



Young adults' travel habits in Greece and how they are affected by social media

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Abstract

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<p>Social media has become an integral part of our daily lives for all people, and even more so for young adults. Beyond entertainment, they also influence users in many sectors such as tourism. They have evolved into an important tool for organizing trips and promoting travel trends, since their influence on the travel community is enormous. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, etc. constantly expose travel-related content that is capable of shaping preferences, decisions and, more generally, the experience before and after a trip.</p> <p>The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the way in which social media influences the decisions of young adults in Greece during the planning of a trip. The study focuses on which platforms have the greatest impact on this topic, the way in which they influence travelers, but also on what expectations are created.</p> <p>The theoretical background of this thesis consists of the role of social media in influencing travelers through influencers and content creators, and their role as a source of travel information. The research was conducted using a quantitative research method, a questionnaire survey.</p> <p>The findings of the study show that social media has a major impact on the entire travel process. The increased interest in certain destinations that have been highly featured on social media is one of the main findings. In contrast, the influence of influencers on the travel community is limited, as young adults trust content that seems authentic more than promotional content.</p> <p>This thesis was written in April 2026.</p>
<p>Key words Social media, decision-making, travel behavior, influence, experience, travel habits</p>

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1 Introduction

In recent years, social media has become an essential part of everyday life, especially among young adults. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are increasingly used not only for communication and entertainment but also as tools for gathering information and inspiration. One area that has been dramatically affected by the increase in social media usage is travel planning, as social media content often shapes how a destination is presented and how a traveler makes their travel decisions.

The influence of social media can also be observed through personal experience. When planning a trip, some destinations may not be initially seem attractive because you may not know much about the city's attractions or because many times some destinations are overly advertised. However, the continuous, repeated display of a destination on social media through beautiful content automatically shifts the traveler's mindset. This content may include short videos, reels, or travel-related posts. Destinations that were once rejected may eventually become desirable simply because of the way they are presented and promoted online. This observation was the beginning of inspiration for the topic of this Thesis and reflects a broader pattern of behavior among young adults in Greece, where we will focus, as well as among people all over the world.

It is widely known that younger generations are increasingly relying on social media in their decision-making process, and this clearly influences their travel choices. Examining the relationship between social media and travel decision-making in a country like Greece allows for more targeted and meaningful insights, as tourism plays a significant role in the lives of its people, serving both economic and cultural purposes.

1.1 Background of the study

The travel behavior of young adults has changed significantly in recent years, as social media has become an essential tool for our daily lives. Compared to previous generations, younger travelers tend to prioritize experiences and visual appeal when choosing destinations and activities, rather than the city's historical significance, which was more common in the past. At the same time, social media has transformed the way travel information is produced and displayed. They are no longer based exclusively, as they used to be, on traditional sources such as travel agencies or travel guides, but are mainly influenced by content created by influencers, internet users, or trends based on algorithms.

Social networking platforms provide constant exposure to travel-related content, often presenting highly curated representations of destinations that make them appear ideal based on what is displayed. This constant exposure can shape expectations, influence preferences, and affect the overall travel planning process. While previous research has shown that the growing role of social media in tourism exists, there is still limited empirical evidence focusing on how young adults in Greece perceive and are influenced by this content when it comes to making travel decisions. Given the importance of tourism in Greece and the high level of social media use by young adults, there is a clear need to investigate the way in which these two elements interact. Understanding these dynamics can offer valuable insights to tourism and marketing professionals, as well as to those who communicate with young people through social media and want to have a greater and more effective impact on the younger audience.

1.2 Aim of the Thesis and research questions

This thesis examines how social media influences the travel habits and decision-making of young adults aged 18-35 in Greece. The study focuses on identifying influential platforms, content, and travel patterns that can emerge through their exposure to social media.

To achieve this aim, the following research questions are addressed:

Main research question:

- How does social media influence the travel habits and travel-related decisions of young adults (18-35) in Greece?

Sub-questions:

1. Which social media platforms have the most significant influence on shaping young adults' travel choices?
2. What types of social media content (e.g., influencers, advertisements, travel stories) are perceived as most influential?
3. How does social media contribute to the creation of new travel patterns or styles, such as luxury travel, budget travel, road trips, or alternative travel experiences?

1.3 Scope and focus of the study

As we have already mentioned, this thesis focuses on young adults aged 18-35 living in Greece and examines their travel habits in relation to social media. The research focuses on the influence of online platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, which have the greatest resonance and use among young people, during the process of planning a trip.

The scope of the study is limited to a quantitative approach using an online survey with the aim of identifying general patterns and trends, and to capture the extent of the impact on young travelers, without focusing on in-depth individual experiences. The research does not seek to measure long-term changes in travelers' behavior but to investigate the perceived influence of social media on the decision-making and planning process of a trip.

The structure of the thesis reflects this focus. Following the introduction, the theoretical framework presents key concepts related to consumer behavior, social media influence, and travel decision-making. This is followed by the research methodology, findings, analysis, and discussion, and finally, conclusions and recommendations.

2 Social Media Influence on Travel Decisions

2.1 Travel and consumer decision-making in tourism

The decision-making process of tourist behaviour has typically been characterized as a multi-stage process including an information search, evaluation of alternatives, intention to purchase and book, in situ experience and post-trip evaluation. Tourism services, unlike many other consumer products, lack a tangible nature, cannot be tried before use and most often have a high level of risk, be it financial, social, psychological and so on. This means that travelers put a lot of effort into obtaining information and minimizing uncertainty before making a final decision (Horner and Swarbrooke, 2016). In this sense, travel choices are no longer rational; there are emotions, expectations, past experiences, and social pressure also play an important part in making travel decisions.

In tourism, traditional models of consumer behaviour follow a fairly linear sequence, beginning with need recognition and concluding with post-consumption evaluation. Nonetheless, literature is suggesting that tourist decision making happens not to be as straightforward. Travel behaviour is said to be influenced by many internal and external factors such as motivations, cultural background, social environment, development of technology among others, in addition, these factors are said to interact, at times in a non-linear way (Cohen, et al. 2014). The pertinence of this topic is in contemporary tourism, with consumers being constantly exposed to travelling stimuli through digital media even without any intention to travel.

Social media is deeply involved at every stage of the tourist decision-making process. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube don't just influence travelers in the information search stage. Rather, they stimulate inspiration and desire right from the outset. According to Hudson and Thal (2013), social media can not only help build interest in tourism destinations but also support the further stages of evaluation and confirmation of the decision. According to many users, exposure to attractive visual content leads them to note a need for travel, despite the contrary logic. In other words, tourists want to travel because they have seen the place time and again on social media, and not because they had originally planned a trip.

During the information search and evaluation stage, social media can access an extensive range of user-generated content (photos, videos, reviews, personal travel stories, etc.). This content gives experiential clues that allow a traveller to picture themselves in a destination and compare alternatives based on the perceived atmosphere, activities and lifestyle fit. As stated by Leung et al. (2013), tourists are no longer passive consumers of information. Social media has turned them into active agents who search and create information. The participatory nature of the process reinforces the

social character of decision-making. Indeed, travelers are likely influenced as much by others, fellow travelers, influencers, and communities as by destination information.

The evaluation of alternatives is shaped by the social validation mechanisms present on social media. The choice of one destination or tourist experience over others is influenced by the popularity of the content shared online. Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) state that positive social signals improve the attractiveness and credibility of a destination. Travelers are probably influenced by the destination they see often on their feed or someone they look up to, admire, or relate to.

