



*Beyond the tourist gaze: the role of visual media in
creating smart tourism approaches
An empirical research on visual social networks*

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To my dad - if it was not for him, I would not be where I am today.*

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Abstract

This study analyses the impact and usage of images and videos on social networks in tourism development from the perspective of tourist-users and tourism providers. The aim is to understand to what extent social networks impact the construction of the tourist gaze, and to what extent visuality on social networks is creating new tourism approaches and interactions. An online survey, a photo experiment and a few examples and case studies from tourism in Scandinavia, South Europe and North America explore the interface between tourism and visual contents on social networks including the role of social network accounts and tourism stakeholders in the creation on online experiences and the digital experience of tourism attractions and places. Results suggest that visuality on social networks impacts the social tourist gaze, by generating a virtual extension of the ‘social tourist gaze’. The latter is created and consumed virtually and simultaneously, meaning that digital images and videos still allow the production of signs thanks to which people make connections within the objects depicted. Moreover, the gazing process occurs on emotional levels, as well as according to the popularity and virality of a certain social network content, leading tourist-users to gaze upon what they see and the emotions that arise from visuality, but also how they are presented and claimed by the social public. The study suggests that the social tourist gaze is created and consumed digitally and virtually; however, once it is created, it leads to new tourism approaches and interactions: the tourism providers establish their presence on social network, and take on practices that allow the creation a community with the same interests, and engage as much as possible with users given their new role of prosumers (producers-consumers). For this reason, tourist-users also engage new practises: visual content – as well as their virality and the interactions with other users – on social network are now influencing their perception, by leading them to prefer a destination and to gather travel information from others’ content.

Key concepts: social networks, the tourist gaze, digital culture, authenticity, tourism, visuality, visual social network, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, selfies, tourist destinations, tourist experiences, social tourist gaze, images, videos, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube

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1 Chapter I: Introduction

The past decades have experienced the rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which refers to all the devices (smartphone), network components (WIFI) and applications that allow the interaction in the digital world (Rouse, 2019). The ever-growing developments carried out by ICTs has brought innovations and challenges also to the tourism sector by resulting in a new era of smart tourism. According to Gretzel et al. smart tourism consists of “digital, intelligent, and virtual tourism based on digital, intelligent, and virtual technology” (2015, p. 178). Smart tourism refers to the use of information and communication technologies to develop and improve tourism practices, such as enhancing tourist experiences through higher personalisation of services and products (Buhalis and Amaranggana 2015, p. 377).

Despite differing in their application, ICTs and social networks are strictly connected, as the first provide all the technological tools necessary to the development of the new online social communications emerged with the introduction of social networks. Social networks have their relevance in improving and challenging the tourism sector. For instance, the Web 2.0 allows Internet users to act as consumers and producers at the same time, and social networks became a captivating source of information, on one hand, and a virtual space where everyone can add their own contribution in any forms, on the other one (Munar and Jacobsen 2014, p. 47). Thus, the emergence of Internet-based social networks has made it possible for one person to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people. Inevitably, these technological revolutions also enabled implications for tourism providers – on an extreme level, with Dimitrios Buhalis suggesting that ICTs have a dramatic impact on tourism as they force the entire sector to fully re-organise its strategies (1998, p. 4119). As a matter of fact, tourism is now facing a new phase where tourists have a central role, are more demanding and have more tools to construct their future travels. Hence, tourism providers must engage new schemes, and their active presence and authority on social networks seems to be central and required.

However, the real challenge for tourism worldwide was the emergence of visual social network and the introduction of improved cameras in smartphones. Photography and tourism have always been strictly connected (Sontag 1977, p. 177) even though they were developed in different centuries. Tourism was born in ancient times, when the nobles used to spend their summers away from the city, while photography was introduced during the 18th century (Rabotic 2014, p. 99). At the very beginning, tourism and photography both had different commitments than today: tourism mainly consisted in sleeping, eating out and spending some time in the country yard, while photography was

centered on the common and real day life with a focus on people and places and their faithful representations (Bull 2010, p. 62). In the 20th century, tourism began to take shape as an international industry, and photographs began to represent every object, person and location with no distinctions. Then in the 1990s, thanks to the industrial revolution, aircraft were able to carry passengers to and from any airport in the world, and people started to feel the desire to discover new and different places and cultures. Coherently, everything became photographable and worth noting with no conditions on what should be embodied or not, and the world seen as an exhibition (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 162).

The introduction of visual social network, improved smartphone-cameras and this new 'photographable era' originated an unprecedented flow of visual communication which radically changed the tourism industry. Indeed, visual social network has taken the tourist experience to a further level and has transformed how we interpret the tourist places and socially construct travel experiences. Tourists nowadays have many technological tools to construct and socially share their experiences, and as social network users, have the authority to promote or obstruct tourism destinations and attractions through shared images and videos. Tourists can communicate not only with tourism operators but are also able to share and look for similar experiences, as they support the sharing of personal experiences with other users through pictures and videos, and other content, such as hashtag and comments. For instance, thanks to photos on Instagram tourists can have an idea of what a destination has to offer them without even visiting there, and therefore decide what they are going to visit and see based on first-hand information gathered from previous tourists. Urry and Larsen state that the "vision is central to tourism experience" (2011, p. 5). Photos are not simply object or souvenirs from our trips. They can bond relations, affect our perception and tease our imagination.

1.1 Research gap

This study seeks to pick up where Urry and Larsen left off in *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* and aims to discover if posting images and videos on social network contribute to the creation of a 'social tourist gaze', which potentially lead to the development of new smart tourism approaches. The tourist gaze's concept is explained by Urry and Larsen as the intrinsic combination of previous anticipations and the visual consuming through a lens or a look (2011, p. 4), as well as the link between tourists and tourist environments, which also comprises the tourism providers and the experience in itself. However, this study seeks to analyse whether the tourist gaze can be also produced virtually through images and videos on social networks, and with the support of virtual

tourism approaches and interactions among users and tourism providers, all of which makes up the tourist environment.

Serving as an important pillar of tourism and leisure studies, the concept of the tourist gaze has been left relatively unexamined within the context of this new visual world and more specifically image based social networks, and photo/video-sharing. Visual social networks enable all users to act as photographers and video makers by uploading photos and videos of their travels, and some others to gather relevant travel information from. Users then engage with the visual as both content generators and content consumers and seek to consume the world through the visual, engage with their audience and content, reflect on the consumed images and create interpretations which may or may not influence tourism approaches. These areas of inquiry have been largely left unexamined within digital culture literature, while an overwhelming majority of research on travel and social networks has been mainly on a marketing and business basis, where the focus is on the role of social network platforms for instance, for the promoting of a destination.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The increasing role of technology in our lives influences tourism and the ways in which people perceive tourist destinations and attractions. Above all, it creates a new sense of being a tourist – Dobrica Jovicic argues that “the smart experience component implies technology mediated experiences of tourists, who not only consume, but also create data that can improve the quality of experiences” (2017, p. 277). These new tourism practices thanks to social networks developed with the event of Web 2.0, which was described by Tim O’Reilly as continually updated services that improve the more people use it, and where data from infinite sources can be gathered and consumed (2005, p. 13). The role of users is critical as they not only consume but provide their own data by creating networks of participation. Thus, websites are no longer just stationary, but dynamic platforms which allows users to generate their content to tell others about their own experiences.

This study focuses on three of the most popular social networks: Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. The analysis of these specific social networks is due to their relevance and the presence of photogenic content which potentially have a bigger impact on users and travellers. The aim is to analyse how tourism is changing and creating new approaches from users in response to photos and videos shared on those platforms, as well as by looking at the role of tourists who share their content or use others’ content in order to create expectations and make informed travel decisions. Additionally, the role of tourism providers also needs to adapt to these changes by remodelling their services and creating a

presence on social network platforms. Another key theme this study explores is how authenticity and realism within the digital content can be an extremely influential approach to smart tourism.

Following on from this, the study answers the following two research questions:

- 1) To what extent can social networks impact the construction of the tourist gaze?
- 2) How is visuality creating new tourism approaches and interactions?

When people gaze upon places and destinations they do not only look at them, but they feel pleasure in the process for reasons such as satisfaction for their expectations or simply because they represent “landscapes or townscapes which are out of the ordinary” (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 1). Travelling itself is the research for the extraordinary and tourists always look for new experiences which are far from their daily lives. When tourists travel, they normally look at what they encounter, and whether they are attracted by them, they gaze at them. Therefore, gaze and attraction are connected: the gaze constructs the attraction of the place by generating emotions in the tourist. Moreover, places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is anticipation through daydreaming and fantasy, which are nowadays generated by media technologies (ibid, 4).

One of the key subjects of this study is whether social networks not only reinforce the gaze but contribute somehow to its creation, as well as how these social networks are constructing the tourist gazes and reshaping tourists’ approaches. It also focuses on visual data with the purpose to demonstrate the potential value that visual content posted on social network can provide to tourists and the tourism industry, as they may contribute in creating or enhancing tourism destinations. Furthermore, this study aims to highlight new practices of smart tourism, which are not necessarily consumed during a trip, or physically being at a destination, but also before and after the experience. The main assumption is that social network users can create destinations available to everyone on the web as well as provide them with virtual tourist experiences. One of the foci is also the increasingly active role of tourists online. The use of social network platforms creates an unprecedented flow of information, where everyone can have access to it whenever. Consequently, photos and videos on social networks are a fundamental element in this argument, as they are the main mediators of these virtual tourist experiences.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis comprises seven chapters:

- This current chapter (I) comprises the introduction, where the research gap, the purpose and the structure of the thesis are outlined. An overview of the treated topics is given, and the research questions are introduced.
- Chapter II comprises the Literature Review by giving an insight of the related theoretical background. The analysis explores the relevant theories about tourism, the tourist gaze, photography and visuality, social networks, authenticity and participatory culture. From this greater attention is dedicated to the tourist gaze, visuality and tourism approaches on social networks, of which help lead me to the research questions.
- Chapter III comprises the Methodology, where the empirical methods used in the study are explained and justified.
- Chapter IV comprises the Empirical Research, where the results and findings are analysed and presented in order to answer the research questions. These include a photo experiment and an online survey aimed to analyse users' attitudes towards visual content and social networks.
- Chapter V comprises three Case Studies representing the three most popular social network platforms, with the purpose of analysing the effects of social networks on tourism providers, and how their approaches are changing to meet the needs of tourist-users. These are presented and compared to the empirical research throughout the chapter, and an analysis is given in order to answer the research questions.
- Chapter VI includes the Discussion of the overall findings, where the findings of the study are further explored to help answer the research questions.
- Chapter VII includes the Conclusion, where the final results and concluding remarks are given, plus the limitations, strengths and recommendations for future research are acknowledged

1.4 Summary chapter I

To summarise, this chapter leads to a general introduction to the key themes presented throughout the study, as well as the purposes of the study and what the research questions aim to find out.

2 Chapter II: Literature review

This chapter presents the current literature of the key themes that are discussed in the thesis. It explores the theoretical aspects related to tourism, the tourist gaze, as well as visibility, authenticity and social networks and how tourist-users and tourism providers engage with all of this.

2.1 Visibility and emotions

While seeing is a human component with which we were born with, visualisation is a symbolic construction of our innate ability of seeing (Mitchell 2002, p.170). Our way of looking at the world is affected by our cultural and personal background, as well as our knowledge and beliefs: when we look at something, we do not only see ‘that specific thing’, but subconsciously we think of the relations we have with it (Berger 1972, p. 9). Hence, vision and visual elements are not automatic, and they require a deeper and intimate elaboration by the viewer. Images and videos, initially, were taken to document reality – afterwards, especially with the combination of the visual and the artistic worlds it became evident that they are more than just physical representations.

In *Ways of seeing* John Berger investigates images as the embodiment of infinite ways of seeing. The author argues that when looking at an image, people are subconsciously aware that the image is a representation of the photographer’s perspective of the object; hence, an image can never be defined merely as a mechanical record (1972, p. 10). Berger further argues that visual content is more precise and faithful than written ones, because texts are not able to “offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times” (ibid, 10). Visual contents are more seductive, persuasive, powerful and have a strong impact on viewers. For this reason, they can be both “source of their own meanings”, but also “tools for manipulation” (Mitchell 2002, p. 175).

