteristics that catch their attention and interest right away? What makes them stop scrolling? Ending the survey with this section, they also had the chance to mention anything they wanted on the subject that they found worthy for the research. The survey was a great way to collect opinions on engaging Instagram content types. The Instagram-based article used in this theoretical framework about 9 types that get the most engagement has an important connection to the planned questions. The qualitative survey was able to examine a variety of different aspects of research (Gumbinger, 2020). Using that benefit, the respondents were asked about their point of view in what are engaging types of content in the focused platform, and it was compared to the chosen article to find out whether that information related to the results.

Taking everything into consideration, the components referred to above were all investigated in this research by using literature-linked survey questions.

### **3.5 Analysis of the data**

There are several different types of qualitative data analysis, all of which have different purposes and have unique strengths and weaknesses. In this research's case, thematic analysis is ideal. A thematic analysis takes figures of data which are usually quite large and assembles them according to similarities and themes. These themes help in making sense of the content and obtain meanings from it (Warren, 2020). Thematic analysis is useful for finding out about people's experiences, views, and opinions. Therefore, it is perfectly suitable for this research's aim and objectives since the goal was to understand people's experiences and views about the topic.

To process the data obtained, the procedure will begin by categorizing the data to formulate the story through connection of each category. To be more specific, since the survey will be divided into three parts, each part will prove a different point. These points should be thus connected in order to analyze the data correctly manually and critically. What is meant by that, all results will be critically thought and analyzed by grouping answers, listing differences, similarities and gaining the best possible understanding of the respondents' beliefs and feelings. In this manual way, all information will be analyzed in a structured manner.

### **3.6 Validity and reliability**

Validity determines if a research truly measures what it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. A well-done qualitative study helps the audience comprehend a situation that would otherwise be somewhat confusing (Eisner, 1991). This connects to the idea of a great quality research when reliability is a concept to assess quality in quantitative study with a target to explain while quality concept in qualitative study has the purpose of creating understanding (Golafshani, 2003).

This qualitative study's survey was the resource for data collection. To ensure the validity and reliability of this study, the survey was strictly and only concentrated on the focus group in order to receive fully reliable data.

Looking at possible data errors or bias, dishonest answers is a usual phenomenon in surveys since some people can rush through survey questions. That is why this survey's questions were carefully created in order to get the best possible outcome when it comes to the honesty of the respondents. The questions were not easy to rush through and were very personal to give the respondent a feeling of importance and make their effort valuable for the success of the study.

## **4 RESULTS**

A questionnaire survey was conducted with a group of 20 Instagram users in their twenties who like to travel. The respondents were critically chosen according to whether they meet the requirements for this research or not. Each response of the survey was given by an eligible respondent aiming to determine the relevance of the whole survey process.

The qualitative survey consisted of 15 questions structured as below:

## Instagram's role in youngsters' travel decision-making: How does IG content inspire you to travel in your 20s?

This survey aims to collect the insights of participants, regarding their experience with Instagram travel-content-wise.

All participants should answer the questions with honesty and all responses will be anonymous. The data will be used in my thesis research paper and all data is treated confidentially while research ethics are strictly followed (see: [www.tenk.fi](http://www.tenk.fi)).

### How much time do you spend on social media daily?

Less than 1 hour

1 to 3 hours

3 to 5 hours

More than 5 hours

### How much time do you spend on Instagram daily?

Less than 1 hour

1 to 3 hours

3 to 5 hours

More than 5 hours

### When you want to travel to a destination, do you check Instagram content to see how the destination looks like?

Never

Sometimes

Always

### What attracts you when you look at IG travel content?

*It can be anything, name as many as you can!*

*Examples: colours, scenery, buildings, sights, people, photography skills, content quality, video, background music, captions, words etc.*

*If you never look at IG travel content, type "X".*

Enter text here

### Tell me your opinion about photo-editing, focusing on IG travel content. What are some negatives and positives of professional photo-editing? (You can answer from both the creator's and viewer's point of view.)

*Elaborate your answer well.*

Enter text here

### Photo-editing/ photography skills are reasons behind "perfect" IG destination content. If you agree, state why. If you disagree, type "X".

Enter text here

### Mention a few Travel Trends you are up to date with.

*Travel Trend: The current most trending places to visit or otherwise the most "Instagrammable" destinations. For example, Paris' The Eiffel Tower is an ongoing Travel Trend since ever.*

Enter text here

**Travel trends affect my travel decision-making. State if you agree or disagree and why.**

Enter text here

**List a few IG Influencers that you follow if there are any and explain why you follow them.**

*These can be influencers from any field that sometimes or often talk about traveling/destinations.*

Enter text here

**Do you value Influencers' travel opinions and suggestions? Do you feel like trusting their recommendations? Why?**

*Food for thought! An influencer's opinion might seem trustworthy due to their experience, content, credibility, social status etc.*

Enter text here

**What catches your attention or what makes you stop scrolling in Instagram?**

*Talk about travel content preferably but feel free to talk about IG content in general as well.*

Enter text here

**Here are a few pictures of Madrid - Spain (posted by @secretosdemadrid).**

**What goes through your mind when you look at these?**

*Give as many insights as possible.*



Enter text here

**Here are pictures of Amsterdam - Netherlands (posted by @amsterdam).**



Here are pictures of Bath - England (posted by @hellobath).

Which destination would you choose to visit and why? Which city's pictures were more appealing and why?

Enter text here

In your opinion, what are the most engaging types of content in Instagram?

<input type="checkbox"/> Human faces	<input type="checkbox"/> Food
<input type="checkbox"/> Animals	<input type="checkbox"/> Inspirational Quotes
<input type="checkbox"/> Landscapes and scenery	<input type="checkbox"/> User-generated images
<input type="checkbox"/> What's trending	<input type="checkbox"/> Behind-the-scenes
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Lastly, mention anything you want on the subject that you find worthy for this research.