After the event of booking, social media plays an important role through the course of travel experience and after the trip. Tourists adopt platforms to document and post their experiences in real-time, thereby validating decision-making in a circular fashion. The material created or shared post-trip aids a potential traveller to form views and/or undertake a trip while at the same time influencing a traveller's own assessment of the trip in question by way of feedback, social interaction, among others (Hudson and Thal 2013). This shows that people view tourist decision-making as not a closed cycle but rather an open cycle, whereby consumption and communication are entangled with each other.

From a critical perspective, a number of the existing decision-making models do not fully capture this cyclicity and discontinuity. The assumption that travelers search for information in a rational manner is challenged by the impact of algorithms, personalized feeds, and social endorsement. In fact, frequent exposure to curated content interrupts, reshapes, and reorients decision-making efforts. This indicates the need to go beyond linear models and move towards more flexible frameworks that consider the role of inspiration, social influence, and digital mediation.

2.2 Social media as a source of travel information

Use of social media as a source of travel information has increased considerably, particularly among the younger generation. The information source's popularity is based on its speed, ability to reach, quantity of information, and diversity of formats. As mobile devices enable travelers to view and access information in images, videos, long vlogs, reviews and stories, they are able to access high volumes of travel-related information in close to real-time, and often in real-time. As it is always available, it is an appealing option as compared to a travel agency or guidebooks (Leung et al., 2013).

A primary reason why travelers utilize social media is the perceived trustworthiness of user-generated content. Travel destination marketing materials are considered too promotional, but content created by other travelers is considered more authentic than official destination marketing material.

According to Munar and Jacobsen (2014), people share on social media their travel experiences in order to express identity and gain social recognition, as well as to help others. The article adds to the perception that people share content deemed to be motivated by real-life experiences and not commercial interest. This increased sincerity causes social media to be deemed a more persuasive source of information.

Travel decisions are influenced by electronic word-of-mouth or eWOM, made up of online reviews and recommendations, which lessen uncertainty. According to a study, travelers are continually using social media platforms and travel websites to gain insights regarding the quality of their accommodation, safety of the destination as well as an overall experience. Sparks and Browning (2011) found that the presence of online reviews affects the booking intentions and trust of the traveler in the case whereby the traveler has a lack of experience and confidence in the destination. According to Puleri and McLeay (2014), the use of information from online reviews depends upon the utility, credibility and relevance of information. Social media has a greater role in pre-trip information search. According to Ho et al. (2016), an accessible device like a smartphone allows the traveler to search, compare and evaluate the travel information any time anywhere. Social media's capacity for 'any-time, anywhere' use is a major pillar of spontaneity and on-the-go decisions. They can easily access social media and keep reaching out to them during the planning phase.

The use of social media for travel information may be increasing but this does create some issues. When information overload or conflicting views are present, users are more likely to face confusion owing to eWOM. As noted by Abubakar and Ilkan (2016), not every information that can be found online will create destination trust as some reviews will be seen as manufactured. This also furthers the blurring of a line between genuine experiences and marketing communication when it is not clearly disclosed that the influencer's post is sponsored. Without proper disclosure of sponsorship or the purpose of the communication, credibility could be severely impaired (Abubakar et al. 2017).

Selective representation is another major issue. The content shared on social media displays beautiful moments and unrealised experiences, thus generating ideals amongst its audience. People experience more attractive content for tourist uses and forget that prices, crowds, and environmental impact exist and matter. The algorithms also penalize content that generates engagement, suggesting users' feeds are based on logic rather than information. As a result, it draws attention to the fact that what is advertised on social media is not neutral by any means. In fact, it is a result of the technological system and the creator (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014).

2.3 Role of social media platforms in destination choice

Social media platforms have become something more than mere channels for the distribution of information. They are complex digital environments that shape the choice of destination. Social networks and platforms choose what content to show users through algorithms and recommendation systems. This informs users as to what destinations are popular, desirable or trending. According to Leung et al. (2021), platform architecture is central to the consumption of any tourism-related information, as personalised feeds ensure exposure to select destinations, while excluding others.

The power content formats of different platforms influence destination choice in different ways. Instagram is image-centred and aesthetic in nature, thus one of the most powerful platforms for “instagrammable” places. According to research, attractive destination image on Instagram can increase user engagement and intention to visit (Tešin et al., 2022; Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024). Unlike Instagram, TikTok enables a destination to go viral instantly due to its algorithm-driven platform and short-form video content. Zhou et al. (2023) discovered TikTok has the strong potential influence of destination choice by generating feeling and one of trendiness participation, among younger users. YouTube travels’ longer-form vlogs allow for more spread-out narratives and information-based details, resulting in more evaluation and credibility building.

The visibility that comes from platform-driven fame can lead to an overemphasis on what is visual, as opposed to being a cultural, authentic, and sustainable commitment. Places that look good tend to win the attention of people, however places that do not look good but carry a good culture often go unnoticed. Moreover, viral content can lead to overcrowding and overtourism. According to Siegel et al. (2023), destinations that are not ready for influxes of visitors caused by social media are under pressure to react rather than plan because of these “digital tourists”. Social media platforms actively shape destination choice through visibility mediation, experience framing, and trend amplification processes. Although they provide opportunities for promotion of destinations, the use of films involves challenges of sustainability, portrayal, and the long-term management of flows.

3 Influence of Social Media Content on Travel Choices

3.1 Types of social media travel content

Travel content produced for social media can generally be classed as belonging to a number of categories. One of the most dominating types is user-generated content (UGC) which is posts, pictures, short captions, and also informal travel diaries shared by normal users. User-generated content (UGC) is deemed more authentic because it is born out of personal experience, as opposed to the messaging created through professional marketing. As UGC allowed travellers to be content creators, Leung et al. (2013) note that tourism communication is fundamentally transformed where destination images are created by travellers.

Online reviews are a more structural form of UGC and are quite influential during evaluation and confirmation decision-making stages. User reviews offer practical information regarding the quality of accommodation, service performance, and value-for-money which aids the travellers in comparison and reduces their perceived risk (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). Travels vlogs or longer videos that can be found in sites like YouTube show stories along with information in a visual manner. These formats help the audience to develop a more realistic sense of what a destination is like that often informs their expectation about the atmosphere, activities, and lifestyle.

Short video content such as reels and TikTok videos have become popular in recent times. Powerful, concise and visual formats have an effect of immediacy and emotion that make them a great source of inspiration. At the initiation of the decision process, travelers are not necessarily yet planning, but they may have a few options in mind (Hudson and Thal, 2013). Official branded content produced by destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and tourism companies represents an important category at the same time. This type of content talks about a destination strategically, talks about an attraction, and also the brand. Paid ads and sponsored posts also belong to this category, though they increasingly use the visual and narrative style of UGC to seem more real.

Different types of content have different influences on travel decisions. Content is categorized into two types, informational and inspirational

Informational content, like reviews or detailed vlogs, mainly aids evaluation and confirmation, whereas inspirational content, like shorts and aesthetic posts, creates desire and interest. Other formats, including peer posts and repeated exposure to like destinations, act as validation which enhances travellers' belief that a destination is popular or socially approved. A large-scale analysis of User-Generated Content (UGC) can reveal dominant narratives and emotional tones associated

with a destination, which in turn tends to shape its overall destination image. Likewise, according to Marine-Roig (2019), traveller-generated reviews can have a strong impact on destination image over time.