In her book, *On Photography*, Susan Sontag emphasises photography as an affective medium, and she questions how it impacts the human’s perception so intensely, as well as to what extent visibility can provoke strong emotions regardless of what it represents (1977, p. 85). She further argues there is an inseparable link between knowledge and emotion, which is demonstrated by our emotional reactions to photographs: when we gaze upon an object that we are familiar with, we are simply recalling what we have previously experienced. In this case, emotions arise from our faithful knowledge of the represented object (ibid, 174). On the other hand, when there is a lack of knowledge, and we look at something for the very first time, visibility acts as a ‘manipulator’ in a way that it controls our perceptions, in some cases to the point of deception. De facto, the link between ‘not knowing’ and visual features can influence or generate new emotions, which lead us to perceptions

that may be either far from the author's intentions, or the actual sense of the photograph (Mitchell 2002, p. 176). Sontag further argues that knowledge gained through photographs will always be linked to sentiment (1977, p. 18). Moreover, emotions of desirability are driven by distance and time – for instance, when we look at a photo of an exotic location, our desire to visit that place is activated also because it is unfamiliar. Simultaneously, photographs from the past move us because they were taken in different eras, and this activates our sense of melancholia and nostalgia for something that we will never be able to see as it was during that time period (ibid, 18).

2.2 Photography and tourism

The roots of photography are first detected in the camera obscura, a system thanks to which the images were manually engraved and reproduced (Bull 2010, p. 6). Since this process was time consuming, photography as we know it was introduced in 1839 (Manovich 1997, p. 4). At the very beginning, photographs centred on people and places, as a way of glorifying atmosphere and sensations (Bull 2010, p. 62). In the 20th century, photography focused on every object, person and location: there is no conditions on what should and should not be represented, everything is now photographable, and the world is seen as an exhibition (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 162). As a result of this tourism and photography became an intrinsic system – in Sontag's own words:

“Photography develops in tandem with one of the most characteristic of modern activities: tourism. [...]. It seems positively unnatural to travel for pleasure without taking a camera along. Photographs will offer indisputable evidence that the trip was made, that the program was carried out, that fun was had” (1977, p. 177)

Images are now an essential tool for depicting tourism experiences. They are a physical evidence that an event or trip took place (Urry 1990, p. 12). Sontag argues that taking photographs became a given activity when travelling, so much so that tourism has evolved into a strategy for the collection of photographs. Travel has become a strategy for accumulating photographs, seen as a way to transform tourism experiences into photo-memories, which may impact the tourist gaze (1977, p. 178). Moreover, the author critically states that tourists feel the need to photograph what they think is remarkable, even though they may not know what a certain place or attraction is about (ibid, 178). Photography starts to involve obligations: tourists feel the need to photograph certain places, attractions etc. What is worth seeing with our eyes, automatically become also worth photographing. The influence of tourism photography has conditioned the way in which certain places, landscapes and destinations are seen today. That explains Urry's statement which suggests that tourism became

a search for the photogenic and that travelling is a strategy for the collection of photographs (1990, p. 139). In addition, he also argues that the more photographic technologies and practices improve and develop, the more the number of sights to be photographed increase (1992, p. 180).

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes argues that a photograph represents 'what has been' and aims to visually express what it represents (2000, p. 85). Barthes supports the plurality of meanings and defines every photograph as a certificate of presence (Koike 2019, p. 9). Thus, photographs have the symbolic power to speak to the viewers by connecting with their mental representation of places. This process allows them to emotionally relive the photographed scene anytime.

In the tourism context, a photograph has this powerful role of storytelling, where it is possible to narrate a place and a site through visibility (Benjamin 2015, p. 95). According to Urry and Larsen, photography linked to tourism has become such as an essential act which has led to the accessibility of the tourist gaze (2011, p. 177). In their opinion, visiting places through photographs is as good as embodied gazing because, given their realistic trait, photos make such travelling captivating (ibid, 168). Visual contents embody and represent the world, where their senses and meanings are not fixed and depend also on the viewer and his/her interpretation (Jenkins 2003, p. 306). As a matter of fact, mass media is now influencing the development of touristic destinations through images and videos. Richard Butler argues that different forms of media are now affecting the organisation of international travels by suggesting that the influence of the literary in the establishment of tourist destinations has been replaced by visual and media practises, including photography and videography (1990, p. 47).

Moreover, Stuart Hall introduced the concept of 'circuit of culture', where the main statement is that when visual contents circulate within a culture, they also become permeated with its particular meanings, associations and values (1997, p. 2). Hence, there is a strict connection between visual representations and deep senses; this results in the connection of certain visual representations with certain meanings. In the context of tourism, the use of photography and videography is directly related to the construction of national identities and cultures. Hall further argued that things in the world do not have any fixed, final or true meanings, rather it is the society, people who give things real and sensed connotations (1997, p. 2).

The 'circle of culture' was further conceptualised by Olivia Jenkins in relation to tourism (2003, p. 308). She argued that once mass media offer images of a destination, these images may influence people to travel there. During a trip, tourists are more likely visit the main attractions and locations

that were visually offered to them by the media, and they tend to reproduce them – through photos or videos – in order to record their experience. After the trip, tourists generally show their content to others to share with them their experience; certain features are selected and recaptured, and the resulting photos and videos are show to others. At this point, there might be another form of influence by the same content and how the new individuals perceive them, which allows the cycle begins again (ibid, 308). The concept of ‘circle of culture’ is useful to explain the new approaches to tourism which arise when tourists are influenced by visual content. For instance, when tourist re-take pictures of attraction that they have already seen online, and share them on social network platforms, they are both being part of a pre-existent cycle, but, at the same time, a new one is activated. As a result, an increasing number of people is influenced to see similar tourist attractions and destinations. Simultaneously, Urry suggests that tourism involves a ‘hermeneutic circle’, where tourists on holiday pursue the aim of collecting and capturing a set of images for themselves. Before travelling, tourists consumed images through mass media, such as TV programmes; upon returning from the destination, they tend to demonstrate what they have visited and seen by showing their collection of captured content (2002, p. 129). Thus, as Larsen argues, people travel in order to see and collect for themselves what they have already seen in image form through photos and videos. Consequently, those reproductions are more important than the sight itself that is now reduced to another picture (2006, p. 249); it becomes more central to capture and have a photo of a certain attraction than to physically be there and seen it.

2.3 The tourist gaze

G a z e

To look at something or someone, especially in surprise or admiration.

[Cambridge Dictionary]

Urry’s book *The Tourist Gaze* is well-known for the concept of the tourist gaze, which is an important pillar in tourism and cultural studies as it focuses on a visual-based tourist consumption. Since the tourism sector regularly evolves and theories need to adapt to these changes, Urry published the third edition (cf. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*) in collaboration with Larsen in 2011. This book is relevant for this study because the new chapters also examine the tourist gaze in relation to photography and digitisation. Before fully exploring this topic, it is important to conceptualise the notion of the tourist gaze and its implications. According to Urry and Larsen, tourism is strictly related to the modern society, where collections of signs, as well as new social practices are enabled (2011, p. 4).

The tourist gaze explains the link between tourists and their environment, which includes visiting places, interactions with tourism providers and other people (Urry 1990, p. 97). The concept of the tourist gaze allows the understanding of how tourists see destinations, and it involves emotions and sensations, other than the mere act of seeing. Urry also claims that visual experiences are relevant for the construction of the tourist experience (ibid, p. 172). Moreover, he argues that viewing is not a straightforward process, but requires signs; hence the tourist gaze is constructed and activated through signs and associations (ibid, 172). For instance, in the authors' own words: "when tourists see two people kissing in Paris, what they capture in the gaze is timeless romantic Paris" (2011, p.4). The places gazed upon generally offer some distinctive contrasts with the everyday life. These must be spectacular, unusual and outstanding, and the process of gazing engages a greater sensitivity to visual elements. As a matter of fact, the tourist gaze engages landscapes, places and destinations which separate the gazer from the ordinary and familiar experiences (ibid).

Moreover, places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is anticipation of intense pleasures, either on a different scale than the usual, or also involving completely new and different senses. These anticipations are constructed through daydreaming and fantasy. When the gaze is visually captured it can be systematically reproduced, recaptured and redistributed. Consequently, such anticipations and visuality have the power of constructing and reinforcing the gaze (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 5). Such anticipation can also be also generated by media technologies; tourists are able to formulate expectations in their minds of what it is that they want to see. Out of these technologies, it is argued that photography is "the most important technology for developing and extending the tourist gaze" (ibid, p. 155). Hence, a photo is the material-everlasting representation of the object of the tourist gaze but also a tool to help future tourists who may seek similar locations and attractions. However, Urry and Larsen criticise those who capture images without an emotional connection, such as those tourists who take pictures of certain attractions just because they are famous (ibid, p. 18). These individuals reduce the meaning of the gaze to mere material and cause it to lose its real essence.

Nevertheless, visuality can construct and preserve the tourist gaze. Consequently, what is generally appreciated by the gazers is the representation developed from the medium of photography and not from reality. In Urry's words:

"What people 'gaze upon' are ideal representations of the view in question that they internalise from previous visual contents, and even when they cannot in fact 'see' the natural wonders in question they can still sense it, see it in their mind. And even when the

object fails to live up to its representation it is the latter which will stay in people's minds, as what they have really 'seen'" (1990, p. 86).

Hence, gazing is not only seeing, and the way one gazes upon something is not simply a reflection of what they physically see with their eyes. Rather, the whole process of the gaze implies feelings of pleasure generated by intimate interpretations (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 1). Gazing can be so defined as a central – subconscious – activity.

Urry and Larsen support this idea by stating that "one's eye is socio-culturally framed", which means that people gaze upon the world according to their personal views, which might be influenced by nationality, age, and gender, but also cultural and societal frameworks (2011, p. 2). This suggests that there is not a generic tourist gaze. Hence, as Larsen argues "there are many ways of gazing within tourism, and tourists look at 'difference' differently" (2006, p. 247). As a result, the societal aspect is very important in this context as it helps to understand how people construct the tourist gaze. What people see is selective, thus the tourist gaze is also selective. In the tourism context, this means that tourists learn to appreciate certain attractions, and to ignore others. Appreciation and displacement are mediated by routine engagement with an ever-growing number of photos and videos that have become pervasive thanks to mass media.

The role of the tourism providers – and the interaction that arise with the tourists – is also essential and extremely relevant. When it comes to travel, tourism providers are relevant to tourists in three stages – "anticipatory, experiential and reflective" – suggested by Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009, p. 25). Before the trip, the anticipatory phase is activated and the tourism providers' task is to give suggestions and information to tourists; while onsite, during the experiential phase, tourism providers do their best to make the tour enjoyable. After the trip, in the recollection phase, tourism providers gather feedback and reviews from tourist about their experience so to improve their services for others in the future.

Likewise, tourists require authenticity: during their trips they wish to experience something different, but still real and authentic (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 18). Since everything can be the object of the gaze, tourist providers have to be careful and aware that they themselves might be the object of the gaze as they are in charge of offering tourist gaze-related services. Just their presence may be seen as an added value to the tourism experience: such services require what Hochschild calls emotional work, meaning that the emotional side of the service is part of the service itself, and that to please

and seduce the consumers, especially visually, is a significant task (Cited in Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 78). Indeed, in some cases, even their appearance, gender, personality and geographical provenience may be relevant in tourism management in order to generate fair and intimate interactions that may affect tourists and their experiences. Indeed, “the more intimate the service, the greater the importance of quality for consumers” (ibid, 78). For this reason, the creation of personalised experiences increases the chance to maintain the gaze by offering personalised tourism services which meet the tourists’ needs and preferences (ibid, 88). Urry and Larsen validate the existence of different kind of gazes that may arise from different kinds of expected tourism experiences: some are attracted to the ‘collective gaze’ where there are a large number of people in big spaces, while others are attracted to the ‘romantic gaze’ in the search for “solitude, privacy and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze” (ibid, 19).

Although *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* lacks social networks analysis and how the gaze would be affected, the authors express how Internet platforms would impact the gaze (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 59). They predict that as the boundaries between tourism and everyday life are blurred, compounded by globalisation, the fall of mass media, which gave rise to social networks, would democratise the concept of the tourist gaze, where user-generated content is central. As a matter of fact, nowadays western culture is largely visual and, in the era of mass media, people’s imagination and desires can be both created and twisted by the mass media. This leads to new challenges for tourism stakeholders who need to engage new forms of communication with tourists and customers, new ways of promoting places and services, and new ways of beating their competitors (ibid, 60). Reflecting on these social and technological changes, the authors adapt and reconfigure the concept of the gaze to the modern, highly mobile ‘liquid modernity’ which has overtaken society and specifically the tourism industry. They attest that the tourist gaze is not fixed; however, it is intrinsically fixed to contemporary experiences and those experiences are changing therefore shifting the gaze (ibid, 97). The authors acknowledge that the new world order brought about by the proliferation of the Internet is rapid, ever changing, and temporary causing the gaze to be fluid and ever changing in response to society. Urry and Larsen agree that it is through these uniquely individualised social constructs which we see the world around us, and thus control our gaze (2011, p. 2). The tourist gaze is simply an extension of the gaze whereby we see, interpret, and consume the sites we visit as tourists. In this way there is no universal, static tourist gaze. The tourist gaze is always evolving, and modern society it is no longer set apart from the everyday life, but it is a part of it (Haldrup and Larsen 2009, p. 24). However, visual content available through mass media channels offer a variety of represented destinations and act as mediators of tourist experiences. Lash and Urry argue that “people are tourists

most of the time, whether they are literally mobile or only experience simulated mobility through the incredible fluidity of multiple signs and electronic images” (1994, p. 259). Moreover, Larsen highlights that “the tourist places are produced and consumed through images and representational technologies” (2006, p. 246) As a matter of fact, contemporary introduction of information and communication technologies, are now enabling people to have different tourist experiences thanks to different modes of travel, through virtual content or imagination. Ellen Strain introduces the concept of virtual gaze, where tourism and virtuality, meant as a reproduction of reality, are combined (1998, p. 150). Although Urry and Larsen do not provide enough information about the changes of ICTs and social networks on the gaze, they argue that tourism has become media-mediated, and that photography is an extension of the tourist gaze. Indeed, while Urry introduced the concept of ‘mediatised gaze’ (2002, p. 151), Larsen argues that the link between photography and the tourists is a way to make mental connections between signs and the related objects. In addition, the gaze increasingly celebrates places which are famous in media worlds, by stating that “people travel to actual places to experience virtual places” (2006, p. 247). Meaning that tourists enjoy visiting places which they have already seen thanks to mass media, such as set of movies.