Thank you so much for participating!

Enter text here

Finish

Figure 4. The Survey's Structure

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## 4.1 The Survey's Responses

The responses to the survey have been collected and the results include applicable and useful material for the research purpose. Taking the questionnaire from the very beginning, the results of question 1 showed that 40% of the respondents spend 1-3 hours on social media everyday while another 40% spend 3-5 hours and the remaining 20% spend more than 5 hours per day.



Figure 5. Respondents' hours spent on social media daily

As for question 2, the respondents were asked how much time they spend on Instagram itself daily. It turned out that 50% of the respondents spend 1 to 3 hours on Instagram daily while the 30% spend 3 to 5 hours and the remaining 20% spend less than 1 hour on the platform per day.



Figure 6. The Respondents' hours spent in Instagram daily

Moreover, question 3 asked whether the respondents check out Instagram content when they want to travel to a destination to have a look at what the place looks like. The

majority of respondents, meaning the 55%, said that they sometimes do that. 30% of the people answered that they always check out Instagram beforehand while only 15% never do that.



Figure 7. How often the respondents check IG travel content before travelling

Moving on, the more in-depth open-ended questions begin with loads of information to focus on. Taking question 4, the respondents were asked to name things that attract them when looking at Instagram content in general. The responses were the following;

#### What attracts you when you look at IG travel content?

Responses:

1. "Colours and content."
2. "Sightseeing, culture, scenery, nightlife."
3. "Content quality."
4. "Sights, Food places, Hotels, Activities."
5. "Scenery and sights, as well as the quality of the photo/video, how it is taken, where - is important. Short reels attract more, long videos are annoying. Music is important too, depending on the vibe that content makers want people to feel when they see video. If these all good, then post's description is important to ass well, it should be informative enough."
6. "Sights, people, photography skills, video, music."
7. "Scenery, cute places."
8. "The colours, the scenery, and especially to see how people are living and enjoying the experience, does that influencer have anything in common with me? Then it could be likely I would like that travel experience."
9. "Pretty much all the above. Maybe colours, pretty cafés/restaurants etc. and environment (beaches, parks, buildings... anything "Instagrammable")"
10. "Scenery, cozy atmosphere, architecture."
11. "I am trying to find places to visit and places to eat at, so, mostly it is food and landmarks."
12. "Nothing specific."
13. "Scenery, hotels, restaurants, tiny streets, beaches, urban areas, influencers posts, TikTok videos, YouTube videos, daily life there, how does the parties and clubs look like, must see places."

14. "Quality of the pictures, if many people are tagging the same location, food pictures."
15. "Views, colours, buildings, sea, sun."
16. "Scenery, people, content quality."
17. "It just needs to be something eye-catching."
18. "Video effect."
19. "The scenery, buildings, food and culture."
20. "For me the content quality is very important otherwise I don't pay attention. Background music is something that can easily catch my attention, especially when it is a song I know playing in the background. Thirdly, strong captions catch my interest."

Looking at question 5, the 20 Instagram users were asked to explain their opinion about photo-editing, focusing on IG travel content. They were asked to mention some negatives and positives of professional photo-editing and they could answer from both the creator's and viewer's point of view.

**Tell me your opinion about photo-editing, focusing on IG travel content. What are some negatives and positives of professional photo-editing?**

Responses:

1. "Photo editing can make the picture unreal, and you see something that is not real."
2. "Positive: you can make photos look more attractive. Negative: Sometimes the edited photos can be way too different compared to the originals."
3. "From the viewer's point of view, it distorts the reality that the viewer will face. So, it will bring disappointment."
4. "They enhance pictures in order to look more attractive into viewers eyes, influencers are paid to travel and create such content, therefore if someone is willing to visit a destination they should not only rely on social media."
5. "I think that travel content shouldn't be over edited, it should stay natural if the shots are done professionally or so that the content is pleasant to the eyes and shows a big picture of the place to travel to."
6. "Positive is that they look nicer when editing but negative is that i prefer to look at something with their real colours"
7. "P: It's a hobby, it's a job, it makes the person doing it feel nice, it's creative. N: It's false!"
8. "A bad side is that most of the time, they are trying to make it look better than it is. Although, a positive thing is that it makes me want to discover a new place"
9. "Vibrant colours are a key in travel photos! Also editing out people in the background. These look more attractive from the viewer's point of view."
10. "It's nice to be able to enhance the beauty of a picture. But they can also be changed to look completely different."
11. "I think editing is good because it lets us make photos look more aesthetic and attractive. The negative part of it is that reality can look less beautiful than the edited photo."
12. "Positive: it looks good. Negative: it's fake."
13. "I love to add my own vibe to the pictures, so photo editing does not usually bother me as a viewer either. I am a very aesthetic person and I choose my travel locations

- based on these places' visuality. Before the trip I want to find some visual content of that place to get inspired. I don't feel that photo editing is fake – vice versa! Usually, the view is a lot more beautiful in real life and when you take a picture it just looks boring. If you want to edit more life and vibe to the picture, go ahead!”
14. “Negatives: Not showing reality, if I'm interested in travelling somewhere I would like to see how it really is. Positive: It's nice to look at pretty photos and get inspired to travel.”
  15. “Well for starters a negative thing about editing is the fact that it gives a fake image to the viewers. A scenery might not look as fascinating as it appeared after editing it. On the other hand, a positive thing about editing is that you can crop off anything on a picture that you don't like.”
  16. “Sometimes it creates an illusion of the place, high expectations. Other times it inspires you to go there yourself.”
  17. “Photo editing is necessary, since without it the pictures would look dull and unappealing. It is a part of a bigger marketing scheme of selling fantasies to people about travel and exotic destinations. Just seeing a normal picture isn't enough, it takes editing to make a scene look exciting (not in all cases, but in many).”
  18. “It must be good to attract followers.”
  19. “Sometimes, it does not correspond to reality. Thus, you have high expectations when you travel to that country.”
  20. “I believe that photo-editing is something that creators benefit from a lot nowadays. It is so easy to take a picture that looks better than the original just by using some tools. This is the positive thing about it. As for its negatives, I think that this has to do with the viewers who might not have a clue how much a picture has been edited. Taking travel content as a focus, a destination can appear way better in Instagram than how it is.”