A critical examination of this phenomenon sheds light on the increasing blurring of distinctions in this context. A lot that looks like life experience may have been sponsored or generated, while branded content often mimics the aesthetics of what looks like life experience. As a result, users will find it difficult to note the persuasive intent and assess the reliability of information. In addition, just because UGC is in great quantity does not mean it is accurate or of good quality. Algorithms tend to pick highly visible content based on the engagement metrics rather than on its informational value. This makes way for the amplification of misleading or superficial representations. Buhalis and Sinarta (2019) contend that the co-creation of content in real-time and the “nowness” of things favour immediacy over reflection as it contributes to the reinforcement of trends and aesthetics rather than the presentation of balanced information. Consequently, tourists might develop opinions about places based solely on distorted images and representations.

3.2 Definition and role of social media influencers in tourism

Social media influencers refer to a group of people who have gained an audience on a particular digital platform and are considered credible or relatable or aspiring by the same audience. In relation to tourism, influencers work as a mediator between a destination and a potential traveller by transforming experiences into visual stories and personal recommendations. Travel is an experiential product characterised by an intangible nature and high reliance on imaginations, feelings and symbolic value (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Hence, their role is particularly effective in tourism.

The influencers make impact through various psychological and social mechanisms. Identification and relatability play an important role as followers tend to see influencers as “people like me” rather than as an advertiser. The perception increases trust and the likelihood followers will accept their suggestions. Another important mechanism is social proof: a high level of engagement shows that a destination is popular and desirable. Influencers create a fear of missing out through their unique travel experiences. Their experiences are image-driven and time-sensitive, showing uniqueness and social value. Over period they may develop parasocial relationships wherein followers will develop an emotional attachment to the influencer despite the influencer being unaware of this (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017).

According to studies, influencers do not work unless the message is worthwhile and that influencer is credible. According to Lou & Yuan (2019), informative, entertaining, and authentic content results

in developing trust in the messages branded by influencers. According to the findings of Pop et al. (2022) related to tourism, influencers can play a significant role in travel decisions. In particular, if the follower trusts the influencer and there is alignment in the lifestyle of the influencer and the destination, the influencer can have a significant impact on travel decisions. A series of systematic and bibliometric reviews on the relevance of influencers in tourism and hospitality research indicate that they contribute to the awareness, attitudes and intentions of destinations (Javed et al., 2025).

Nonetheless, the increasing commercialisation of influencer marketing raises many concerns. There is a big concern about transparency as not always is sponsored content made clear for audiences. Moreover, over-standardisation may also pose a problem, as destinations market similar visual templates, stories that urge the traveller to visit same places for similar pictures. This may lead to excessive occupancy and limit diverse experiences. Also, there may be a mismatch between the audience of an influencer and the real experience at the destination resulting in unrealistic expectations and post-trip disappointments. Recent studies indicate that destination type, audience characteristics and authenticity perception also account for effectiveness of influencer and not just follower numbers (Spörl-Wang et al. 2025). These restrictions highlight how it is necessary to have a more critical understanding of the influencers.

3.3 Trust and credibility of social media travel content

Essentially, trustworthiness and credibility of a source shape the impact of social media. Credibility is the perceived believability and reliability of the information. Trust indicates a willingness to depend on them when making decisions. The concepts are not the same, however they are related. Content can seem credible without being trusted, and it can be trusted for emotional reasons rather than rational value.

Trust towards social media travel content depends on several factors. Information that appears reliable is corroborated by various sources and comes with ample explanation, useful information and is communicated clearly and away from rhetoric. The travelers' attitudes toward using platforms such as TripAdvisor depends on their credibility perceptions, which, in turn, affects the adoption of user-generated content (Ayeh et al., 2013). Likewise, Sparks and Browning (2011) indicate that online reviews are crucial to establishing trust and booking intentions especially under high uncertainty.

Users' assessment of the usefulness and relevance of social media information has also been an important factor. Filieri and McLeay (2014) conclude that a review which offers specific information on a travel experience rather than a mere opinion will be more trusted. Moving within the eWOM

context, the impact of trust on destination image and intention to visit is direct. Positive, credible and trustworthy online communications related to a destination enhance destination trust (Abubakar and Ilkan, 2016). Inconsistencies and perceptions of manipulation may harm it instead (Abubakar et al., 2017). The credibility assessment gets an additional dimension with visual images. While videos can be an excellent way to add authenticity to personal content and show an accurate representation of places and experience, it is also highly edited and enhanced aesthetically. According to Chen et al. (2025), source credibility and inspirational value impact the travel vlog planning behaviour mutually with one another. This suggests emotional appeal is generally accompanied by rational scrutiny.

Travelers frequently look for aesthetic signals, popularity indicators, emotional resonance, and other subjective cues. The misleading nature of material things could create false hopes as they are engaged through governance not reality. Since engagement-centric algorithms reward attention rather than accuracy, the platforms themselves have little incentive to restrict misleading content. Consequently, over-reliance on social media may lead to disappointment and dissatisfaction. These issues illustrate just how important it is to be literate in the media. Travellers must go beyond accepting the information on social media at face value.

4 Contribution of social media in the creation of new travel trends

4.1 Influence of social media on travel styles

Due to social media, new types of travel have been made popular and accepted especially amongst the youth. A notable example in this regard is the growing popularity of short city breaks that centre on visual consumption. People choose destinations not for their rich historical or cultural value, but for their photogenic aesthetic and recognisable monuments that will do well on Instagram and TikTok. This has made “travel for the photo” popular where the point of view, café, or street is the star of the holiday (Yuan et al., 2025).

An entirely social media driven travel style is the contemporary road trip. Through reels, short videos, and carousel posts, users share pre-planned itineraries, beautiful road trips, and tips making road travel look easy and appealing. Simultaneously, highly curated content that is aesthetic, exclusive, and lifestyle branding has reinforced the boutique and luxury travel styles. Budget travel trends have also thrived through content on user-generated “travel hacks”, budget accommodation and affordable experiences. The simultaneous existence of luxury and budget content indicates that social media does not promote one form of travel but is instead a magnifier of various niche preferences (Brusch, 2022).

The rise of ‘hidden gems’ in travel has found great popularity through social media, which highlights less popular tourist spots, local neighbourhoods and experiential tourism among others. Many of these trending activities are a response to mass tourism and are ultimately popularized through hashtags, challenges and reposting functionality. The repetitive exposure of users undergoing a specific travel-related experience to similar content is accelerated due to the functioning of recommendation systems. Buhalis & Sinarta (2019) argue that real-time co-creation and the “nowness” concept allow trends to emerge and spread quickly, with no intention to plan or destination management.

Nevertheless, the same mechanisms that are responsible for travel style diversity also contribute to homogenisation. When a place or experience goes viral, many travellers reproduce it seeking for a similar picture. This leads to the same experience being repeated and the same images being shot. According to Siegel et al. (2023), this phenomenon has been labeled as “social media-induced tourism” where the increase in visitation is more due to visibility/connectivity through the social media platform than being ready or able to cope with increased demand. There will be a problem of whether the destinations can sustain themselves. They will have an influx of visitors, but it will be something that is planned and recognised by an algorithm rather than real planned recognition.

Travel styles that rely on social media are generally framed as a visual performance. Tourists may experience pressure to fabricate trips around “scenes” rather than meaningful interaction with a place, undermining cultural understanding and authenticity. Cheng (2024) states that digital visibility increasingly shapes tourism geographies today, which may entail marginalization for other less visible places and increased spatial disparity. As a result, user-generated posts on social media may affect newer styles of tourism that are more creative or experimental but may not necessarily be sustainable or responsible.

4.2 Changing travel motivations among young adults

Social media has significantly affected the travel motivation of young adults (aged 18 – 35) to a great extent. The motivations to escape, relax, and socialise are still important, but increasingly so are those to self-present, construct identity, and gain a social following. Travelling has become a way to “collect moments” which can be publicly shared. Experiences are now a communicative act that generates social capital.