2.4 Social networks and tourism

The rise of the Internet and the development of the Web 2.0 has reshaped tourism, including the way people organise and book their travels, by becoming the major information channel for the tourism sector. A statistic by Eurostat (2016) shows how 4 out of 10 Europeans look online for travel related information, and more generally, how over 1 in 3 Internet users book their travels using online services. Online-related tourism content can improve the effectiveness of management by the tourism stakeholders and affect the preferences and choices of future tourists and travellers in terms of quality and quantity. In the Web 1.0 era tourism was mostly managed by organisations and tourism stakeholders, but with the introduction of the Web 2.0 and the emergence of social networks, the online network became a more inclusive environment where users have a high chance of participation and interaction (Munar and Jacobsen 2014, p. 47). Hence, the Web 2.0 provides new services targeted to the direct participation of the users who are now able to not only to gather information, but also to create new information themselves. Information is the soul of tourism, hence the introduction of ICTs, such as social networks, brings both opportunities and challenges for the tourism sector (Buhalis 1998, p. 411).

In the last decade, social networks have become so popular because they allow users to construct a parallel digital life. In the process making of their social profile they can add their personal

information and choose the profile picture that they find more attractive. Once they become active members, they are able to make comments, follow pages, be part of certain groups, and share content with other users in their network of friends/followers. There is a divergence of opinions in the literature concerning the 'friends' element on social network. Barnes argues that some users prefer to have a network made of their real friends (2013, p. 87), but, on the other hand new connections seem to be an essential component of social networks (Ellison and Boyd 2008, p. 213). Many Facebook groups, Instagram accounts and YouTube channels committed to tourism purposes are populated by users who do not know each other. The aim of the aforementioned platforms is to reunite people with the same passion or intent of travelling, rather than making new friends as other social networks. Social network platforms also play a role in this research as they not only allow profile creation, but also the visibility of relationships between users (ibid, 214). However, social networks do not only provide networks where people can connect with their friends; it is no longer just a mere form of socialising, but it has become part of the everyday life by allowing users to become active, to produce and create rather than just consume (Hinton and Hjorth 2013, 2). In light of these assertions and for the purposes of this research, two definitions of social networks stated in the literature can be given. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein consider social networks as the innovation of Web 2.0 that allows the focus on the users, and consequently the production of user generated content (2010, p. 61). A few years later, Campbell et al. stated that the central arguments on social networks should not be around technology innovations, rather on people and the new challenges and opportunities that arise from them. People are now active, and not just passive users who only seek information. They can now create, edit, modulate this information and be central to the web (2013, p. 87). Before the rise of social networks, travellers relied entirely on travel agencies, guidebooks and print advertisements (Hays et. al 2013, p. 212), for this reason and the aforementioned changes, Stankov et al. argues that the Web 2.0 made tourism providers conscious of the importance of using social networks platform in their strategies to promote destinations (2010, p. 107).

In the tourism context, social networks are defined by Xiang and Gretzel as a "mega trend" (of the Internet) which has significantly impacted the tourism industry and changed the way the travel is first planned, and then consumed (2010, p. 179). Furthermore, Burgess et al. find in social networks useful also to motivate others to engage similar actions that future tourists may find attractive based on previous shared tourism experiences. The use of social networks in everyday life enables a participatory culture where everyone is the producer and consumer, can share and also gather ideas (2006, p. 5). As Jovicic further argues:

“The smart experience component implies technology-mediated experiences of tourists, who not only consume, but also create data that can improve the quality of experiences, e. g., by uploading photos on electronic social networks, related to a certain destination” (2017, p. 278).

All the interactions between users are based on the content that is shared on a particular social network platform. As a result, three considerations have to be made: 1. a number of users who have familiarity with these contents may arise and interact; 2. a large number of users have the power to potentially make the content viral; 3. viral content may affect users’ opinions and tourism approaches by generating different interpretations. In the digital era, tourists are so defined as ‘prosumers’ (cf. producer and consumer) and have technological tools – for instance the smartphones – to construct and socially share their experiences. In the process of constructing, smartphones are the means which mediate tourism experiences, as previously stated. On the other hand, tourism is per se a social activity, and sharing travel experiences with others is now not only a face-to-face matter, but also a more immediate and popular pursuit (Brown and Chalmers 2003, p. 240). Hence, these technologies provide new opportunities for individuals who are likely to initiate information and ideas based on globally social networks platforms in order to contribute to the circulation of new content (Burgess and Green 2018, p. 19). When the content shared is travel related the authors argue that a large number of social cues generates an electronic word-of-mouth system which is closer to the traditional word-of-mouth communication, and they consider it a crucial information source for travel planning and decision-making (ibid, 5). Since it has been proved that these digital technologies have a decisive role in mediating experiences, as they are widely adopted by users for tourism purposes. As a result, also tourism providers have to offer attractive and persuasive services and destination promotions on social networks, because the users-prosumers have become their competitors. Therefore, social network tourism accounts require frequent updates, so that users are always informed. Plus, social networks support the sharing of personal experiences with others through comments, pictures and videos, tags etc., therefore activities such as “digging” and “tagging” not only increase the users engagement, but also “create an ever-growing link structure on the Internet” (Xiang and Gretzel 2010, p. 182).

Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier highlight that tourism providers also offer images and videos to better support tourists when promoting destinations and attractions. This offers numerous messages that represent destinations, and serve as mediators of tourist experiences (2009, p. 26). Indeed, images and videos play a big role in social networks due of their visual nature: these are eye-catching and

can draw the attention of the users. As a result, both the users' engagement and the sharing practice are activated. Sharing information and visual contents on social networks about destinations and memories is becoming a big part of the enjoyment of travel. Thus, showing experiences within actual photos and videos is becoming a common habit, as well as a new way to find a place in the virtual community.

An innovation that concern digital technologies, visuality and social networks is given by Anja Dinhopf and Ulrike Gretzel and their introduction of the selfie as a tourist sight as a result of the introduction of the smartphone and front facing camera technologies (2016, p. 132). The authors state that these technologies have shifted the direction of the gaze by turning it upon the gazer, which still needs to be spectacular and remarkable in order to impress the viewers:

“Rather than fetishizing the extraordinary at the tourist destination, tourists seek to capture the extraordinary within themselves, leading them to perform in unexpected, extraordinary ways that are afforded by social (networks) and increasingly facilitated by the tourism industry. These dimensions allow for the extension and different application of the existing theoretical foundations of the tourist gaze” (2016, p. 135).

Tourism destinations remain important but is not central anymore; instead oneself is. In the visual representation of the gaze, tourists become more central than the tourist attraction. Furthermore, the authors argue that the selfies may become the touristic attractions themselves as they “are a way of touristic looking directed at the self” (ibid, 136).

The introduction and usage of visual social network in the tourism context has resulted in the creation of mediascapes defined as “the various images, sounds, and programs presented by the mass media” (Merriam-Webster).

2.5 YouTube, Facebook and Instagram: a short insight

YouTube is the first ever mass-popular platform for user-created videos created in June 2005 (Burgess and Green 2018, p. 2). As one of the most globally used social network platforms with over 2 billion monthly users (YouTube Press), it provides an environment where users can view and engage with a plethora of video content from travel videos to vloggers. It allows many users and content creators to share their digital content based on shared interests and create online identities

and is used for a variety of purposes such as professional, fandom or leisure (Burgess and Green 2018, pp. 21-22).

Launched in 2004, Facebook is the biggest social network worldwide with almost 2.5 billion monthly active users as of 2019 (Statista 2019). It offers the chance for anyone in the world to create an account and begin engaging with friends and family through their own personal profiles, where they can also create and share their own digital content (Kelsey 2010, p. 28). They allow users to be part of groups with people who share similar interests, beliefs and cultural values where they can engage in related content as well as interact with one another.

Launched in 2010, Instagram is one of the most popular social network platforms used worldwide with one billion monthly users (Statista 2018). One of the reasons for its meteoric rise in popularity among users is highlighted by Shane-Simpson et al. who argue that people prefer Instagram because of its relative novelty and its focus on visual communication, as well as its simplicity, privacy, trust, and social connections (2018, p. 284). Hence, visual content – images, videos – seems to be preferred by the social network users. At its essence, Instagram is a platform for posting pictures. One of its main features is the editing tools available to users which enable them to enhance and alter photos to their liking. Other significant features include #hashtags which are assigned to photos within their captions which allow them to be grouped with other related content that is linked to that same hashtag. In 2016 Instagram launched the Instagram Stories which let the users share real time photos and videos that vanish after 24 hours (Read 2019). Real time content have a wide role in the development of personal virtual identities; for instance, while travelling, they allow tourists to share their real time experiences. Personal online content helps the others to understand who we are and give us the opportunity to be whoever we want to be.

2.6 Interactions and participatory culture

Naomi White and Peter White argue that social interactions are central to the travel experience (2008, p. 43). Along these lines, Brown and Chalmer argue that sharing experiences with others a central and important need of tourist (2003, p. 337). Andrad and Hilary suggest that social networks have emerged as a technology with significant influence on how people communicate (Cited in Stankov et al. 2010). Social networks have a role in creating new form of sociality among tourists and future travellers as it provides the chance to gather and share travel information. Social networks are also designed to create and increase social interactions between users, who have the chance to create their own communities where the same interests are shared with other users, whether friends or strangers

(Middleton et al. 2009, p. 267). That is the case of travel groups on Facebook, where users join in order to discuss, gather information and share travel experiences. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier noted how some scholars, among who Beeton, Bowen, and Santos have argued that the tourist gaze is becoming more and more mediated and that the main character of these mediated experiences is the engagement with the others (2009, p. 25).

Social networks have been adopted by travelers to search, organise, and share travel stories and experiences – this process leads social network users to create tourism experiences accessible to everyone (Sigala et al. 2012, p. 27). On this matter, Leung et al. argues that these contents are perceived to be more trustworthy by users when compare to official information supplied by companies or agencies. This may be because the users-producers of such information are simply sharing their travel experiences and have no commercial and financial interest (2013, p. 4). De facto, marketers offer travel content to create daydreams and fantasies with the purpose to intensify consumption and promote services. However, content exposed by real travelers, which have no commercial purposes, have a strong social significance in the act of sharing, by enabling others to enjoy contents and stories from other tourists' experiences (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, p. 28). Moreover, Jacobsen and Munar emphasise that trust and influence of these users is also based on the emotional aspect which arise with the exposition and view of previous experiences (2012, p. 45). The more the content is perceived as authentic, the more users will consult them, the more they will have a great impact on their decisions. Burgess and Green further point out that the bond between the producer and the consumer is extremely relevant in the creation of trustworthy interactions (2018, p. 39). When the producers introduce themselves to the users, they are aware to be exposed, but this produces a faithful discourse where the users feel they know – and can trust – them.

With the introduction of Web 2.0, the term 'participatory culture' refers to the link between more accessible information (thanks to digital technologies) and the Internet users. The introduction of social network platforms made people aware of user-generated content – users understand their relevance in this scenario and are now aware that they themselves are the main consumers of the Web 2.0 (Barnes 2013, p. 16). The connection between social network and its users allows an endless and active participation of the users who in turn become the producers as well as the and consumers of content (Burgess and Green 2018, p. 19). If online participatory culture finds its roots in the users' activeness, it means that popularity and usage of a certain social network is very significant.

Within the tourism industry, future tourists want to know the opinion of previous travellers, and such opinions may help them decide to purchase or reject the service (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 61). Thus, shared images or videos act as mediators for the tourist experience (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, p. 26). Cultural participation practices are central because it is through participation that people give meanings to objects, activities and events; thus, those meanings are produced and exchanged during social interactions (Hall, 1997, p.3). Hall argues that every society has its own culture, hence related images, language and concept (ibid, 3). However, with the introduction of the web 2.0 and the event of global communication, these features of a certain culture can become part of other cultures and societies too.