Question number 6 was to figure out if all the perfect destination pictures and videos in Instagram look the way they look due to photo-editing and photography skills rather than the destinations themselves. The results for this question were:

**Photo-editing/ photography skills are reasons behind “perfect” IG destination content. If you agree, state why. If you disagree, type "X".**

Responses:

1. “X.”
2. “X.”
3. “X.”
4. “For some yes, lack of research and even a different season of travelling can change that.”
5. “In the traveling marketing photography skills are the key to success in my opinion. It is like an art from a professional's perspective. Sometimes photo-editing is not required, when the photography skills are high. Photo-editing is useful when you want to change the content based on your targeted customer segment.”
6. “Yes, because when you edit a photo behind the mindset you try to do it perfectly and nicely instead of real and authentic.”
7. “Of course, when you make something look more appealing, it will attract more attention - more likes - more people.”

8. "I agree, because that is the only thing that they show from travelling, perfect dates, perfect weather, but we don't see bad weather or bad experiences (which can always happen in any situation)."
9. "I do agree because a good photographer can make nearly anything look "aesthetic."
10. "I agree. You can manipulate the content to fit your desired vibe. By saturating images, you can get flowers to pop more or make the sky blue on a grey day."
11. "X."
12. "X."
13. "Yes, definitely! It is a skill to catch every magical element to one picture and share the same feeling via social media what you are feeling in that moment."
14. "Yes, because editing can make any destination look nice."
15. "As I've mentioned above by editing a picture and making it look better you automatically create the "perfect" Instagram post."
16. "X."
17. "Not necessarily always, but they contribute to it."
18. "X."
19. "Agree, photo-editing removes all the imperfections."
20. "I agree with that because someone marketing a destination will want to make it as perfect as possible to get people to visit it. Photo editing and photography skills are indeed great reasons behind perfection in destination content."

Furthermore, question 7 required the respondents to mention travel trends that they know, meaning the most trending destinations to go to currently.

### **Mention a few Travel Trends you are up to date with.**

Responses:

1. "Madame Tussauds museum, Burj Khalifa, Louvre museum, Colosseum."
2. "Rome/ Colosseum, Ibiza / the tower of Ibiza, Zakynthos/ Navagio (ναβηγιο) , Rhodes / the Rhodes old town, Dubai/ Burj Khalifa (the tallest building in the world) London/ Big Ben and London eye."
3. "Cappadocia."
4. "Bali, Dubai, Portofino."
5. "Bali, UAE, Spain, Istanbul, Paris."
6. "Paris, Italy, Switzerland, Bali, Philippines, Maldives,"
7. "I am not up to date with travel trends."
8. "Tulum, Maldives, South Italy, Dubai."
9. "I think Bali has recently been a popular travel destination for its Instagrammable nature and culture as well as Dubai."
10. "I have seen many clips from Dubai lately. I also get recommended a lot of vanlife videos."
11. "Lake Como in Italy, Alps in Switzerland, St. Moritz."
12. "The lake in Amsterdam."
13. "Still dreaming about Bali and Australia, I want to live chill beach lifestyle listening to tropical vibes playlist and not caring my make up too much. Otherwise, I am dreaming about a buzzy New York lifestyle and living like Carrie Bradshaw. Road trip on the USA or South Europe (Italy or Portugal) would be amazing too. I don't have kids but when I do, I already dream about traveling with them! I'm not

excited about Finnish winter with the small kids but think about the same life situation on the tropical environment. Will do that!”

14. “Bali, Maldives, Dubai.”
15. “Any Greek Island/beaches, London/London eye.”
16. “Santorini sunsets/photos with long dresses.”
17. “I’m not really into that many travel trends, I’ve been seeing a few travel videos in TikTok about Greece and Italy lately.”
18. “Italy/Pisa.”
19. “Lapland/northern green lights. Greek islands/beaches, Bali/tropical beaches, Dubai/shopping mall and Dubai marina.”
20. “Los Angeles (butterfly wall), New York (statue of liberty), China Town, London eye, big ben.”

As for question number 8, it was about finding out whether travel trends affect the respondents’ travel decision-making or not and why.

**Travel trends affect my travel decision-making. State if you agree or disagree and why.**

Responses:

1. “Yes, they do because people are choosing their next trip based on what they have seen on social media daily and based on potential likes.”
2. “Sometimes they can affect. But personally, I don’t choose my travel destinations by travel trends. I like to search for info from google about different places.”
3. “I disagree because I don’t follow travel trends.”
4. “No, I disagree since travel trends are not important to me.”
5. “Yes. The idea of traveling somewhere itself usually comes from viewing some content on Instagram.”
6. “Yes, because when I see them, I want to go so badly.”
7. “They don’t really affect my decision-making.”
8. “I agree, but I think the place you live in too, for instance, my hometown is very hot and there is a coast. I live now in Helsinki, and since I have experienced the cold weather plus looking to Instagram travel pictures, it just makes me want to go to tropical places like Maldives.”
9. “I do agree because there are places that I didn’t even know existed or didn’t know their potential before seeing them in Instagram (or TikTok).”
10. “Agreed. What we see affects us unconsciously.”
11. “Agree. When I see plenty of pictures of some amazing place, I really want to see it myself.”
12. “I disagree since I don’t follow travel trends.”
13. “Yes, but of course I have my own interests already. I have always enjoyed traveling to the warm countries and culture there feels like home to me. Even here has been huge trends about traveling to Norway, camping, snowboarding in Lapland, techno partying in Berlin, adventuring in Korea etc. these trends haven’t inspired me to book a trip or search more. I know what light my fire and I want to catch that feeling again and again from the new beachy places.”
14. “Yes, because if many people are traveling to a location, I assume it’s a good vacation spot.”