As stated by Munar and Jacobsen (2014), people share their travel experiences on social media due to self-expression, relationship maintenance and a desire to help. Not only are the motivations related to sharing, but also to shaping the travel experience itself as travellers think how the experiences will look online. Making an image and recognizing oneself from social media has made travellers choose destinations and activities that resonate with their “image”. Exposure to offers, recommendations and peer advice simultaneously reinforce practical motivations such as discounts, ease of planning and accessibility.

Due to characteristics of social media such as immediacy, visual-aesthetic elements and algorithmically personalized news feed, impulsive travel decisions increase. According to Wei et al. (2025), the environment of social networks can spur spontaneous travel intentions, in particular, users who are younger and highly involved with digital technology. While deeper motivations may not be substituted, this phenomenon can shorten decision making and planning horizons. Hudson and Thal (2013) opine that social media combines inspiration, evaluation, and validation which makes a travel decision less regimented and more fluid.

Young travellers are not a homogeneous group of people. According to the research, the influences of social media on motivations are affected by several factors including digital literacy, background, financial, and values. Some young adults, instead, tend to use social media for inspiration or knowledge. Often, they become part of smaller communities that are connected with culture or sus-

tainability or a specific interest. Some people are likely to get affected more by popularity and appearance. Leung and others (2021) note that social media does not cause behaviour but enhances what one is already up to and motivated to do.

The quest for social media and other credible motives can coexist. Although the focus is on image and visibility, the platform can be a space for learning, exchange or community. The main issue is recognizing the diversity of motivations and not creating a straw-man argument that they are superficial. Social media should not be understood as the site of new motivations, but as a context in which motivations are negotiated, reinforced and sometimes changed.

4.3 Impact on the main reason for taking a trip

A main contribution of social media towards tourism today is that it changes the principal reason for taking the journey. Exposure to social media may change travel from the planned response to an identified need for a content-creating activity for many young travellers. Trips can be taken to attend viral events, visit popular places or recreate repeated experiences (Oliveira et al., 2020). This indicates a departure from traditional motivations which include relaxation, visiting friends and relatives and cultural exploration. These have been replaced by socially visible and digitally shareable experiences.

Research shows that social media characteristics can promote impulsive and short-term travel decisions. According to Wei et al. (2025), platform characteristics like constant visibility, emotional stimulus, and simple accessibility of booking information can trigger spontaneous trips. In a similar vein, places that are popular on social media as per the so-called “Insta effect” produce a more positive impact in the consumer’s mind (Soares et al., 2025). Users interested in travel exhibit a remarkably pronounced effect in this regard.

Inspiration is now embedded in your daily digital habit, influencing the decision-making process. According to Martins et al. (2025), during their leisure time, people have begun planning their next adventure primarily during the post-COVID-19 era as social media erases the boundary between leisure time and planning time. According to Tešin et al. (2022) and Zhou et al. (2023), platforms like Instagram and TikTok can contribute towards a destination choice by repetitively exposing users to certain places which they become familiar with. Influencers help to create this process by linking destinations with personal narratives that create an emotional impact on followers, evoking travel intentions based on the ascription of trust and identification (Pop et al., 2022).

From a critical point of view, this change does not necessarily mean that young travellers are superficial and just care about image. In contrast, the social context of travel is undergoing broader change. Travel experiences are becoming more and more embedded in communication practices, sharing and storytelling are part of the meaning making. Nevertheless, it brings potential risks too. Traveling for content has made many people display poor expectancies and results when experiencing something that did not match the image. This can cause overtourism and the commodification of places as destinations are packaged for the net as content. In conclusion, it is not only the choice to travel to a destination which is changing but also the reason to travel due to social media. Platforms significantly influence the development of innovative travel trends through their shaping of motivations, priorities and decision processes. Research attempts at balancing innovation and authenticity and sustainability in current tourism need to take such dynamics into account (Chen et al., 2022).

5 Data and Methods

5.1 Research approach and method

This study conducted a quantitative research approach with the aim of examining how social media influences travel habits and the way in which young adults aged 18-35 in Greece make decisions about how to organize a trip.

In academic research, there are two possible approaches, qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research focuses on understanding the experiences and behaviors of individuals in their environment. This method is usually used to investigate phenomena that cannot be captured through quantities, as it mainly refers to beliefs and emotions. The results are collected mainly through observations or interviews. On the other hand, quantitative research is a research that focuses on the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data. This strategy is commonly used to investigate relationships between variables and to make predictions. Quantitative research often involves collecting data through surveys and experiments, and then evaluating the data using statistical techniques (Jessica Abbadia, 2023).

For the purpose of this study, the qualitative approach was considered more appropriate for its implementation. The research aims to identify general trends and patterns of behavior through the experiences of the people taking part in the research. Therefore, the research is conducted through a questionnaire and will offer us an easier comparison between the respondents and more objective and substantive analysis of the results.

To carry out such a type of research, the most common approaches are experiments, structured observations and surveys. Questionnaires are the most common method in student studies but also the easiest and most widespread in tourism and consumer behavior studies, as in the end, the different approaches and beliefs of each individual are reflected through the answers. Thus, we have as a result information about the different habits of people and the different influence of factors such as social media that we studied. Additionally, the large collection of data within a short period of time from a large number of people, makes the choice of the questionnaire a very common and reliable option.

For this study, this method was chosen due to its suitability for measuring attitudes, perceptions and behavioral patterns related to the use of social media. Each person is influenced differently when making decisions due to social media or other parameters and this method allows us to distinguish this. In addition, through this method, we are allowed to standardize the collection of data

and ensure consistency between the responses, which is necessary for the analysis of the impact of social media and the analysis of trends in the specific age range that we set at the beginning.

5.2 Development of a survey

The questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical framework and the initial research. The initial research and what we developed through the previous sources is the basis for the creation of the present research. Basic concepts such as the use of social media, trust and reliability, as well as the motivations for organizing a trip, were presented as measurable variables and were captured as questions for the creation of the questionnaire.

The survey consisted exclusively of closed-ended questions as well as multiple-choice questions. The reason this type of question was chosen was to ensure the clarity of the questions to the individuals participating in the survey, the response time to be short, and finally, the qualitative analysis of the questions to be simpler.

The questionnaire was structured in sections, starting with journalistic and evaluation questions. Next, the questions concerned travel behavior, social media use, and the perceived influence of social media on travel decisions. With this structure, a logical flow was ensured in order to facilitate the respondents' follow-up in the questionnaire.

Before the final publication of the survey, there was a pilot test with a small number of people within the age group limits set before its launch. The purpose of this test was to identify any unclear wording, technical issues or shortcomings. The results and responses that were received during the pilot testing phase were not counted at the end of the survey and on the final results.

5.3 Data collection & Data analysis

For the purposes of this study, the target group studied is young adults aged 18-35 living in Greece. This age range is considered quite active on social media and is also related to contemporary tourism trends, so it automatically serves the maximum requirements of the study.

For the research process, the participants for the questionnaire were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to respond. The survey was distributed online through famous social media platforms such as Instagram, as well as word of mouth through friends and messaging apps.

Data collection took place over a period of approximately three (3) weeks, during which a total of 60 valid responses were collected.

The data that collected were analyzed through statistical graphs, including frequencies and percentages. The results will be presented and analyzed in the next chapter using charts and graphs.