Middleton et al. argue about the differences between travel sites and social networks. In the first case, internet users meet in forum, chat rooms, review sites etc. with the main purpose of discuss share interests. Social networks take user control a stage further allowing users to construct their own travel communities by creating and joining groups. Also, tourism providers can be part of social network interactions and create them on their own, by constructing travel communities (2009, pp. 267-268). That can be the case of tourism offices that establishes their presence on social networks through Instagram accounts, YouTube channels or Facebook pages.

2.7 Authenticity within social networks and tourism settings

YouTube, Facebook and Instagram are some of the most used social networks world-wide, and with the increasing importance of the Internet and social networks for travel purposes, the matter around where information is gathered and to what extent they are trustworthy is on the agenda. Litvin et al. detected that the word of mouth (WOM) communication as the most important information source when a consumer is making a purchase decision (2008, p. 459). When the WOM process becomes digital, new challenges arise – for instance, social networks allow users to share their content with freedom in many different ways, such as posting comments, but also images and videos (Xiang and Gretzel 2010, p. 185). However, the real challenge is not only the high number and variety of information, but also understanding how information is initiated and then circulated, and whether it is authentic and sincere. For this reason, authenticity has been analysed in length in the digital media context. With regards to the concept of authenticity, Mary Bucholtz, a scholar in socio-cultural linguistics, argues that authentication is the outcome of constant and ever negotiated social practices, and this generates authenticity as its effect (2003, p. 408). Given that social networks can be seen as social interactions, it is arguable that users feel the need to affirm themselves with the purpose of

identification and socio-cultural participation. Therefore, the shared information must be authentic and sincere – or at least, must be perceived as such if they are going to have any effect on users.

The Global Era in which we all are living generate what Nikolas Coupland calls the ‘superdiversity’ but social networks can often transcend these diversities between people by creating a community of users who interact with one another regularly, which builds trust over time and may give people a better idea of what is authentic or not (2010, p. 38). In reference to YouTube, Burgess and Green argue that is the relationships between authenticity and community to produce the real sense – the YouTubeness – of YouTube (2018, p. 44). What they mean by this is that it is not just the digital content produced by the social network platforms that makes it so popular with users, but rather something deeper that connects the users and content creators together by creating a community where people can interact with others and engage with content to create an intimate and authentic experience.

Authenticity is a key issue in the tourism context because tourists seek ever authentic experiences, as previously argued. Along these lines, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore state that nowadays authenticity is what consumers look for (2007, p. 3). The authors argue that the desire of authenticity is due to the reaction to all the mediated realities that the technology is constantly providing us. As well as this, Britta Knudsen and Anne Marit Waade consider media technologies as extremely relevant in the authenticity context as they provide representations of place which can stimulate the desire to visit a destination (2010, p. 2). In their book *Re-Investing Authenticity. Tourism, Place and Emotions*, the authors discuss the ‘New Economy’, which has developed in the last two decades and focuses on people who wish to symbolically intensify the present moments, rather than merely consuming (ibid, 4). Authenticity is here generated by intensifying the tourist experiences, but the authors also argue that this is possible whether the tourism providers invest in authenticity as a way of branding cities, destinations and places on the side of (ibid, 4). Therefore, in tourism authenticity is a feeling one can experience in relation to places.

In addition to this, Russel Belk’s theory is that tourists should not be considered as perceptive consumers, but they need to be conceptualised as individuals who are in the middle of constructing their individuality through interpretation and adaptation of symbolic meaning (cited in Bayraktar and Uslay, 2017). Places are not only budget and business, but they are also essential to the society as they embrace culture, historical heritage, inhabitant of that society. Places are now branded and objects of marketing and global economy, which means that they are potentially consumable by

tourists, so it is important to value them sufficiently and appropriately. Despite this, Knudsen and Waade mention that for that reason, places are staged and constructed, therefore the faithful perceiving of authenticity by tourists is not possible (2010, p. 6). Moreover, they mention three different kind of authenticity: 1) symbolic authenticity, when the authenticity of a tourist destination is defined in terms of how it meets the customer's ideas of what the destination has to offer and it is about; 2) iconic authenticity, based on how well the copies of a place resembles the real characteristics and how they are accurate; 3) indexical authenticity, when the object is not a copy, but the original (ibid, 7).

According to Urry tourists seek for authenticity; he further argues that who want to establish a personal and deep relationship with the object of the gaze – such as those who pursue the romantic gaze – consider the quest for authenticity as central in their travels (2002, p. 9). On the other hand, Dean MacCannell argues about the concept of 'staged authenticity' where authentic experiences are actually staged by tourism settings (1973, p. 593). He argues that tourists are fascinated with society's features, and they surely hope for authentic and real experiences, however their paths can be outlined in advance over small increments of what is for them increasingly apparent authenticity proffered by tourist settings (ibid). Therefore, while Urry and Larsen argue that everything in the world can be the object of the tourist gaze (2011, p. 32), MacCannell is against this concept of 'one accepts whatever they see', and takes this argument further by stating that the gazers know there is something hidden and substantial that goes beyond seeing (2001, p. 35). For instance, the perceived authenticity of a place does not necessary relate to the place itself, but it can comprise how this is presented and offered to the public. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier argue that tourist experiences and practices are now mediated by mobile technologies (2009, p. 35); hence the role of tourism providers is to offer authentic and sincere content, which can be perceived by tourists as a pre anticipation of future trips, and as a remainder of memories or previous experiences.

2.8 Summary chapter II

To summarise, in relation to the literature review, the key themes that were explored in this chapter were visuality and emotions, photography and tourism, the tourist gaze, and authenticity, as well as the changing approaches from tourist and tourism providers in relation to the link between social networks and tourism. Having analysed the current literature, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of visuality on social networks in the tourism context.

3 Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this project is to investigate the hypothesis that the tourist gaze can be created and consumed by images and videos developed on social networks. According to Urry and Larsen, the construction of places and objects chosen to be gazed upon is a result of any sort of emotional and visual anticipation, however the actual consuming of the gaze takes places in spatial proximity of the objects of the tourist gaze (2011, p. 19). Given this statement, my main goal is understanding whether it is possible for the tourist gaze to be virtually created and consumed on social networks, and if so, how new smart tourism approaches are created. In order to get the answers needed for resolving my research questions, I have utilised an empirical method and carried out a multi-methodological line, based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. As Creswell argued, these two methods present different strengths and weaknesses, therefore a mixture of both methods was employed in order to achieve a complete and better understanding of the topic (2014, p. 183). These comprise: a quantitative tourists' survey, three qualitative interviews with tourism providers, and one with students in the form of a photo experiment. In addition to this, observation and individual researches as a method has been applied when making considerations directly on social network platforms and accounts related to travels and tourism. Furthermore, Literature Review (Chapter II) combines theories from science and technology studies and media and marketing-communication studies to examine the relationship between the use of visual and communicative media in the online tourism context.

3.1 Ethical considerations and personal data

In October 2019, before the launching of the online survey, and the presentation of the experiment, I notified NSD, the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, of the analysis I was going to conduct. I had to send them a draft of the survey and experiment in order to make sure that they did not include IP addresses and sensitive or personal information that could potentially led to the participants' identities. Eventually, they did not. The survey was distributed online, and personal data collected are gender, age, nationality and occupation; however, since the collection of IP addresses was disabled, there was no way to relate answers to a certain respondent. Moreover, the survey was anonymous and both names and emails were never collected. The experiment was handed out on paper to the participant, which means there were no IP addresses to trace the respondents. I was not required to get parental approval to carry out the experiment since the students were older than eighteen years old and it was anonymous; only age and gender were asked but, also in this case, it was impossible to relate the answers to a certain participant. Concerning the interviews, I did not need

to file an application with NSD as no personal information, apart from the names, was revealed in the interviews. Conclusively, I will state that the privacy of each participant has been carefully respected.

3.2 Photo experiment

According to Creswell, qualitative research is best suited when “the problem needs to be explored to obtain a deeper understanding” (2012, p. 19). This method was used in order to interpret a broader meaning and findings of the matter.

The photo experiment concerns the impact of photos – edited and unedited - on people’s perceptions in terms of attraction, enjoyment and disappointment. The experiment took place at Aarhus University on the 25th of November 2019, during my 4 months visiting research scholar internship in Aarhus, Denmark. My tutor, Mette-Marie Zacher Sørensen gave me the chance to give a lecture about my thesis’ topics and my current finding at the time, and to present and conduct this experiment with her Danish bachelor’s students in Digital Aesthetics.

In order to conduct the experiment, I looked for photos representing Scandinavian cities on social networks and contacted a few photographers through Facebook and Instagram as to ask them whether I could have used their photos. Eventually, two of them – Kumaran Pondicherry and Thomas Eriksson – answered and gave me the permission to use some of their photos.

The total number of the participants is 30 (22 females and 8 males). Participants’ ages range from 19 to 24 years old, with a median age of 20 years old. All the participants come from Denmark. The purpose of this study is to understand whether photos can affect our perception of a destination, a place and/or a tourism site. Bachelor’s students at Aarhus University were shown a few photos and asked to answer according to their personal beliefs and perceptions. They all had a sheet of paper with a table on so that they could tick their answer for each question. They answered each question according to a Likert scale of 1 – 4, where 1 designates “strongly disagree”, and 4 designates “strongly agree”.

The purpose of the experiment is to understand whether edited and unedited photos could potentially affect users on social networks in terms of appreciation. A further analysis is directed to the reactions, in terms of disappointment, of participants when they are proposed inauthentic and unrealistic content.

Twelve photos previously shared on Instagram and Facebook were shown to the students. The logic behind the collocation of the photos in the physical experiment is due to the pursuit of not influencing the participants' eye. Photos number 2, 3, 5, 8 (Appendix - Tables 2.) represent the city of Bergen, while photos number 4, 6, 7, 9, 10 (Appendix - Tables 2.) represent the city of Stockholm. Moreover, photos number 1 and 11 (Appendix - Tables 2.) represent the most spectacular and famous mountain in Norway, Trolltunga, and photo number 12 (Appendix - Tables 2.) represents the Northern Lights. The first five (1-5) photos are edited and enhanced, and they were taken by a professional photographer (cf. Kumaran Pondicherry). The following five photos (6-10), on the contrary, are unedited and took by leisure photographers (cf. Thomas Eriksson).

In order to get more accurate and consistent responses, the same two questions were asked:

- a. Would you like to visit this place?
- b. Do you think this photo is a faithful representation of the represented place?

This first section of the experiment aims to analyse if edited photos have a stronger impact on participants than the unedited ones, and whether this may lead them to be influence in choosing a destination rather than different ones thanks to their photographic representation.

The last two photos (11, 12) of Trolltunga and the Northern Lights were taken by me in 2017. No filters, editing or enhancement were made. The following questions were asked respectively:

- a. Would you feel disappointed to know that the place shown in the first photo is actually like this?
- b. Would you feel disappointed to know that an unedited photo of the Northern Lights is actually like this?

This second sections of the experiment aims to analyse a direct reaction of the participants when they are proposed the real and sincere representation of previous inauthentic and unrealistic content.

3.3 Online survey

Surveys – as quantitative methods – are effective as they gather a large amount of data in a short time (Creswell 2014, p. 185). This method helped me to investigate significantly and indirectly attitudes and opinions of tourists and social network users, that I could have not observed directly.

In order to develop this survey, I used SurveyXact, a Scandinavia leading tool for creating questionnaire-based surveys. Thanks to the affiliation of the platform with the University of Bergen (UiB), I had the chance to insert as many questions as I needed and used the layout I preferred. Once the survey was fully completed, I used the option to create a hyperlink as a method of distribution. I personally shared the link on four few Facebook groups related to tourism.

The survey opened for respondents on the 3rd of November 2019 and closed on the 12th of February 2020. The total number of respondents was 378 (243 females, 132 males, and 3 transgender males). The age of the respondents ranges from 18 to 60 > years old, with a median age of respondents between 18 and 29 years old (n = 255).

The overall purpose of this study is to examine how tourists use and share visual content on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube in the three phases of a trip: 1) before the trip in order to gather information, 2) during the trip, when they share content on real-time basis, 3) after the trip, when they share past experiences and take on the function of informants concerning destinations and attractions.

Beginning with the assertion that social networks can develop a new form of smart tourism where users become both tourists and tourism providers, the aim of this survey is understanding how relevant social networks are in affecting people's opinions and personal choices, create travel expectations, and eventually generate a virtual tourist gaze. Moreover, this survey attempts to capture the impact of social networks on the experience of travelling, therefore the actual destinations and the reasons of travelling were not recorded as they are not relevant in helping to answer the research question.