15. "Not really, I'd rather say sceneries and mostly beaches affect my travel destinations."
16. "I personally don't like super touristic places and too many people. I mostly prefer to check out new places and explore different parts of a place I visit. I prefer authentic places."
17. "Yes, I think probably the content I see influences where I want to go. Mainly I get influenced by my friends and family and their recommendations as well as my own previous experience with travelling."
18. "No. Because I want to travel where I want not based on travel trends."
19. "Yes, because when you check other people's videos and pictures and compare them, you can decide which country you want to travel to the most."
20. "I believe that travel trends affect the whole world since the more people talk about a place or post about a place so amazing, the more want to go there. I can say this affects me too since I also want to go and see the location I mentioned earlier. Those are destinations that are strongly stuck in my mind, and I really want to visit them and take pictures."

Moving on to question 9, it was desired to find out which Instagram influencers the respondents follow and why.

**List a few IG Influencers that you follow if there are any and explain why you follow them.**

Responses:

1. "Kim Kardashian, Justin Bieber, Gigi Hadid, Kylie Jenner, Wiz Khalifa, Kendall Jenner. I follow all the members of the Kardashian family because they post a lot of content and in my free time, I like to explore the expensive life they have with cars, brands etc."
2. "I don't follow influencers."
3. "There aren't any."
4. "Therealeve -Oscar and Emmy winning makeup artist. Travels a lot for Hollywood film shoots."
5. "Well, if we talk about traveling, there are few influencers that I follow because they make fancy content in different places they travel. And it's pleasant for the eyes and useful in a way that you get to know and see something new about other places and your potential travel destinations."
6. "Reo Palmer. She lives in Bali, and I am inspired by nature, the things she is doing and her life. Jeanne Zizi, Margot de Kroon for her ethical fashion posts."
7. "@dobrosilaurawerk @theabstractgirl @xrisa\_lykou @joanaguerratadeu @korkaravokiri .the influencers I follow are more focused on social issues. Traveling tips are not their 'specialty', but when they do travel somewhere, they know how to present it well."
8. "Alan x El Mundo, Luisito Comunica, Lethal crisis, Lost LeBlanc."
9. "@anniesbucketlist, @wearethetravelgirls, @bloggerstravellovers, @apretty-coolhoteltour, @anyuta\_rai, @pubityearth, @earth, @jovi\_travel."
10. "Ribecka, a vanlife content creator from Sweden. It's fun to see how many possibilities the lifestyle gives you."
11. "I don't."
12. "I only follow family and friends on IG."

13. “@kenzas (traveling with her family in the beautiful places) @hilvees & @eljackson (beautiful couple and breath-taking views, such an inspiration!) @dorapalmroos (before covid and the baby she traveled a lot with her boyfriend and they have been a goal couple for me!) + I’m very interested in digital nomad lifestyle so searching these kinds of accounts from IG and other platforms.”
14. “Kylie Jenner because I’ve been keeping up with her since I was young, and I like her outfits and makeup.”
15. “Molly Mae/sense of style, Romee Strid/model and great style.”
16. “Kenza”
17. “I don’t.”
18. “I don’t.”
19. “Alexandra Pereira.”
20. “Tammy Hembrow is an influencer I follow because she does fitness. Other than fitness, she travels a lot to tropical places that really interest me. Another influencer I follow is Emma chamberlain who is a youtuber I’ve watched since I was a kid, and she travels to places as well that I like to watch since it is fun to see this person share her experiences in places.”

Question 10 aimed to find out if these Instagram influencers’ travel opinions and suggestions are followed, trusted and valued.

**Do you value Influencers’ travel opinions and suggestions? Do you feel like trusting their recommendations? Why?**

Responses:

1. “Some influencers can be creative and informative you learn about latest news and trends in the market but on the other hand many teenagers and young people are trying to look and behave as they do, and they give them much value as they deserve.”
2. “I trust their recommendations, but I don’t get affected because of some posts on Instagram. I prefer to search info from google or books for my next destination.”
3. “No, I don’t because I believe that traveling is based on preferences, and they all are subjective.”
4. “Not really. A paid content doesn't necessarily mean valued content. I always check reviews on google for example a restaurant, and the ratings of it.”
5. “Not always. I trust the ones that I have been following for ages and they became trustful for me, and ones that film their traveling in a daily life mode using Instagram stories. When it looks natural and like everything is not 100% perfect.”
6. “It depends.”
7. “No, where I travel is based on other factors.”
8. “Yes, I do value their opinion, because most of the time even when they have paid for promotions, they try to give their true opinions. Furthermore, they not only review quality/price (flights and hotels) but also include content from the food, culture, and costs of living like one of the locals, they give you a story behind their pictures or blogs.”
9. I do trust their opinions mainly because they also show footage of it, like a video that shows clearly what they are talking about. I trust what I see.
10. I would not trust any influencer since they get paid to advertise.