6 Results

6.1 Background details

The survey collected 60 valid answers, where the respondents has answers all of the mandatory questions for a time period of approximately 3 weeks (February 12 – March 8). There were a variety of multiple-choice questions in which the respondent could select only one answer, while in some others he had the option of more than one. In some of these questions, there was the possibility of adding his own unique answer. In addition, in some of the questions, the respondent could choose how much he agreed with the specific question using a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Firstly, both aspects, age and gender, were examined. Of the 60 participants, 68% were female, and 32% were male. Regarding the age of the participants, the biggest participant group by age was the youngest one, people aged 18-24 with 70%, followed by 24-30 years old with 28%, and 30-35 with just 2%.

Most of the participants stated that they travel 2-3 times per year (52%), followed by 1 time per year (23%), then 5 times or more per year (13%), and lastly 3-4 times per year (12%). The number of times that a person travels per year depends on many factors, such as available time to travel, budget, travel preferences, etc. For example, most of the time a young adult (18 years old) finds it more difficult to travel more than an adult of 25 years old, as the second one has more work experience and probably saved more money. Additionally, responsibilities such as college, work etc play a significant role in the free time someone may have to travel.

What type of trips do you usually take?

60 απαντήσεις

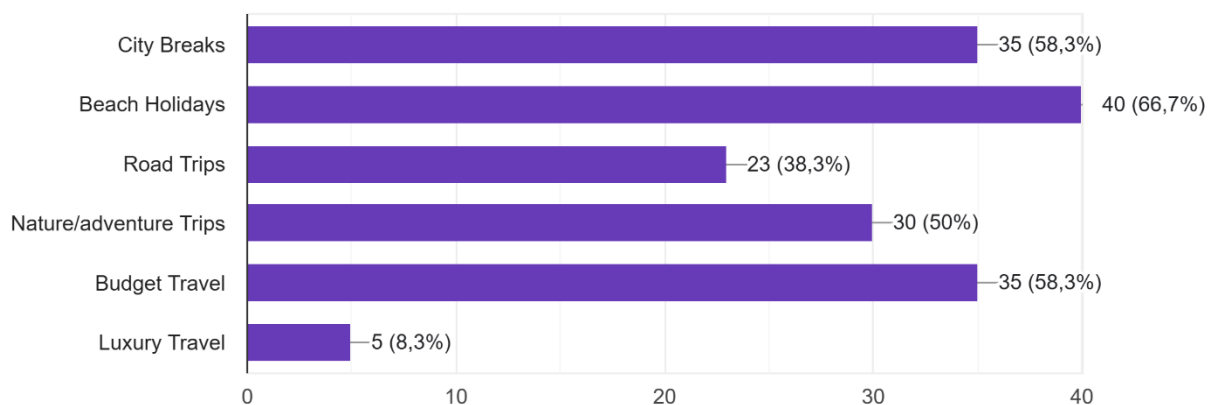


Figure 1. Most of the people have different type of travelling

The participants were asked what is the type of trip they usually take. The possible answers were city breaks, beach holidays, road trips, nature/adventure trips, budget travel, and luxury travel. As Figure 1 shows, the majority of participants (58%) chose either city breaks or budget travel, while a slightly smaller percentage (50%) chose the nature/adventure trips. Then road trips collected 38% of the answers, while only 8% of the participants chose the luxury travel.

6.2 The Influence of Social Media

Before starting the writing of the thesis, in discussions that took place with people who travel, when asked if they use social media before or during the organization of a trip, the answer was positive by a large margin.

Which Social Media platforms do you usually use for travel recommendations?

60 απαντήσεις

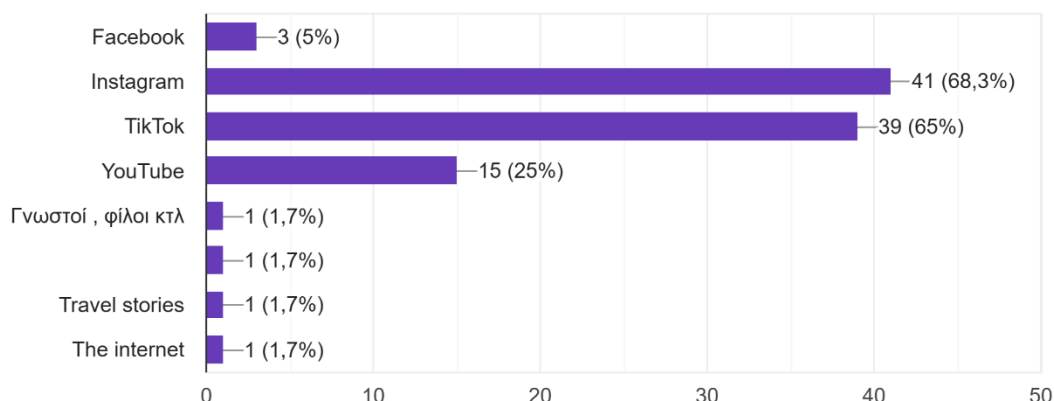


Figure 2. Over 65% of travelers use Instagram or TikTok for travel recommendations

The bar chart in Figure 2 shows the number of people using different social media platforms for travel recommendations. In this question, the participants could choose more than one answer. Instagram (68%) and TikTok (65%) gathered the most answers from the participants, followed by YouTube (25%). Then Facebook gathered 5% of the answers, and was then followed by 3 participants' unique answers.

How often do you use Social Media when you planning a trip?

60 απαντήσεις

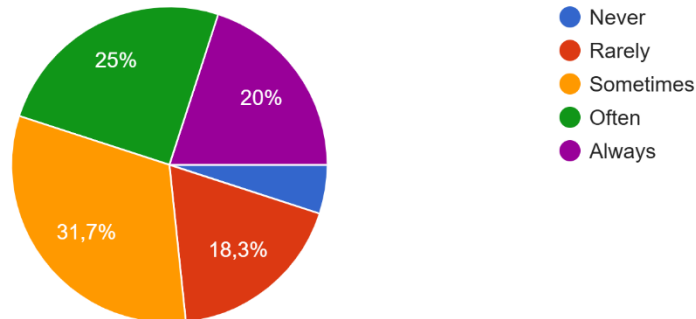


Figure 3. Most of the travelers have used social media when they are planning a trip

The above graph in Figure 3 depicts the frequency with which participants use social media when they are planning a trip. As can be seen in the graph, the largest percentage of participants state that they use social media sometimes (32%), followed by the people who have used it often (25%). Then, 20% of the participants state that they always use social media, and then, 18% of them use it rarely. Only 5% of the participants said that they have never used social media when they are planning a trip. From these results, we can understand that the influence of social media is quite significant in organizing a trip, as the largest percentage of participants have used social media at some point, while the percentage that does not use it at all is very small.

Social Media inspires me to consider destinations that I had not previously planned to visit.

60 απαντήσεις

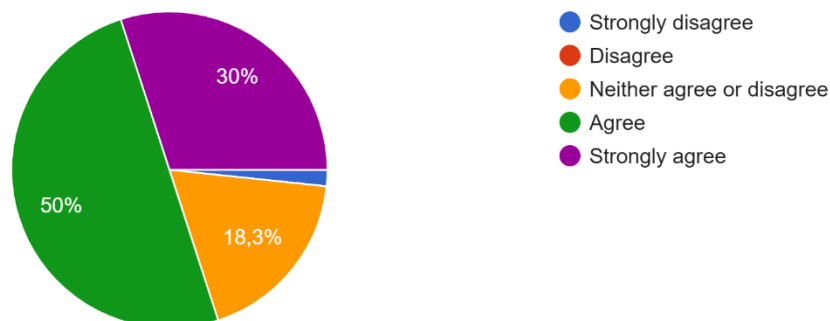


Figure 4. 50% of travelers are inspired by social media to visit a destination they had not previously considered

The graph in Figure 4 reveals the number of people who have been inspired by social media to visit a new destination that they had not previously considered. According to the survey results, 50% of people said they agree, and 30% of people said they strongly agree with that statement, showing that the influence of social media on young adults' travel decisions is extremely large. After that, 18% of people said they neither agree or disagreed, while only 2 % said that they strongly disagreed. Furthermore, no one answered that disagrees.