The survey was comprised of 6 sections and 22 questions using a Likert scale and multi-answers methodology. Section 1 comprised four demographical questions. Section 2 comprised three questions concerning their travel habit, and the use of social networks before, during and after travelling. Section 3, 4 and 5 comprised four questions each about the use of YouTube, Facebook and Instagram for traveling purposes. Section 6 comprised six questions on data privacy and influence of social networks. See Appendix 4. for the full survey.

Overall, the participants were asked questions about their usage of social networks for travelling purpose in relation to visual content, meaning, for instance, their habits of taking photos with the intention of sharing them on social platforms or whether sharing visual content takes more place than sharing written content (e.g. status on Facebook). Moreover, the travellers were asked in what measure they use the selected social networks before, during and after travelling. Indeed, they were asked about possible contributions of previous and existent content on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube about their holiday tour, meaning whether they were useful in the organisation process of their holidays themselves. On the other hand, it was indispensable to ask them whether they share their travel content after a trip, as this action could arise in a sort of board diary accessible to every

user who is able to gather information and take inspiration from them for their future trips. Other questions included the use of location settings and whether users are aware that location data is generally active when is on, the presence of travel adverts on social networks account related to a destination after having looked for flights or hotels, the influence to prefer one destination/attraction over other ones and therefore the organisation of a trip there caused by related visual content.

I carried out my analysis by reporting and analysing the most significant results from each question while where appropriate linking the findings back to existing literature, as well as using the results to help me answer the research questions. Furthermore, I carried out a cross analysis on some of the questions, allowing me to more closely analyse the respondents' behaviour towards social networks in general and when using them for travelling purposes.

3.4 Case studies and observations

While the previous methods were focused on tourists, the three case studies analysed aim to analyse new tourism approaches by tourism providers and new form of tourism interactions that arises on social network platforms. In order to carry out this method, a non-participant observation was chosen for the research, meaning that I did not directly participate in any of social media interactions, but I took notes over time of what was happening on the different platforms.

I investigated the impact of touristic Instagram pages on users through observations., where I focused on the Scandinavia area, focuses specifically on the Norwegian official tourism account on Instagram: @visitnorway. I analysed how it uses Instagram to share and narrate places, as well as create connections among users and others related accounts. The main purpose was to understand the account use visual content to share information about Norway and its cities, and how the engagement of users is strongly emphasised. Furthermore, the case of the Norwegian mountain Trolltunga was briefly considered and analysed as it is now one of the Norway's social networks hot spots.

Il Mio Viaggio a New York is the number one Italian tour operator in New York. The founder, Piero Armenti, built his online presence through a Facebook page with over one million of followers, an Instagram account and a YouTube channel. As he argues, his purpose on social networks is to show the city of New York and its hidden gems by sharing videos in which he goes around the city to narrate what he sees. I analyse specifically the YouTube channel and observe what kind of videos are posted on the channel as well as what they represent and how users engage with him and other users via the comments section.

For these two initial case studies, I also combined email interviews (3.5 below) with the findings in order to present a broader picture of the significance of the findings.

Travel Insider Bucket List is one of the most popular travel group on Facebook, where Members post about travel stories, but mostly they share photos and videos from their travels. This group is a great example of the use of Facebook for gathering travel information and was used for observations concerning whether users find useful travel photos and videos to gather information about destinations. For this reason, I made a Facebook post where I asked to the members:

- Have you ever been influenced to prefer one destination/attraction over another one after seeing related photos/videos on social networks?

This question was also asked in the online survey in a multi answer question. In this way, I also had the chance to receive a direct answer to the aforementioned survey-question.

3.5 E-mail interviews

On the 9th of October 2019, I participated in the conference *Tomorrow's Urban Travel* hosted by Wonderful Copenhagen, the official tourism organisation for Copenhagen, Denmark. The conference theme was urban tourism and new ways in which tourism industry will develop in the years to come. I had the chance to meet many employees at the official tourism offices in Scandinavia, such as Tina Estreich Steiwer working for Wonderful Copenhagen and Anna Johansson working for Malmö Tourism. After the conferences, I sent them a series of open questions about the tourism in their cities, and the use of social networks that their company do in other to promote their destination and help tourists. The two interviews were conducted through the months of October and November 2019. I sent my questions at the end of October, and received the answers from Steiwer the 6th of November, and from Johansson the 22nd of November. The two interviews comprised 15 open-ended questions, and both the interviewed received the same questions so that I was able make comparisons between statements across interview sessions. Section (Appendix 1.1) comprised 10 questions about the use of social networks to influence further tourist experience, the effectiveness of visual content over articles and so on, and the strategies their companies used in order to promote their city as a tourism destination brand. Moreover, a question on the relations between their tourist information office and other Scandinavian ones was added, in other to understand whether there is any sort of collaboration. These two interviews add contributions to the observation I did on the official accounts on Instagram (5.1).

In February 2020 I contacted Piero Armenti through the Facebook account “*Il Mio Viaggio a New York*”, and he agreed on answering a few questions. At the beginning of March 2020, I sent 5 open-ended questions to his personal email, and he answered two weeks later. The questions (Appendix 1.2) were about his strategy of storytelling via videos shared on Facebook, and his point of view on how social networks are changing traditional tourism.

This method was used to complete the online survey and case studies to better investigate case studies in order to make these last more complete. My opinion is that receiving answers from those who work directly in the tourism sector gives a great overview on the topic of this study.

3.6 Justifications for research project

This project has two main foci: first, the experience of individuals, their active role on social networks and the way they use this tool to gather travel information and share their content. Second, the role of tourism providers in producing online content for tourists. This choice is due to the fact that both tourists and tourism provider contribute to the technological development and changing of tourism. Therefore, in order to understand how social networks are changing tourism and creating new ways of doing tourism, both of them require the same consideration.

Despite the great amount of research on tourism and social networks, many of them are mostly marketing and business based with a focus on tourism business development and marketing strategies behind the tourist decision-making. The aim of my research is to show how the creation of an environment in which people and technology coexists and support each other can be valuable for tourism and tourists. Since there is not much literature review on this frame of reference, the choice of empirical methods seems to be the most suitable to better carry out my project.

3.7 Summary chapter III

To summarise, the methodology chosen to answer my research question employs a variety of approaches from empirical research, where I use methods such as a photo experiment, an online survey, four case studies, observations and three email-interviews. The result is multi-methodological approach is that it allows me to take advantage of the different strengths that quantitative and qualitative methods can provide. As a result, this can provide me with a broader and more detailed insight into the aim of the study.

4 Chapter IV: Empirical research and findings

This chapter focuses on the results – and their findings – of empirical research aiming to demonstrate and answer the research questions of the thesis. The chapter comprises a photo experiment and an online survey: the photo experiment was conducted at Aarhus University in November 2019; the online survey was distributed online via Facebook. The data is included in the research report in order to allow fellow researchers and others to check the validity of the findings.

4.1 Photo experiment

This experiment took place at Aarhus University on the 25th of November 2019 and examined the impact of photos – edited and unedited - on participants' perceptions in terms of tourist location attraction and whether they feel pleasure or let down when looking at the images.

Twelve photos (Appendix - Table 2.) were shown to the students:

- Photos 2, 3, 5, 8 represent the city of Bergen;
- Photos 4, 6, 7, 9, 10 represent the city of Stockholm;
- Photos 1 and 11 represent the mountain of Trolltunga;
- Photo 12 represents the Northern Lights.

The experiment has three different aims:

- 1) To determine to what effect edited and unedited photos have on participants' travel decision making. The question was asked: "Would you like to visit this place?".
- 2) To determine to what extent participants are able to identify accurate content. The question was asked: "Do you think this photo is a faithful representation of the place in the image?".
- 3) To determine to whether participants feel let down upon learning that photos on social networks may differ from the reality. The following questions were asked:
 - a. "Would you feel disappointed to know that the place shown in the first photo is actually like this?"
 - b. "Would you feel disappointed to know that an unedited photo of the Northern Lights is actually like this?"

Overall, the purpose of the experiment is to understand what expectations and anticipations can be generated by photos shared on social networks, and ultimately whether can they contribute to the creation of social tourist gazes.

4.1.1 Experiment results

A total number of 30 individuals participated in the experiment, aging from 19 to 24 years, with a median age of 20 years. There were a higher number of female participants (n=22) than male participants (n=8). Due to the low number of participants there was not enough responses to achieve statistically significant results for a cross gender analysis. Therefore, I analysed the data as a whole. All the participants were Danish citizens and bachelor's students in Digital Aesthetics at Aarhus University. No further personal questions were asked and taken into analysis.

4.1.2 Edited Photos results

All 30 participants were shown five edited photos (numbers 1 through to 5 in Table 2.) of the aforementioned locations and asked if they would have liked to visit the place represented, and if they identify the image as an accurate content.

Photo 1 (Appendix - Table 2.):

- Out of the 30 participants, 90% participants (n=27) showed interest in visiting the specified location, whereas 10% participants (n=3) were uninterested.
- Out of the 30 participants, 30% participants (n=9) considered the image to be a faithful representation of the location, whereas 70% participants (n=21) did not.

Photo 2 (Table 2.):

- Out of the 30 participants, 77% participants (n=23) showed interest in visiting the specified location, whereas 23% participants (n=7) were uninterested.
- Out of the 30 participants, 50% participants (n=15) considered the image to be a faithful representation of the location, whereas 50% participants (n=15) did not.

Photo 3 (Table 2.):

- Out of the 30 participants, 77% participants (n=23) showed interest in visiting the specified location, whereas 23% participants (n=7) were uninterested.
- Out of the 30 participants, 33% participants (n=10) considered the image to be a faithful representation of the location, whereas 67% participants (n=20) did not.

Photo 4 (Table 2.):

- Out of the 30 participants, 93% participants (n=28) showed interest in visiting the specified location, whereas 7% participants (n=2) were uninterested.

- Out of the 30 participants, 63% participants (n=19) considered the image to be a faithful representation of the location, whereas 37% participants (n=11) did not.

Photo 5 (Table 2.):

- Out of the 30 participants, 73% participants (n=22) showed interest in visiting the specified location, whereas 27% participants (n=8) were uninterested.
- Out of the 30 participants, 57% participants (n=17) considered the image to be a faithful representation of the location, whereas 47% participants (n=13) did not.

The results show how that the majority (82%) of the participants agree on wanting to visit the places depicted. On the other hand, the results regarding the faithful representations show some discrepancies. Most of the participants (54%) correctly identified that photos 1,3 and 5 (Table 2.) do not represent faithful representations. However, more than half of the participants did not realise that Photo 4 and Photo 5 (Table 2.) were modified photos (63% and 57% respectively), and exactly half of the participants realised that Photo 2 (Table 2.) was a modified photo, while the other 50% did not.

4.1.3 Unedited Photos results

All 30 participants were shown five unedited photos (numbers 6 through to 10 in Table 2) of the aforementioned locations and asked if they would have liked to visit the place represented, and if they identify the image as an accurate content.

Photo 6 (Appendix - Table 2.):

- Out of the 30 participants, 47% participants (n=14) showed interest in visiting the specified location, whereas 53% participants (n=16) were uninterested.
- Out of the 30 participants, 90% participants (n=27) considered the image to be a faithful representation of the location, whereas 10% participants (n=3) did not.

Photo 7 (Table 2.):

- Out of the 30 participants, 87% participants (n=26) showed interest in visiting the specified location, whereas 13% participants (n=4) were uninterested.
- Out of the 30 participants, 87% participants (n=26) considered the image to be a faithful representation of the location, whereas 13% participants (n=4) did not.

Photo 8 (Table 2.):

- Out of the 30 participants, 83% participants (n=25) showed interest in visiting the specified location, whereas 17% participants (n=5) were uninterested.
- Out of the 30 participants, 40% participants (n=12) considered the image to be a faithful representation of the location, whereas 60% participants (n=18) did not.

Photo 9 (Table 2.):

- Out of the 30 participants, 63% participants (n=19) showed interest in visiting the specified location, whereas 37% participants (n=11) were uninterested.
- Out of the 30 participants, 87% participants (n=26) considered the image to be a faithful representation of the location, whereas 13% participants (n=4) did not.

Photo 10 (Table 2.):

- Out of the 30 participants, 47% participants (n=14) showed interest in visiting the specified location, whereas 53% participants (n=16) were uninterested.
- Out of the 30 participants, 77% participants (n=23) considered the image to be a faithful representation of the location, whereas 23% participants (n=7) did not.

Overall, the results related to unedited photos show that the participants would still like to visit the represented places. Photo 10 (Table 2.) seems to be the one that participants (47%) would visit the least. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that the colours are dark and could be unappealing to the eyes. This suggests that photos can influence a person's idea of a location. In line with this, all participants agree on the accurate feature of all photos, except for Photo 8 (Table 2.) where the majority of participants (60%) have selected that it is a false representation, but it is not.