11. Not always because I understand that influencers advertise a lot, they live by advertising
12. "No since I don't follow any."
13. "I am picky about who I follow and when I do, I feel that I can trust their suggestions and they are as real as they can be. I try to find people who have the same vibe and interest as I do and then listen to their suggestions, but usually I always google these places as well and want to read, not just to trust one random influencer."
14. "No, because they usually go to expensive hotels and are doing expensive activities that "normal" people will not have access to."
15. "I do value an influencer's opinion but to a certain point. Influencers usually hang out in expensive places that not all can afford."
16. "Influencers' opinions don't affect me at all."
17. "They're believable if they justify their suggestions well enough and give some good insight. A good insight for me would be e. g. telling people about some not so well-known travel destinations and interesting sights and places in those destinations. If they're very comprehensive, I think they're also convincing."
18. "No."
19. "I don't trust their recommendations because it might be that someone is endorsing them. Mostly, I check their content: videos and pictures."
20. "I do value influencers travel opinions because they share content and talk in detail to where they go. I trust the ones I follow since I feel like I know them, otherwise I wouldn't listen to just anyone."

As for question 11, a very open question with a wide range of possible answers, the respondents had to freely mention anything that catches their attention in the focused platform. Anything that makes them stop scrolling through their feed.

### **What catches your attention or what makes you stop scrolling in Instagram?**

Responses:

1. "Music videos reels, nice pictures, communication with friends, gossiping."
2. "Places that I have never seen before and places that look unreal."
3. "Food and some feedback from my friends about traveling."
4. "Videos are the most effective these days, in my opinion."
5. "Matching colours and warm posts attract me, as well as a like short travel and fashion reels. Poorly filmed and low-quality posts make me stop scrolling the feed."
6. "When I spend a lot of time then i am like okay get back to your own reality and live your life instead on social media and on someone else's life."
7. "Nice colours, food, the water element."
8. "Many things that I must do in my day, or I just get bored."
9. "Vibrant colours!!! That catches my attention most often. Also, if it is my aesthetic, it catches my attention and background music too!"
10. "Cool locations catch my attention."
11. "Food, beautiful views, nature, architecture."
12. "Images."
13. "Beautiful view, good looking food, instagrammable place, good looking outfit, happy couple/family, feeling like" I want this!!"

14. "Food, makeup and fashion."
15. "Beautiful scenery, the sea, colorful restaurants, flowers."
16. "A new place, videos."
17. I don't really use Insta that much, but probably some cool videos and aesthetics.
18. "I don't know what exactly catches my interest."
19. "Something that I find interesting might be the scenery, clothing, funny video or even a quote."
20. "Good music, puppies, something extreme or weird, when i see someone i know."

Question 12 was a different type of question. The respondents had to look at pictures of a destination and write what thoughts went through to their minds when looking at the content.

**Here are a few pictures of Madrid - Spain (posted by @secretosdemadrid). What goes through your mind when you look at these?**

Responses:

1. "All pictures look amazing, and I have a picture of how Spain looks like as I never had the opportunity to travel to Spain."
2. "You can see clearly the city by the night and some of their local food."
3. "Cozy, warm, relaxed, elegant."
4. "It captures somewhat the city center and the market."
5. "Warm, nice spot to travel, street shopping, summer, tasty and cheap food."
6. "Beautiful pictures and country."
7. "I want to goooo."
8. "That Madrid is both very classic and modern."
9. "First pic didn't look like a travel pic but was pretty. Others looked like they were from google images. Needs editing."
10. "I want pizza."
11. "Madrid looks cozy and friendly. Gives a feeling of warmth. It is also quite a modern city."
12. "Beautiful Instagram pictures & I'm hungry."
13. "Looks beautiful and I have heard a lot of good things about Madrid. The food picture is very aesthetic, and the streets look cute. I prefer personal style content; I want to see a vibe! More urban style, not like a postcard. So that's why these pictures don't give me a feeling" omg I want to go there!"
14. "I think it looks like a big city where I will be walking a lot. I like the city lights and the old architecture. The food picture makes me interested in restaurants there."
15. "If I was in Madrid, I'd take the same pictures and post them on my Instagram account."
16. "Instagrammable, old city, clear content, warm"
17. "They don't really tell much to me. Some of them seem even a bit boring (like the pic of pizza - pizza can be eaten anywhere, isn't specific or relevant to Madrid)."
18. "The lights are nice."
19. "Good food, nice architecture and culture."
20. "That I want to eat that pizza and I want to visit those places. I am also amazed with how pretty the city looks in the night when it's full of lights. I would take so many pictures of this city."

Question 13 is similar to number 12. The respondents in this case had to look at content of two different destinations clarifying which city's content is more appealing. They also had to choose between the two destinations and state which they would prefer to visit and why.

**Here are pictures of Amsterdam - Netherlands (posted by @amsterdam). Here are pictures of Bath - England (posted by @helloworld). Which destination would you choose to visit and why? Which city's pictures were more appealing and why?**

Responses:

1. "The pictures of England were more appealing for me personally and as I've been in England, I prefer Holland as a destination but these pictures that are fully edited, they are more appealing in my eyes."
2. "I would choose the second (England) because I have already been to Amsterdam. Amsterdam is a famous destination, so I have already seen this kind of content. But usually if we talk about destinations in England the furry city that comes to our mind is London, so I am more interested in the second option because I haven't heard much about this city in England."
3. "Amsterdam because of the colours and the vibe of pictures."
4. "I would visit Netherlands for its canals and traditional feel."
5. "I would choose the first destination. Pictures there look more natural, some of them are detailed, which is good. Pictures are warm and light and give summer vibes. You can see both everyday life like food and streets, as well as traveling side of the life, like city sights and sightseeing."
6. "Netherlands because the picture they chose in my opinion and in what i like were better than England also because I like the Netherlands more."
7. "I'm not a UK (as a travel destination) fan, so maybe I'm biased, but the Amsterdam pictures attract me more. It's the general cuteness that makes me prefer those pictures; I think. (Also, maybe the flowers)."
8. "Netherlands, because the back story of Amsterdam (influencers talk about this too, parties, modern places, etc.) the most appealing for me was Madrid, as I said classy and modern, it could be quite fun."
9. "I liked Amsterdam's images more because I liked the way they were edited and that it showed the town whereas bath showed more like pictures of details instead of the place itself. Also, the pictures were hazy."
10. "Amsterdam looks most appealing to me. But i have also heard recommendations from people and i already would like to travel there."
11. "I would go to Amsterdam because the houses in it look like gingerbread houses. The photo of trees is very attractive, I would like to take a walk in that forest."
12. "Amsterdam, the colours, the warm & in general Amsterdam is a beautiful & inviting plu."
13. "Amsterdam! Bath's pictures look boring, and the vibe is missing, but Amsterdam is catchier (maybe because of the canals and cute buildings). Bath doesn't make any feelings in me, looks so boring."
14. "Amsterdam because the houses look very cute and I would be interested in taking a boat ride in the canal and I like the lights."
15. "Amsterdam for sure. Love all the colours the city's architecture."
16. "Madrid. Because of the food picture and the old architecture."

17. "Amsterdam just based on the pics. It appeals to me more personally, I like the European style small buildings and the picture of the trees is cool too, since I like nature. Also, there is a picture of the canal with artwork hovering on top, which seems cool."
18. "All but I like Amsterdam because the lighting effect is better."
19. "Based on the pictures Bath, it looks more sophisticated, clean and has a Kiko store (make-up)! However, since I have friends who travelled in all these three countries and the best feedback received was for Madrid, I would most possibly travel to Madrid!"
20. "I would say I want to visit Amsterdam since I've heard from many people that it is beautiful. Also, the pictures are appealing in this case since there are so many colours and it looks more modern than Bath."

Last but not least, question number 14 was for the respondents to choose between types of content, according to what they find engaging. They were able to choose as many as they wanted and add something different.

### In your opinion, what are the most engaging types of content in Instagram?

Responses:

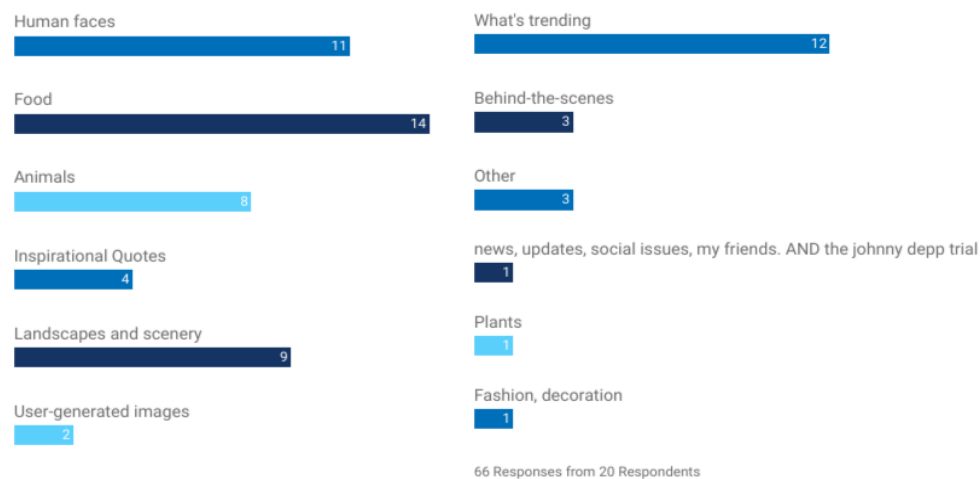


Figure 8. Most engaging types of content responses

Question number 15 was a blank text box for the respondents to mention anything else they find interesting and useful for the research.

### Lastly, mention anything you want on the subject that you find worthy for this research.

Responses:

1. "It was very interesting seeing the pictures from England how beautiful and amusing they were after being edited."
2. "I would suggest people search for more info about travel destinations. A large percentage of people."
3. "The trend of "reality" in traveling content can be studied in more detail."

4. *“Social media became a way for some people to express than businesses to deceive, people should be more aware that not everything looks the same in reality.”*
5. *“I feel like IG posts give us the initial idea of traveling and the potential destination.”*
6. *“Firstly, it was interesting to see myself how i see social media and to be aware of how many hours and why I am spending it on IG.”*
7. *“Smart specific and unique topic. loooooove it.”*
8. *“Selling a story behind the pictures/videos in influencers travelling reviews*
9. *“Idk if those are really the most” engaging” pics if that means that people react and comment on them but those above are at least what catches my attention.*
10. *“I look up locations on social media if i have already been recommended the place and I want to see more of it.”*
11. *“Good luck!”*
12. *“-.”*
13. *“I believe that in the future the power or one still picture will die and TikTok kind of videos are for the win. You must share more personal content and a too general post will not engage anyone anymore.”*
14. *“Are these Instagram locations better or worse than people expect.”*
15. *“-.”*
16. *I think influencers should stop editing pictures of themselves and making them look “perfect”.*
17. *“I don’t have additional insight. Thanks!”*
18. *“-.”*
19. *“In general, I don't check Instagram for traveling purposes. Mostly, I check TikTok videos from people who have already travelled to this country.”*
20. *“Trends are so important.”*

## **4.2 Final Results**

Taking the questions’ responses one by one on their own leads us to an interesting result for each question. Beginning with number **1**, it is visible that youngsters these days are most likely to spend 1 to 5 hours in social media per day.

Number **2** shows how most people in their twenties tend to spend 1 to 3 hours in Instagram itself per day.

Number **3** has resulted to the fact that more than 50% of the respondents sometimes check IG content before travelling to a certain destination.