Travel-related content on Social Media increases my interest on specific destinations.

60 απαντήσεις

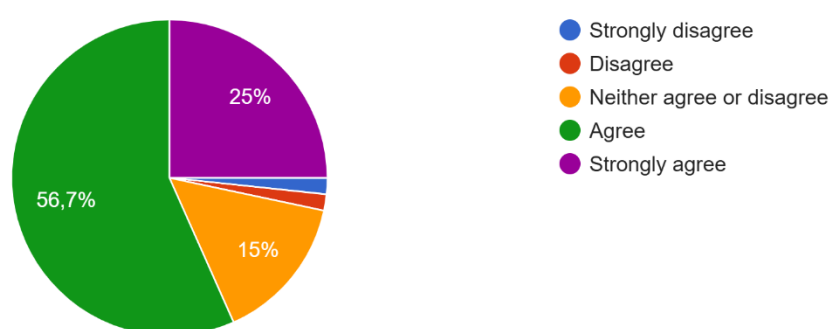


Figure 5. Over 50% of travelers are influenced by social media to choose a specific destination

Question 8 was also a statement where participants showed how much they agreed or disagreed with it. The statement was "Travel-related content on social media increases my interest on specific destinations." Figure 5 indicates the number of people who agreed or disagreed with that statement. According to the graph, 57% of participants agreed, followed by 25% who strongly agreed. Then, 15% of participants neither agree nor disagree, 2% disagree, and again 2% strongly disagree. These figures real that most of the participants have started to think about a destination also because of the social media advertised it to them.

Influencer's travel recommendations or content affect my travel decisions.

60 απαντήσεις

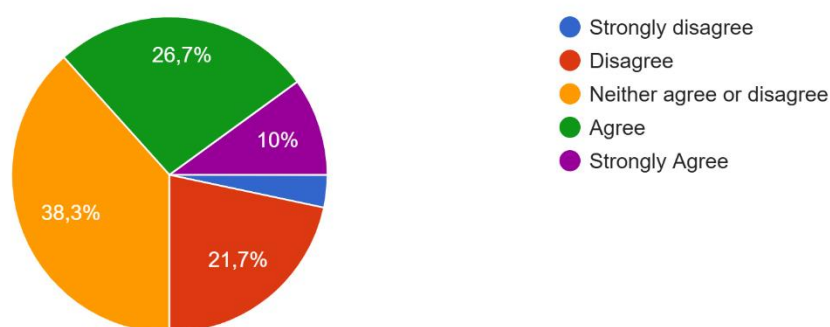


Figure 6. Influencers do not totally affect the decisions of the travelers

In the statistical graph above (see Figure 6), the participants were asked if their decisions are affected by influencers' recommendations or content. 38% of participants answered that neither agree or disagree, followed by 22% that disagree. After that, 27% said that they agree with that statement, while 10% strongly disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. In other words, the influence of influencers on travel-related content and decision-making is not very effective for most of the people.

Social Media influences the travel type of experiences I used to look for. (e.g. Budget travel, road trips, nature trips, etc.)

60 απαντήσεις

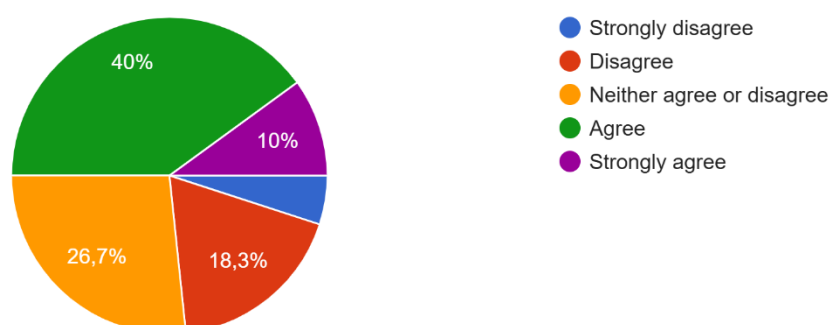


Figure 7. 40% of travelers change their travel preferences because of social media

When people start travelling, they adopt a type of travelling that suits their preferences. Because of the social media and travel trends that were not so common among some of the people, this

started changing. According to the results of the survey, 40% of the travelers agreed with the statement that social media influences the travel type of the experiences they used to look for. They add on their preferences different traveling types such as road trips, nature trips, etc. Then, 27% said that they neither agree nor disagree, and 18% that they disagree. At the end, 10% of the participants said that they strongly disagree, while a 5% of them said that they strongly agree.

Social Media affects my travel expectations of a country.

60 απαντήσεις

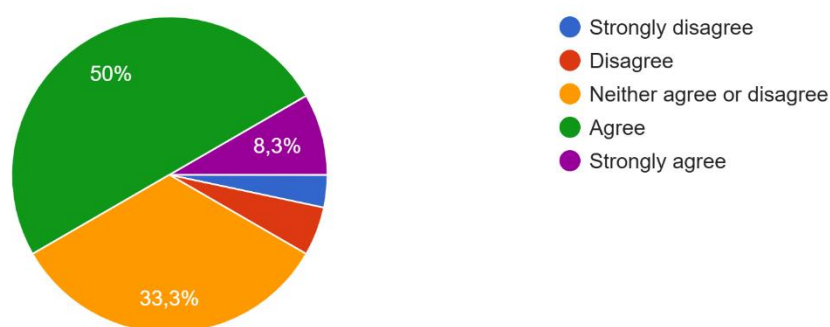


Figure 8. 50% of travelers' countries' expectations are affected by social media

As seen in Figure 8, 50% of travelers agreed that social media affects their travel expectations of a country, followed by 33% who neither agree nor disagree with that statement. Then 8% strongly agree, 5% disagree, and 3% strongly disagree. The conclusion from these results is that most of the participants are affected enough by what social media advertises. The way that social media shows a destination creates high expectations for it.

Social Media influences the activities I plan to do at a destination.

60 απαντήσεις

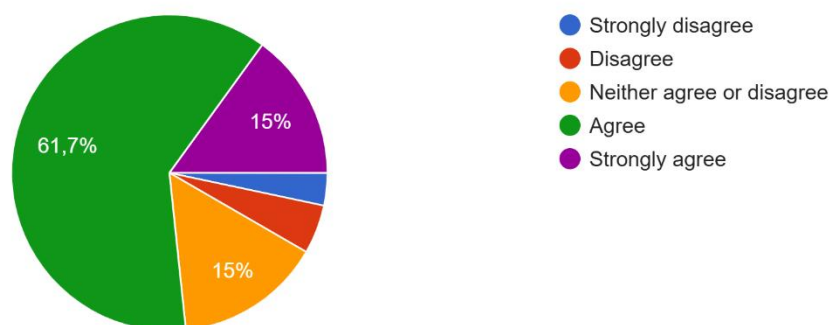


Figure 9. More than 60% thinks that Social Media influences the activities they plan to do

The graph in Figure 9 reveals that social media influences the activities that the young adults plan to do at a destination, with 62% of the participants agreeing on this statement. After that, 15% said they strongly agree or neither agree nor disagree, while 5% stated they disagree, and 3% of them stated they strongly disagree. This confirms that a high percentage of young adult travelers start planning a trip to a destination, or when they get there, are trying to enjoy activities that this destination offers and is famous for.