4.1.4 Comparison between edited and unedited photos

Table 1. below shows the comparison between the number of participants interested and uninterested in visiting the locations depicted in edited and unedited photos.

	Number of interested participants					Number of uninterested participants				
	Ph. 1	Ph. 2	Ph. 3	Ph. 4	Ph. 5	Ph. 1	Ph. 2	Ph. 3	Ph. 4	Ph. 5
Edited	27	23	23	28	22	3	7	7	2	8
	Ph. 6	Ph. 7	Ph. 8	Ph. 9	Ph. 10	Ph. 6	Ph. 7	Ph. 8	Ph. 9	Ph. 10
Unedited	14	26	25	19	14	16	4	5	11	16

Table 1. Interest in visiting locations in edited and unedited photos

The results suggest that the participants are mostly likely to visit the places represented by the edited photos. However, the results of the edited and unedited photos are very close to each other, therefore there is not a big difference in terms of appeal between them.

Table 2. below shows the comparison between the number of participants who agree and disagree in regard to whether edited and unedited photos comprise accurate representation of the locations depicted.

	Number of participants who agree					Number of participants who disagree				
	Ph. 1	Ph. 2	Ph. 3	Ph. 4	Ph. 5	Ph. 1	Ph. 2	Ph. 3	Ph. 4	Ph. 5
Edited	9	15	10	19	17	21	15	20	11	13
	Ph. 6	Ph. 7	Ph. 8	Ph. 9	Ph. 10	Ph. 6	Ph. 7	Ph. 8	Ph. 9	Ph. 10
Unedited	27	26	12	26	23	3	4	18	4	7

Table 2. Agreement in accurate representation of content in edited and unedited photos

In terms of faithful representations, surprisingly the results are not as expected. For instance, as argued Photo 8 (Appendix-Table 2.) was mostly considered a not faithful representations by participants, but this is actually an accurate content. At the same time, Photo 4 and Photo 5 (Appendix-Table 2.) were considered as a faithful representation, when the mentioned are actually edited photos.

4.1.5 Northern Lights photo results

Northern Lights photo is number 12 (Appendix - Table 2.). This photo is unedited, and the participants were asked if they were disappointed to know that photos of Northern Lights shared on social networks accounts are not always a true representation of reality.



Figure 1. unedited photo of Northern Lights

Out of the 30 participants, 33% participants (n=10) were disappointed, while 67% participants (n=20) were unconcerned.

Overall, the majority (67%) of the participants were unconcerned with the editing/un-editing of the photos, showing that Northern Lights are a symbol and a tourist mediascape. Thus, it is irrelevant whether the photo is enhanced or not, simply that it shows the Northern Lights.

4.1.6 Trolltunga photos' results and comparisons

Photo 1 and Photo 11 (Table 2.) show images of Trolltunga, one of the most famous mountains and tourist attractions in Norway. Photo 1 is edited, while Photo 11 is unedited.



Figure 2. edited photo of Trolltunga



Figure 3. unedited photo of Trolltunga

Out of the 30 participants who were shown Photo 1, 90% participants (n=27) would like to visit Trolltunga, whereas 10% participants (n=3) are uninterested.

Out of 30 participants who were asked if Photo 1 is a faithful representation, 30% participants (n=9) agree, while 70% participants (n=21) disagree. Photo 1 is actually edited, but the results show how some of the participants (30%) have considered it as a faithful representation of the represented place.

Furthermore, after being shown the edited image of Trolltunga, Photo 1, the participants were later shown Photo 11, an unedited image of Trolltunga. They were then asked whether they were disappointed by the discrepancies between the two images. Out of the 30 participants, 70% participants (n=21) showed disappointment, while 30% participants (n=9) did not.

	Faithful representation Photo 1		Disappointment Photo 11	
Number	9	21	21	9
View	Agreed	Disagreed	Concerned	Unconcerned

Table 3. Results photo experiment Trolltunga

4.1.7 Overall findings

Overall, the experiment shows that the results obtained from the edited and unedited photos were comparable. In addition, the concern regarding the faithful representations of tourist sites, is not a major element. A consideration is that perhaps nowadays people are aware of edited photos and enhanced reality. However, the Northern Lights photo shows that the experience itself is what matters and argues that the introduction of social network in the tourism context has resulted in the creation of ‘tourist mediascapes’, where images presented by the mass media become a living embodiment of countries and cities. The participants were unconcerned when shown the unedited photo of the Northern lights, which leads to the belief that the desire to see the Northern Lights is the main concern. Experiencing the Northern Lights is more than just a visual experience, but also an emotional one. It takes a physical as well as an emotional presence to really take it all in. This might explain the low level of concern of the participants. Therefore, this suggests that experiencing the northern lights is satisfactory to tourists, regardless of whether they meet the visual standards of images on social networks.

In agreement with Knudsen and Waade, people are conscious that tourist places are often staged and constructed, hence it may be hard for them to understand whether they are really accurate or not

(2010, p. 6). This is further suggested by the results of the experiment, where some of the participants were not able to always identify accurate and inaccurate content regarding some of the depicted locations. However, images may have generated one of the authenticities that Knudsen and Waade argue about (ibid, p. 7). Some of the participants may have perceived symbolic ‘authenticity’ if some of the photos have met their ideas of what the destination is about; for instance, Photo 4, over all the others, indicates that the majority of participants (93%) would like to visit the depicted location. The image represents Bryggen, the historic harbour district in Bergen and UNESCO World Heritage Centre. As one of the most famous attractions in Norway, this leads to the consideration that this high number is due to the popularity of the place depicted, and to its symbolic feature which meet the participants’ ideas.

Moreover, Barthes argues that photographs embody symbolic power to the viewers by acting on associations of signs with their mental representation of places (2000, p.86). In result, this process allows viewers to emotionally relive the object of the image anytime; hence, some participants may have been to some of the locations depicted and relived their previous tourist experiences. This led them to answer positively or negatively to whether they would have liked to visit those locations. As well as this, Mitchell highlights a further impact of visual content, arguing that they are more seductive and enticing, which can significantly impact the viewers, however he is quick to point out that they can often become “tools for manipulation” (2002, p. 175), as seen in the case of edited photos in the photo experiment, where if a user is not aware that a certain image of a destination is edited or enhanced, it can manipulate them into thinking that this is how the destination actually appears in real life, therefore potentially affecting their travel decision making in a deceptive way.

4.2 Online Survey

This study is being conducted online and developed through Facebook groups related to tourism in Scandinavia, such as Tourism in Norway. The survey was open for respondents on the 3rd of November 2019 and closed for respondents on the 12th of February 2020. The total number of respondents to the survey was 378. The overall purpose of this study is to examine Facebook, Instagram and YouTube users' behaviours in the digital and smart tourism context in order to understand how the aforementioned social networks platforms is affecting users' opinions and personal choices.

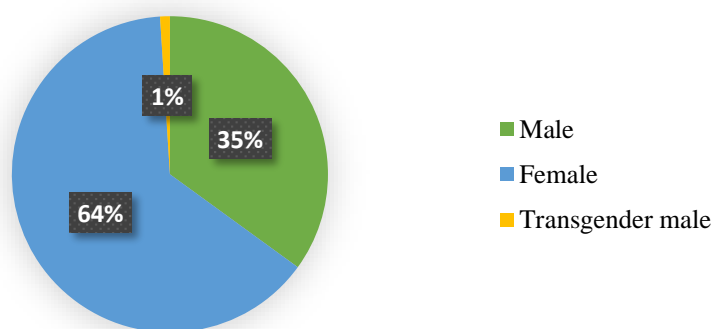
4.2.1 Demographic results

An important factor in determining the reliability of the data I have collected through the surveys is assessing how statistically relevant it is. From the graph below (figure 4 below) showing the age breakdown of respondents, 68% of the respondents were aged between 18 – 29, 19% were aged between 30-45, 11% were between 46 – 60 while only 2% were above the age of 60. This demographic representation is important to consider since according to the 2020 Social Media Demographics Guide, most people that use social networks are aged between 18-29, with 86% of internet users within this demographic using Facebook, 67% using Instagram and 81% using YouTube. Comparatively only around half of internet users (51%) aged between 50-65 use Facebook, while only 23% of internet users within this demographic use Instagram. While the number of total respondents in the survey (378) is not enough to be statistically significant, the results do go some way in allowing me to draw suggestions from them, since the 18-29 years old demographic is well represented in the sample (68%) and the main group from whom I would like to draw conclusions from since they are likely to be the most active social networks users from the sample, compared to those aged 46 and over who form only 13% of the entire sample and are less likely to generate statistically relevant results.

Age 18 – 29	255 respondents	% n = 68
Age 30 – 45	73 respondents	% n = 19
Age 46 – 60	43 respondents	% n = 11
Age 60 >	7 respondents	% n = 2

Figure 4. Age results of online survey

As well as the age breakdown of the respondents being consistent with social networks' demographics, from the graph below (Figure 5 below) showing the gender breakdown of the respondents, it can be observed that 64% of overall respondents were female and 35 % were male, which correlates closely with data showing that predominantly females use social networks compared to males, with 54% and 51% of Facebook and Instagram users respectively being female, as well as over 50% of YouTube users. While the proportion of females is slightly bigger in the sample at 64%, the results still does go some way in providing some statistical relevance to the sample by correlating with social demographic data and therefore enables me to draw some suggestions from.



Male	n = 132
Female	n = 243
Transgender male	n = 3

Figure 5. Gender results in online survey

In terms of the geographical locations of the respondents, as shown in figure 3 below, the majority of respondents come from Europe with a combined total of 294 (78%) respondents representing this continent. More specifically, the majority come from southern Europe (166 or 44%) which include countries such as Italy, Spain and Greece, while the second highest respondents come from Northern Europe (109 or 29%) which encompasses countries such as the UK, Scandinavia and Germany. The remaining European respondents come from Eastern Europe (31 or 8%) comprising countries such as Hungary and Russia. The next highest number of respondents are from Asia, forming 9% (33) of the overall respondents while North America in total represents 6% (23) of the sample. The remainder of the sample is from respondents from the remaining key continents: Africa (2% or 6), South America (8 or 2%) and Australia (2 or 1 %).

The next question of the survey identified the occupation of the respondents, giving a range of options to choose from (Appendix – Table 1.). Most of the sample were either employed for wages or a student, with nearly half (47%) currently studying while a sizeable 36 % were employed for wages. The third most common occupation was self-employed, (8%) while the remaining 9% consisted of either people who were out of work, retired or in trainee positions.

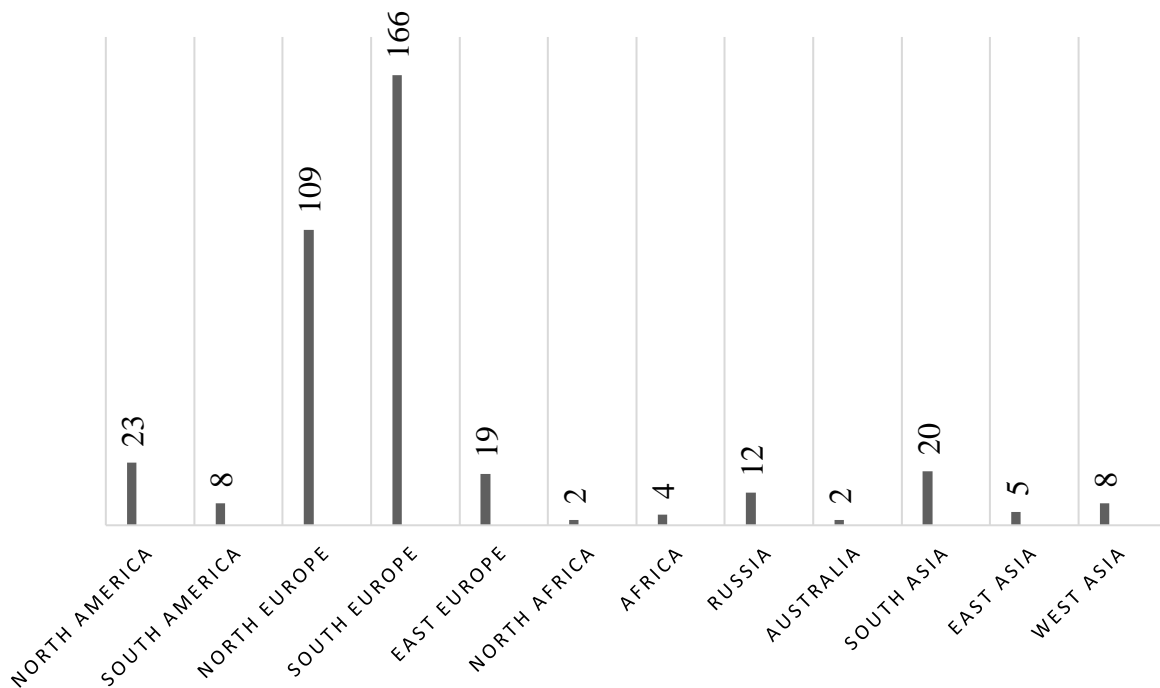


Figure 6. Nationality results in online survey

4.2.2 Travel habits and social networks’ results and findings

After this the respondents were asked on average how many times, they travel each year within a given range, as shown in Figure 7 below. The average amount that the sample travelled each year was 2.5 times, while the most common overall answer was 1-3 times, with 57% of the sample falling within this range. The second most common response was 4-6 times (27%) while around 12% travelled more 7 times or more and only 4% not travelling at all.