Moving on to number **4**, the target group is mostly attracted to colours, scenery and quality when looking at IG travel content. These three things seem to be very important when thinking about the engagement of Instagram posts.

Number **5** results show how professional photo editing seems to be very known with the target group and they are aware how it can create a fake perfect image of a place. However, it is understandable that it catches more attention and audience while it also makes feeds look appealing and it is a fun thing to spend time on.

Looking at number **6**, more than 80% of the respondents similarly explained how photography and photo-editing skills play a huge role when it comes to “perfect” IG destination content.

Number **7** has provided the research food for thought when it comes to commonly known travel trends such as; Bali, Greek Islands and Dubai were the most common as answers to what travel trends the respondents were up to date with.

Continuing with number **8** with quite a debate on whether travel trends affect the target group's travel decision-making leaving us with two different opinions agreeing or disagreeing.

Number **9** was for the respondents to mention Instagram influencers that they follow showing how each person follows different influencers for different reasons rather than sticking to one or two commons.

Followed by number **10** where it is seen that influencers' travel opinions and suggesting are not that high valued. Of course, they are trustworthy but the target group seems to stick with their own research and beliefs rather than just following a famous person's suggestion.

Looking at number **11**, a very interesting finding on what makes the target group stop scrolling in Instagram as in what catches their interest and makes them give attention to a post. Videos are much more eye-catching than still pictures and when there is good background music, people are more likely to stay and watch the whole video.

In number **12**, the respondents look at beautiful pictures of Madrid and mentioned what went through their mind. Most of them thought that they want go there, eat the food presented and admire the city's coziness that is visible through the content.

Number **13** has proved that content quality and photography skills really play a role in what is attractive to a viewer since most of the respondents chose to go to the destination that was the best presented in the example content given in the question.

Reaching number **14** where the respondents had to vote on what are the most engaging types of content in Instagram. 21% voted food, another 18% voted for what's trending, another 17% voted for human faces, a 14% voted for landscapes and scenery and a 12% voted for animals while the rest of the options were only chosen by under 6% of the respondents.

Last but not least, number **15** gave the respondents the freedom to mention anything interesting and useful for the research. Selling a story behind pictures was an amazing insight a responded gave as well as another saying that TikTok is the winning platform due to its engaging skills. Many respondents mentioned how the topic was something they enjoyed answering about.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the above gathered data is discussed and analyzed. The following chapter identifies and discusses what has been discovered and how these findings relate to one another and what type of connections have been created.

To start with, the discussion begins with connecting different parts of the study using comparisons and analyzing relationships. The most important relationship discussed in this chapter is the results with the previous studies. Furthermore, the results are being analyzed with the theories and models chosen in this study as main tools of analysis. Lastly, the chosen method will be discussed focusing on whether it worked in practice as expected.

## 5.1 Discussion of results – Comparisons & Relationships

After carefully studying the results of the research, comparisons were made and have led to numerous similarities in addition to some differences between the survey responses. After gathering both, relationships were discovered where one fact affected another.

Looking at the similarities, most of the respondents spend the same amount of time in social media in general as well as in Instagram itself while most of them also like to check Instagram content of a destination before travelling. When looking at IG travel content, people seem to be mostly attracted by good quality content containing scenery and colours.

As for photo-editing opinions, most of the respondents mentioned how nice it is to enhance pictures and videos to make them appear more attractive. On the other hand, they mention that this action can create a false image of a destination to a person or higher expectations that can probably be left unmet. Many of the respondents also agree that photo editing and photography skills play a huge role in how a destination appears.

The most common travel trends mentioned by the respondents were; London, Bali, Dubai and Greek Islands. Videos with food, vibrant colours and pretty locations are the most common types of content that makes the target group stop scrolling on the platform.

Looking at the part of the survey where the respondents had to choose between destinations, it is impressive how almost all of them chose a destination stating a reason according to their interests and experience rather than falling for the manipulation of trends etc. However, it is interesting how the most popular answer on what is the most engaging type of content in IG was “What’s Trending”.

As for visible differences between responses, there was a type of “debate” on whether travel trends affect each one’s travel decision-making. This seems to be according to a person’s personality and thinking. Some said they do get affected by travel trends since they are an ongoing thing and seeing people loving the same place makes another want to experience that as well. Meanwhile, other respondents stated that they will not get affected by trends since they have their own interests that they focus on. As for IG influencers, some respondents follow celebrities to get updated about their lives while others like to follow influencers that post any content consistently which shows how it is not a very big thing for the target group to get travel guidance by influencers.

Taking both similarities and differences into account, relationships are created mostly between the beliefs and mindsets of the respondents. It is visible how most of the respondents have a wide view of the topic and think openly, this relates to how most of the replies show how the respondents are aware of numerous types of manipulation that is going on online and know how to correctly view and criticize things for themselves. Additionally, other respondents may be more the types of “show-offs” where they really try to answer something different and unexpected which can end up looking fake. The results really relate to people’s personalities and reactions. Therefore, human psychology knowledge is a big plus in social media management and personalized content creation.

## **5.2 Results in relation to previous studies**

Taking the previous studies used in this research in relation to the results, there are quite some particulars to discuss together with changes and how development is affected.

Looking at the first study of 2017, it examined if social media influences a traveler's decision to visit tourist destinations. As mentioned earlier on this paper, this study concluded that social media indeed influences one's travel decision-making and it mostly affects the younger generation since they spend the most time in online platforms. In relation to the results of the current study, the two aspects agree on the conclusions. It has been proved that people in their twenties spend a lot of time online and they get affected by social media in many different ways.

Taking this research in relation to the second study from 2019 discussed in the theoretical framework, a very important takeaway is the following. The Instagram content study found out that over 75% of company posts are using images instead of videos while the current study figured that videos are catchier and user-dragging than images, something to really think about.