Exposure to travel content on Social Media platforms motivates me to start planning a trip.

60 απαντήσεις

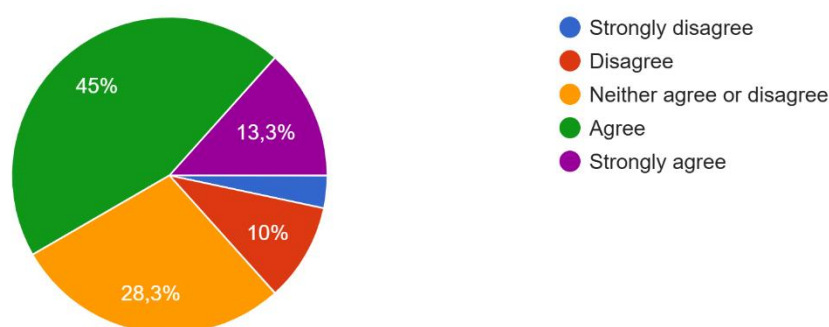


Figure 10. The majority of travelers believe that exposure to travel content motivates them to plan a trip

Nowadays, exposure to travel content is very common. This can influence our critical thinking, and encourage us to research more about a destination or even start planning a trip. In the graph

above (see Figure 10), it appears that 45% of the participants agree with the statement that exposure to travel content on social media platforms motivates them to start planning a trip. Followed by 28% that neither agree nor disagree, 13% that strongly agree, 10% that disagree, and 3% that strongly disagree.

6.3 Social Media and credibility

Social Media content (e.g. Posts, stories, reels, etc.) from other users feels more trustworthy than paid advertisements.

60 απαντήσεις

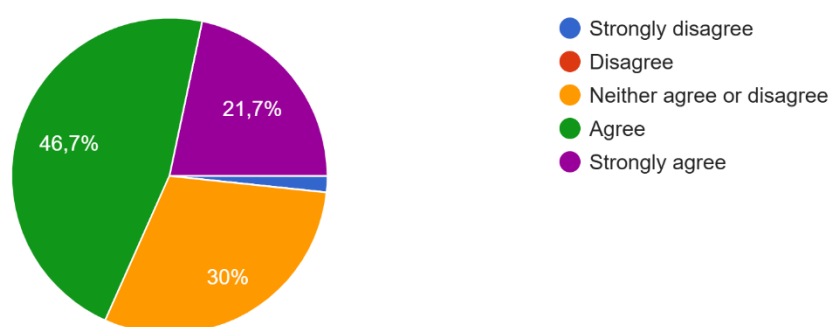


Figure 11. The majority of participants feel that social media content is more trustworthy than paid advertisements

The chart above reveals the percentages of people who think that social media content from other users is more trustworthy than paid advertisements. The highest was 47%, which agrees with that statement, followed by 30% who neither agree or disagree with it. 22% stated that they strongly agree with it. The lowest were strongly disagree 2% and disagree 0%. This insinuates that almost half of the travelers would better trust social media content about a destination from a friend or a non-famous user instead of influencers and paid advertisements.

I am more likely to trust travel content that feels authentic instead of promoted content.

60 απαντήσεις

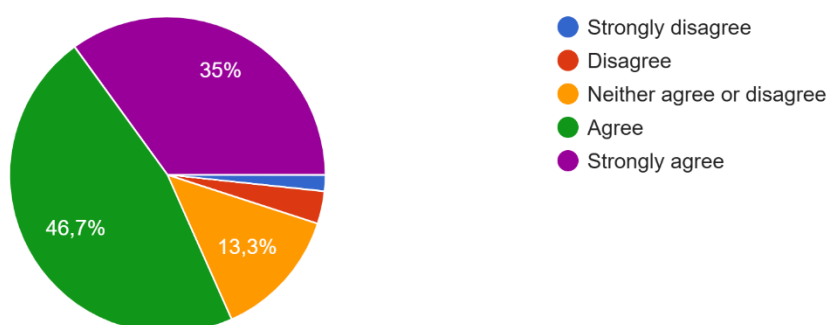


Figure 11. The majority thinks that is better to trust authentic travel content instead of promoted content

The next question followed the same pattern as the previous one, as participants were asked whether they trust content that feels authentic more than promoted content. Figure 11 indicates the number of people who agreed or not with the statement. According to the chart, 46% of participants agreed, 35% strongly agreed, 13% neither agreed nor disagreed, 3% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed. Therefore, from the results of the survey, we can see that again the majority agrees that something other than promoted content, such as authentic content, is more trustworthy, while only a small percentage disagrees with this statement.

6.4 Final survey outcome question

What is the most common outcome after seeing a travel-related content on Social Media?

60 απαντήσεις

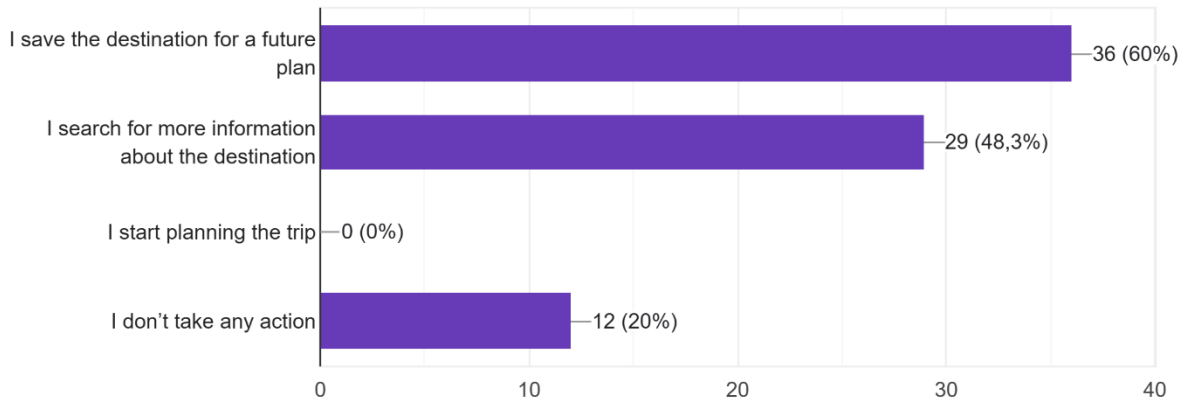


Figure 12. The majority of travelers, when they see travel-related content on social media, consider it as their next destination

The survey's last question was: "What is the most common outcome after seeing travel-related content on social media?" The vast majority of respondents (60%) said that they save the destination for a future plan, followed by those who said that they search for more information about the destination. The option that they do not take any action after seeing travel-related content on social media had 20% of the answers, while no one said that they would start planning a trip.

7 Discussion

This chapter discusses the main research findings and answers to the research questions based on the findings. The purpose is to capture the results of the research, compare them with the literature, and provide answers to the research questions. In addition, the chapter discusses the reliability and limitations of the study and reflects on the learning outcomes of the research process.

7.1 Main findings in relation to the literature

The findings of this study provide valuable information on the influence of social media on the travel habits and decision-making of young adults in Greece. By comparing the results of the research with the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapters, several key observations can be identified.