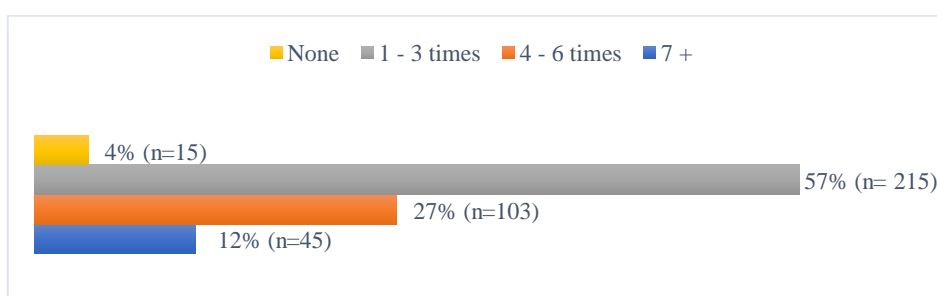


Figure 7. How many times respondents travel each year

When comparing the relationship between the respondents' occupation and how many times they travel each year, as shown in Figure 8 below, it shows that 66 % of students (the most common occupation) travelled between 1-3 times each year and 23 % between 4-6 times. Meanwhile around 7% of the students travelled 7 times or more, while only 4% did not travel at all. Comparatively 42 % of those employed for wages (the second most common occupation) travelled between 1- 3 times and 41 % travelled between 4-6 times, while 15 % travelled 7 times or more and only 2 % did not travel at all. These results suggest that while students may have more freedom to travel given the free time they have available during the holiday periods in between study semesters and academic years, they do not necessarily use this time to travel extensively and go on trips, which could be due to financial constraints which does not give them as much financial freedom as a student compared to those employed for wages. While many students in the sample did travel, the majority (66%) only did between 1 – 3 times, while a higher percentage of those employed for wages on the other hand travelled more frequently, with 41% taking trips between 4- 6 times and 15 % travelling 7 times or more. This could therefore suggest that those who take more trips do so because of the extra financial freedom they have as a result of being in full time work, which is further suggested through 16 % of those self-employed travelling 7 times or more compared to 7% of students, which could potentially be explained by the financial freedom and flexibility that is afforded by being self-employed and working to their own schedule. While the purpose of travelling in some cases may have been attributed to work, which may indicate why 100% of those from the sample that were in the military travelled 7 times or more, the results do suggest that in general a combination of financial freedom and amount of free time influence how many times people travel each year.

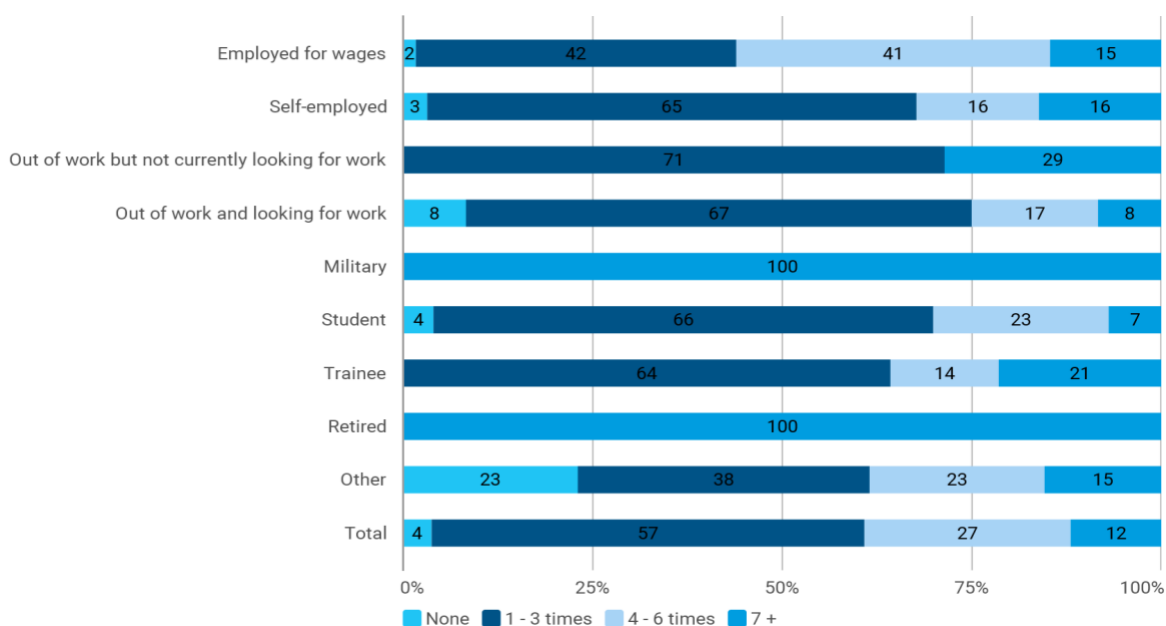


Figure 8. Relationship between the occupation of respondents and how often they travel each year

The next question explored what social networks platforms respondents typically use and whether they use any of them for travelling purposes. From the results (Figure 9 below) it was found that the most common social networks platform was Facebook, with 92 % using it, which is consistent with statistics from Statista 2019, showing it remains the most popular social networks site with 2.45 billion users each month. The second most popular site was Instagram with 79 % using it while around 72 % of the sample used YouTube. As can be seen in figure 4, from those who used Instagram, 70 % of respondents also used it for travel purposes, while only 39 % from those using YouTube also used it for travel purposes and 59 % of those using Facebook did so also for travelling purposes. More specifically, of those who used Instagram in general, around three quarters also used YouTube and 93% also used Facebook. Of those who used YouTube, 84% also used Instagram and 95% used Facebook. Lastly, from those who used Facebook, 80% also used Instagram and nearly 75% used YouTube. While these results do not directly help answer the research questions, they do help offer some insight into the popularity of and correlation between each of the social networks platforms. For example the majority of those using Instagram are also using Facebook (93%) which could be due to the fact that Facebook was launched first and was the original social networks site to offer the chance to engage with users, friends and upload digital content and therefore many Instagram users already used it, but could also be due to the integrated services they offer as a result of Facebook acquiring Instagram in 2012, making it easier to link one's Instagram account to their Facebook account. Furthermore, since 80 % of respondents who used Facebook also used Instagram, compared to a slightly lower 75 % also using YouTube, it could also suggest that although visuality and the ability to upload digital content is an important factor in the popularity of social networks, above all it is the participative culture that Facebook and Instagram offer and something deeper that connects the users and content creators together by creating a community where people can interact with others and engage with content as well as feel part of closely integrated community, as suggested by Burgess and Green (2018, p. 19). This is also suggested with 95% of those who used YouTube also using Facebook compared to only 80 % that also used Instagram, which could be explained by the ease at which you can share the visual contents from YouTube onto Facebook but not on Instagram, suggesting it is not the content of the visual contents themselves users value most but the ability to then share the contents with other users and friends who they can then engage with.

Overall, it is evident Facebook remains the most popular social networks site, followed by Instagram and then YouTube. The participatory culture that is so important in today's era as mentioned by Burgess and Green and that Facebook have been able cultivate for so long (through the ease at which users can interact with other users, friends and digital content and be part of groups representing

similar interests to theirs) could be down to why it remains so popular, as well as because it is the oldest platform out of all of them and so likely attracts a broader age demographic (2018, p. 23).

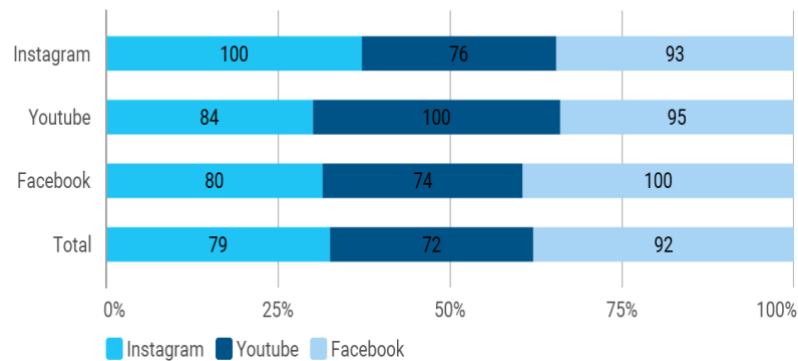


Figure 9. Social networks usage

Figure 10 below represents a breakdown showing what percentage of respondents that use the respective social networks platforms use it for travelling purposes as one of the reasons. This can involve any activity such as collecting information about a destination before a trip through videos and reviews from other friends and users, following travel related Facebook groups or uploading digital content such as photos from a recent trip onto their personal profile. As seen below (see figure 8) it shows that of the people that use Instagram, 82% use it for travelling purposes, while around three quarters using YouTube use it for travel purposes. The highest proportion was Facebook, with the majority (93%) that use the platform using it for travelling purposes as one of the reasons. This further suggests that Facebook remains the most popular site not only for general use but also for travelling purposes, with users possibly valuing the various features such as the sense of community and collective identity gained by being part of travel related groups and being able to upload digital content easily for others to engage with. Together with Instagram they form the most popular sites that are used for travelling purposes in the survey which suggests they are the most effective in communicating and sharing travel-related information which generates an electronic word of mouth system as suggested by Munar and Jacobsen, which users now consider a crucial information source for travel planning and decision-making (2014, p. 47).

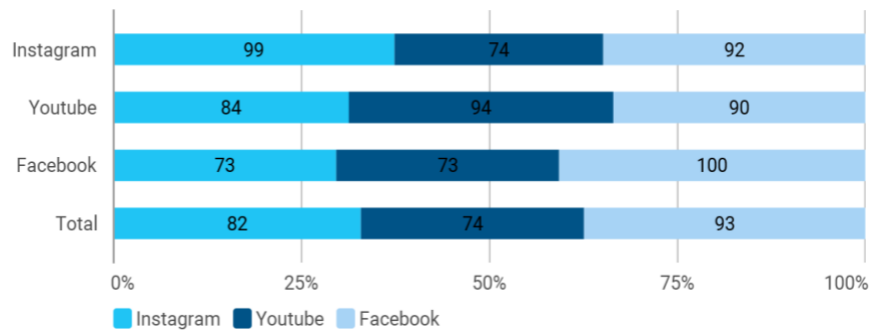


Figure 10. Relationship between general social network use and use for travelling purposes

Figure 11 below shows the correlation between using a certain social networks site for travel purposes and seeing what proportion of those respondents also use the other sites for travel purposes. Of the respondents that used Instagram for travel purposes, only half used Facebook for it while just over a third used YouTube for it. Similarly, for those that used Facebook for travel purposes, only 35 % used YouTube and 60 % also used Instagram. Of those that used YouTube for travelling purposes, a sizeable 65% also used Instagram and 57% used Facebook, suggesting that regardless of the value YouTube provides regarding travel, users still value similar content on Instagram and Facebook. Overall it is evident that both Facebook and YouTube users value the benefits provided by Instagram when using it for travel purposes, which could be because of the preference of many users to upload and enhance digital contents such as photos through features such as filters which Facebook and YouTube do not offer, as well as the ability to share real time contents which can play a wide role in the development of personal virtual identities (Read 2019), especially while travelling, allowing tourists to share their real time experiences so everybody can see what they are doing.