Moving on to the third study used earlier from 2021, it was discovered that Instagram influencers' travel content and promotions affect the travel decision-making of youngsters due to the trust that they have towards them. However, the current study gathered both sides of this argument while one was overweighing the other. Almost all the respondents stated in their own words how Instagram influencers do not play such a huge role in their travel decision-making. These influencers are usually followed for many other reasons while some may find it interesting to hear opinions of destinations but without necessarily meaning that their decision will be based on the influencers' insights.

Lastly, study number four from 2017 measuring the impact of user-generated content in Instagram, concluded to very similar results as the current. Instagram content has the power to change a viewer's perception of a location. Since destinations collaborate with influencers that present them the best possible way, it is easy for the viewer to casually create a perfect image in their imagination. Similarly, the current study concluded that photography skills and photo editing tools are a big thing for destination content and succeed in dragging viewers' attention and creating the best possible image of a location in order to affect the users' travel decision-making in their favor.

## **5.3 Results analyzed with theories and models**

The theories and models discussed earlier in this study are great tools to analyze the results from another important point of view. These tools help in uncovering and realizing the significance of the results.

Taking the Cultivation Theory in relation to the results, it suggests that long-term exposure to media forms how the users of media perceive the world. The results of this study have proved that this theory applies perfectly. The respondents have clearly stated

that social media and Instagram travel content specifically affect how one imagines a destination and how they believe it looks like in person.

Moving on to the Source Credibility Theory, it suggests that people are more likely to trust individuals who are seen as credible. Comparing the theory to this study, it was examined if influencers' and famous people's opinions impact the travel decision-making of youngsters. The results show how the target group turned out to be more independent when it comes to deciding on their next trip. They are not necessarily following IG influencers' destination suggestions and opinions; it is more about looking at their interesting destination content but at the same time have an opinion of their own and keep in mind that they should follow their own interests.

The Selective Exposure Theory suggests that people choose to bring focus on information in their environment that fits with and confirms their present attitudes. This was examined by giving the respondents the task to choose between two destinations while looking at Instagram content of each location. They were given two of these tasks and in each one, one of the two destinations was a travel trend / famous destination everyone talks about. It turned out that the respondents actually chose with their true interest without considering how one is a well-talked about and presented destination. It is very interesting to view how once more, the target group turned out to be more independent on their decisions than expected.

## **5.4 Discussion of method**

The method of this study was Surveys. The chosen method indeed worked in practice as expected. Everything went according to the plan, it was simple to collect participants of the chosen target group and the survey was smoothly created according to the research questions of this study. This method was correctly chosen since there have not been any difficulties and no other method would have ended up as simply as the survey. It has been very comfortable to collect and analyze responses and it was a great way to get the participants to answer as frankly as possible since it was anonymous and it had no time limit.

The study's validity and reliability of the study turned as desired. The research truly measured what was intended to and the research results are very truthful. The validity and reliability were ensured from the very beginning of this study by strictly focusing the survey on the target group in order to get the most accurate answers possible. As mentioned earlier, the survey was completely anonymous to ensure the honesty and comfort of each respondent in order to receive the most personalized responses.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

By gathering the answers to the research aim and questions, conclusions are made. The aim of this study was to achieve a clear view of what type of content catches the interest

of young Instagram users which this study has successfully found out. Taking the aim in connection with one of the research questions “What are the characteristics of the content that youngsters find travel-wise inspiring?”, both are answered with the following conclusion. According to the results, young Instagram users seem to be dragged into videos more than pictures and especially when the content is based on food, vibrant colours and pretty locations. It is also important that the content is as real as possible since the new generation is currently very aware of photo enchantments and editing that can easily lead to a fake presentation of a location, a fact which youngsters nowadays are conscious about.

Taking the research questions of this study one by one, “Is it about the high-quality photography/editing skills that make a destination look so appealing?” This definitely turned out to be a true statement. All respondents believe that high quality photography and editing skills are both factors that make travel content very appealing.

Are travel trends manipulative and affect the focus group’s decision-making? According to the results, it is true that travel trends can be manipulative in the perspective that many destinations are famous for some reasons, and this can create the fake need of one to visit. However, it is impressive how most of the target group (the new generation), are aware of this fact and do not let themselves fall into it. Most of the respondents mentioned how they are only focused on their actual personal interests and choose to visit destinations that they truly dream of experiencing for their own reasons.

Are influencers’ destination suggestions and opinions important to youngsters? Similarly, to the previous research question, young Instagram users are aware of online manipulation and choose who to trust. In the meantime, even if influencers’ opinions are considered, most of the respondents are still mostly focused on their own beliefs, interests and research.

## **6.1 Limitations of the study**

This research presents some limitations. This thesis does not cover information on how social media connects with depression, anxiety or wellness since the focus has not been psychology behind social media. Neither does this study cover the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen platform. This study has not identified Instagram’s functions or effects but simply concentrated on the research’s subject and aim.

## **6.2 Suggestions for further studies**

Lastly, for further studies, it is suggested to keep the following in mind. As made clear, the new generation is very aware of online manipulation and keeping their own beliefs and interests in focus. This is something important to be kept in mind when doing research on this topic with the specific target group.

In addition, it would be good to focus on getting more and more information out of the respondents since it turned out that the more text one gave on each question, the more this

study got to collect and analyze which has been very beneficial for the research. To gather it in a more complex way or in a simpler way always depends on the researcher and which research method is best for them.

Finally, a suggestion that would have been great to keep in mind before starting this study and for anyone who is planning to research on the topic is to give more visual examples to the group that is being targeted. By giving people content to see, gives the researchers first reaction (depending on the research method), valuable information and honesty.

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