One of the main findings of this work is that although social media influencers have a huge influence on young people, the same is not true of their influence on the tourism sector. Their direct influence, as can be seen from the questionnaire, is quite limited. As can be seen from Figure 6 of the questionnaire, the majority believes that their influence on young people's travel decisions is almost negative, as the majority is negative with this statement. On the contrary, based on the literature, there seems to be a gap in this theory, as it is stated that influencers have an important role in shaping the travel intentions of young adults (Pop et al., 2022; Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, recent studies report that the influence of influencers depends on the trust they have gained from their audience, and their authenticity, and not so much on the number of their followers. This has the effect of suggesting that young adults are more critical of the content of influencers if it seems more like a promotion and not as authentic.

Another equally important finding is that social media content increases users' interest in a specific destination. As shown by the corresponding question in the questionnaire (see figure 12), a high percentage of people say that digital content that showcases travel destinations makes them interested and seeks more information about that destination. As has been shown in other research, social media is presented as a source of inspiration in the travel decision-making process (Hudson and Thal, 2013; Leung et al., 2013). The results of the research confirm that travel decisions can be triggered by the consistent display of travel content and not only by the initial need to travel.

Furthermore, this study found that social media plays a significant role in the expectations created for a destination. The majority of respondents agreed that the way in which social media portrays destinations online creates very high expectations and makes users imagine their experience in

these destinations differently. This statement is also in line with the literature, as this content suggests that social media content contributes to shaping the image of the destination (Zeng and Geritsen, 2014). Furthermore, it argues that many times social media creates unrealistic or even exaggerated expectations.

In addition, the results of this study show that social media has a direct influence on the types of travel that young adults want to choose. Many of the respondents reported that they often choose the type of travel they will choose based on what they have seen on social media. This makes them choose and try out some new way of traveling that may seem interesting to them. The conclusion we draw from this result is that travelers are influenced not only in the destination they will choose but also in the overall travel experience they will have.

Finally, another important conclusion that emerged from this research is that users trust content that appears authentic more than paid advertisements. Several recent studies have also shown that it is very important to have credibility and authenticity in influencing consumer decisions.

7.2 Answers to research questions

This thesis consisted of one main question and three sub-questions. The main research question was how the social media influences the travel habits and decisions of young adults in Greece.

The sub-questions were:

1. Which platforms have the greatest influence on shaping young people's travel choices?
2. What type of content is most influential?
3. Does social media create new travel patterns or influence travel styles?

The results of the research showed that the applications with the greatest resonance and influence on the public are Instagram and TikTok. In chapter 6, it was shown that these specific platforms gathered the highest percentages, over 60%, of those used by young adults when they want to search for travel-related information. This finding is also found in chapter 2, where the role of social media and how algorithms work are presented.

The second sub-question concerns authentic content and its impact on internet users. As we saw in the results of the questionnaire, authentic content attracts a larger share of users, at least in matters related to travel decisions. This is clearly seen in Figure 11, as the percentage of respondents who agree with this statement is very high, with 47% agreeing and 35% strongly agreeing. In addition, in Chapter 3, the different types of content and their influence were discussed and analyzed. As the questionnaire showed, internet users prefer content that appears authentic, while they appear to not trust content that comes from paid advertisements as much.

Regarding sub-question 3, the results of the questionnaire have shown that the majority of the respondents would try a new travel experience, such as road trips, budget travel, etc. Another conclusion that emerges from the results of this particular graph is that many travelers have changed their travel preferences due to the visibility of these types of trips on social media. As discussed in Chapter 4, social media contributes to a large extent to the formation of new travel trends. The promotion of content that showcases various hacks for budget travel, activities that you can do on a natural trip, etc., makes travelers think that an alternative way of traveling than the one they are used to, may offer them a better overall experience.

7.3 Further research

Based on the increasing use of social media by young people, but also by adults, as well as the increasing influence that the internet has had on our lives and even on the tourism industry, further research could be quite beneficial and interesting. The influence of social media on the tourism industry is not only reflected in the influence of destination choice, but also in the activities they want to experience, the type of travel they will choose, and much more. Furthermore, future research could focus more on specific platforms that are said to have a greater impact on the public. In addition, research on a wider range of ages and backgrounds could offer a much more comprehensive view of this specific topic.

Many sectors in the tourism sector could be interested in the findings of this research. Travel companies and destination marketing departments could use this information to better understand the way young adults think, what they look for in their trips, and how they like to plan them.

Additionally, influencers and content creators, if they want to attract a travel audience and provide travel content, will need to maintain authenticity, as trust seems to play a significant role in influencing consumers' travel decisions. Content that may appear or actually be advertising may be viewed negatively.

7.4 Reliability and ethical considerations

This study was conducted using an anonymous online survey, ensuring that participants' privacy was protected. Participation was voluntary, and no personal data was collected.

However, some limitations should be acknowledged. Responses were collected through a multiple-choice questionnaire, while some questions were statements with which participants were required to indicate how much they agreed. The sample of 60 responses is considered relatively small and limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the questions concern personal opinions and there is a possibility that responses may be influenced by personal biases.

Despite these limitations, the study presents quite a lot of useful information regarding the role of social media in travel decisions and the influence it exerts through the content it displays on various platforms.

7.5 Self-evaluation

This thesis has been a challenge for the author for mainly two reasons. The first reason was the lack of recent available information on the topic. In recent years, the internet and social media have indeed entered our lives for good. Over time, the content of social media has expanded considerably to include travel, but it is not clear how they influence travel decision-making, the creation of new trends, etc. The sources were numerous, but not so easy to find, and 100% related to the topic you were looking for.

The second reason was the small number of participants in the questionnaire. As time was pressing for the completion of the writing of the thesis, and the number of responses remained far from the desired number, valuable time was lost, and added pressure to the author. In addition, the small number of participants made it difficult to draw an objective conclusion of the research.

In conclusion, overall, the experience from conducting this research has evolved the author in many areas, such as critical thinking and curiosity about how technology and content creation can evolve and help the tourism industry run smoothly.

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Appendix

Survey questionnaire

The Influence of Social Media on Travel Decisions.

* Υποδεικνύει απαιτούμενη ερώτηση

What is your age? *

- 18-24
- 24-30
- 30-35

Gender *

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

How often do you travel? *

- Once a year or less
- 2-3 times per year
- 3-4 times per year
- 5 times or more per year

What type of trips do you usually take? *

(Select all that apply)

City Breaks

Beach Holidays

Road Trips

Nature/adventure Trips

Budget Travel

Luxury Travel

Άλλο: _____

Which Social Media platforms do you usually use for travel recommendations? *

(Select all that apply)

Facebook

Instagram

TikTok

YouTube

Άλλο: _____

How often do you use Social Media when you planning a trip? *

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Always

Social Media inspires me to consider destinations that I had not previously planned to visit. *

- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither agree or disagree
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree
-

Travel-related content on Social Media increases my interest on specific destinations. *

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Influencer's travel recommendations or content affect my travel decisions. *

- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither agree or disagree
 - Agree
 - Strongly Agree
-

Social Media influences the travel type of experiences I used to look for. (e.g. Budget travel, road trips, nature trips, etc.) *

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Social Media affects my travel expectations of a country. *

- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither agree or disagree
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree
-

Social Media influences the activities I plan to do at a destination. *

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Exposure to travel content on Social Media platforms motivates me to start planning a trip. *

- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither agree or disagree
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree
-

Social Media content (e.g. Posts, stories, reels, etc.) from other users feels more trustworthy than paid advertisements. *

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I am more likely to trust travel content that feels authentic instead of promoted content. *

- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither agree or disagree
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree
-

What is the most common outcome after seeing a travel-related content on Social Media? *

- I save the destination for a future plan
- I search for more information about the destination
- I start planning the trip
- I don't take any action
- Άλλο: _____