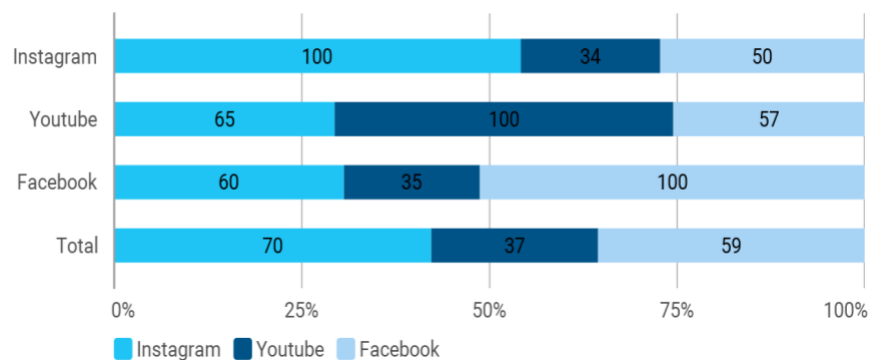


Figure 11. Use of social networks for travelling purposes

The next question explored how often the respondents took photos and videos when travelling. From the graph below (Figure 12 below) a sizeable 56% of respondents stated that they always took photos and videos while travelling, while a quarter stated they usually did and 13% sometimes did. Overall

98 % of respondents took photos or videos in some capacity, even if it was rarely (4%). Of those who used social networks for travelling purposes, 60% always took photos and videos while travelling (Figure 13 below) and 23% who used social networks for travelling purposes usually took photos and videos, which suggests a strong correlation between those that use social networks for travelling purposes and those that frequently take photos and videos while travelling, highlighting the desire for people travelling to upload the digital contents of their trip onto social networks for users to interact and engage with as suggested by Munar and Jacobsen (2012, p. 45). It also supports Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier view that sharing information and visual contents on social networks about destinations, new places and memories is becoming a big part of the enjoyment of travel (2009, p. 35), as well as provide visual proof the trip took place as mentioned by Susan Sontag who argued that photographs offer indisputable evidence that the trip was made and that for many tourism has evolved into a strategy for the collection of photographs, seen as a way to transform tourism experiences into photo-memories (1977, p. 18). While her argument was made before the emergence of social networks platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, they remain just as relevant today, with people who travel still using it as a strategy to collect photographs of their experiences, but now having social platforms they can display their photos that offers others the chance to interact and engage with. This supports the argument that visuality on social networks is creating new tourism approaches by creating an online community that offers users increasingly new ways to gather and create information on touristic destinations to make informed travel decisions, replacing the conventional word of mouth communication with an electronic word of mouth system as suggested by (Xiang and Gretzel 2010, p. 185). Furthermore it highlights the emergence of Web 2.0 where users are now not only able to gather information but create the information themselves as they become “prosumers” as opposed to just consumers (Buhalis 1998, p. 411) who are now able to contribute greatly to the tourism industry through the dissemination of tourism destinations and experiences across the world which can serve to “motivate others to engage similar actions that future tourists may find attractive based on previous shared tourism experiences” as argued by Burgess et al. (2006, p. 5).

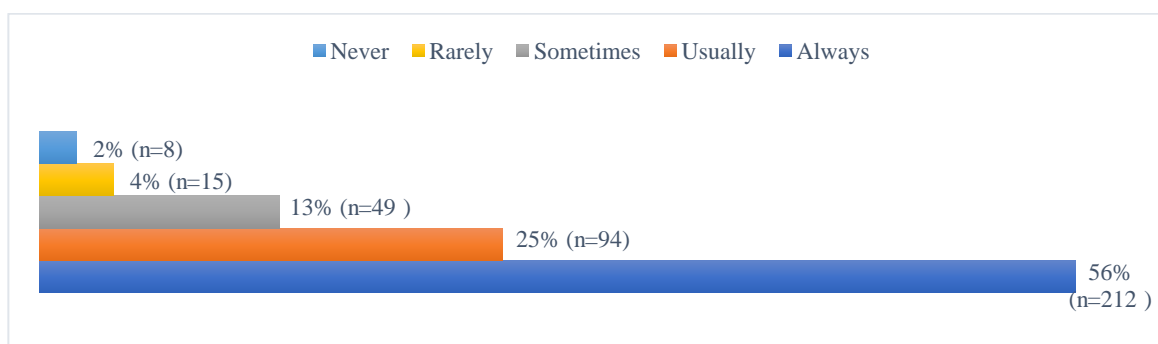


Figure 12. How often respondents take photos/videos when travelling

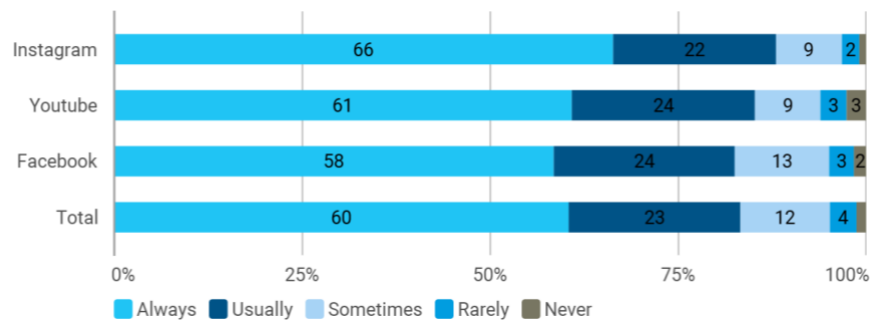


Figure 13. Relationship between how often respondents take photo/video when travelling and if they use social networks for travelling purposes

4.2.3 YouTube results' and findings

The next 2 questions explored the respondents' activity on YouTube, with the first asking whether they follow any YouTube travel channels. The graph below (Figure 14 below) shows that in total 35% of respondents followed travel channels in some capacity, with just 9% following 3 or more and around a quarter following between 1 and 3 channels. On the other hand, around 53% of the sample did not follow any YouTube travel channels and a further 12% did not because they did not have a YouTube account.

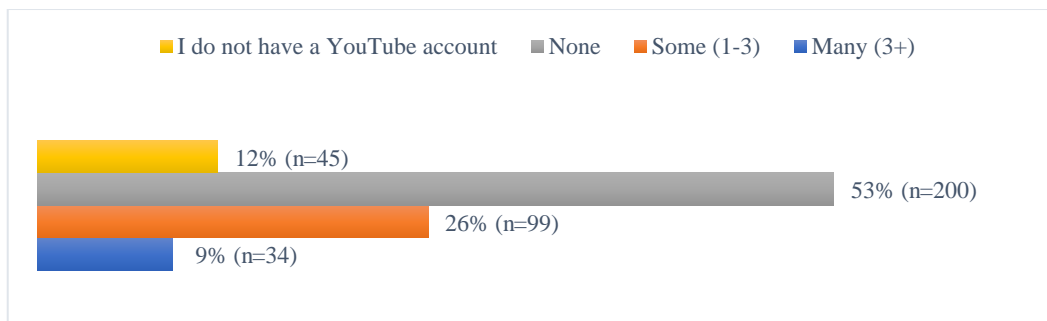


Figure 14. How many follow YouTube channels

In addition to this when respondents were asked how often they search for YouTube videos of destinations they were planning to travel to (Figure 15 below), 20% frequently did, with 8% always doing so and 12% responding that they usually search for them. Just over a quarter (26%) sometimes did while a sizeable 53% had very little engagement with searching for videos of destinations they were planning on visiting: with 28% rarely searching and 26% stating that they never searched at all.

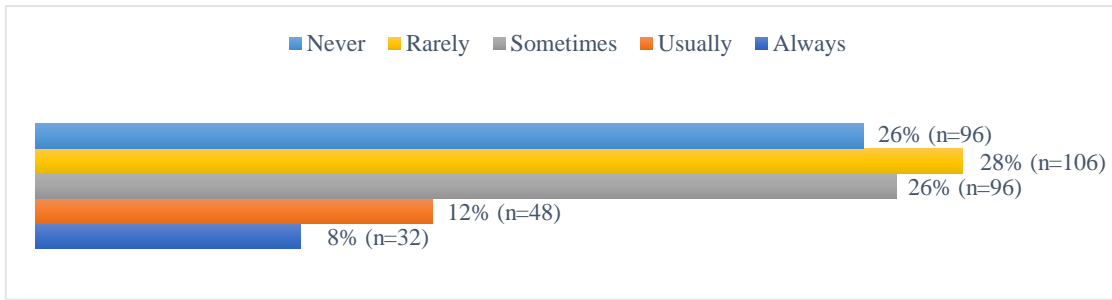


Figure 15. How often respondents search for YouTube videos of destinations they were planning to travel to

The responses to these 2 questions suggest that generally people engage in digital travel content on YouTube more so if they are planning a trip to a certain destination, potentially using it as place to gather more visual information on where it is they are planning a trip to and places they would specifically like to visit there, as opposed to just engaging with general travel content through following travel channels. Moreover, when these 2 questions were crossed together, as shown in Figure 16 below it showed that of the people who followed more travel channels (e.g. 3 or more) the more likely it was they also searched for videos of destinations of places they were planning to travel to, indicating the responses to these questions could also be attributed to how engaged the respondents were with YouTube in general as a social networks platform.

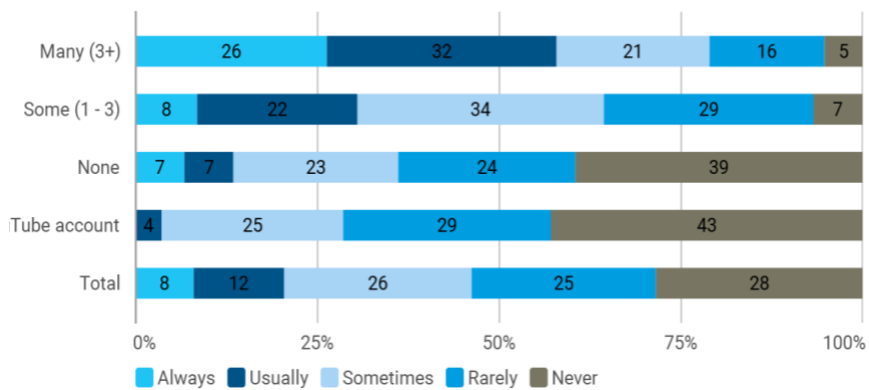


Figure 16. Relationship between How often respondents search YouTube videos of destinations they are planning to travel to and whether they follow any YouTube channels

The next question elaborated on the previous two, asking respondents how useful they find travel videos on social networks to gather information about destinations (Figure 17 below). In total 80% of the sample found at least some use in travel videos on social networks. Specifically, 20% found them very useful, 29% found them fairly useful and 31% found them useful, while 20% found them not to be useful at all when using them to gather information about destinations to aid their travel decisions. While the question does not reveal what social network platforms respondents use to watch videos to gather information about destinations, it does highlight the impact video content can

generally have on users when using it as a valuable source to gather travel information to influence their travel decisions.

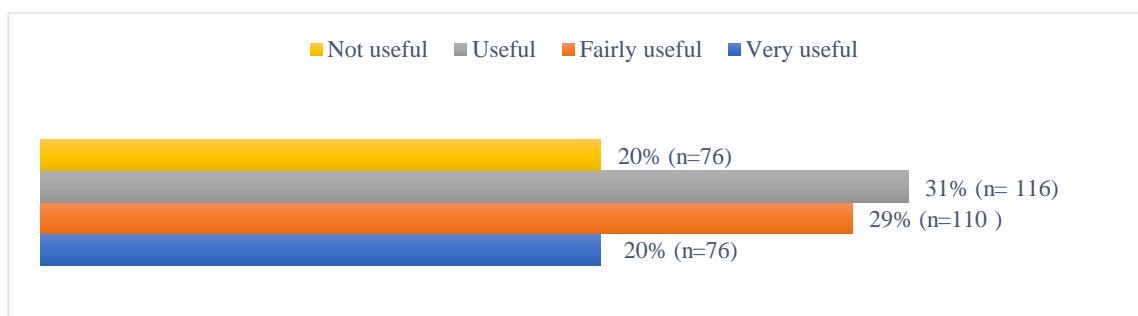


Figure 17. how useful respondents find travel videos on social media to gather information about destinations

Furthermore, while YouTube may not be as widely used by people to gather travel information and influence their travel decisions compared to Instagram and Facebook, as shown in Figure 6 above where only 37% used YouTube for travelling purposes compared to Instagram and Facebook (70% and 59% respectively), Figure 18 below shows that a larger percentage of those that more frequently search for YouTube videos of destinations they are planning to travel also find those find videos on social networks more useful compared to those that searched less frequently for YouTube videos of places they are planning on visiting. This again suggests those more engaged with travel content on YouTube (and YouTube in general) find more use from the travel-related videos it offers, which supports Leung et al.'s theory about how many users value content that is more authentic (2013, p. 4).

With the emergence of YouTube brought the introduction of vlogging, which is now the central form of YouTube participation and has changed the way tourists engage with and gather travel content. With this informal and conversational type approach that reminds the users of a typical face to face conversation, the bond between the producer and consumer is stronger compared to Facebook and Instagram (where often visual authenticity can be determined by users quickly, for example if filters have been used to enhance a photo). In the case study of Piero Armenti's YouTube travel channel *Il Mio Viaggio a New York*, he documents his unfiltered experience of touristic destinations to a mass audience of users who can virtually experience these destinations from anywhere around the world. Seeing as he appears to simply just be sharing his experiences and opinions of his trips in a very informal kind of approach, this produces a faithful discourse where users feel they can trust them, generating feelings of authenticity and builds a relationship of trust between user and producer as argued by Burgess and Green, where users feel they can use it as trustworthy source of information in their own travel decision making process (2018, p. 39). This further supports the argument

presented by Munar and Jacobsen that the more the visual content is perceived to be more authentic by users, the greater impact it can have on their travel decisions 2014, p. 47).

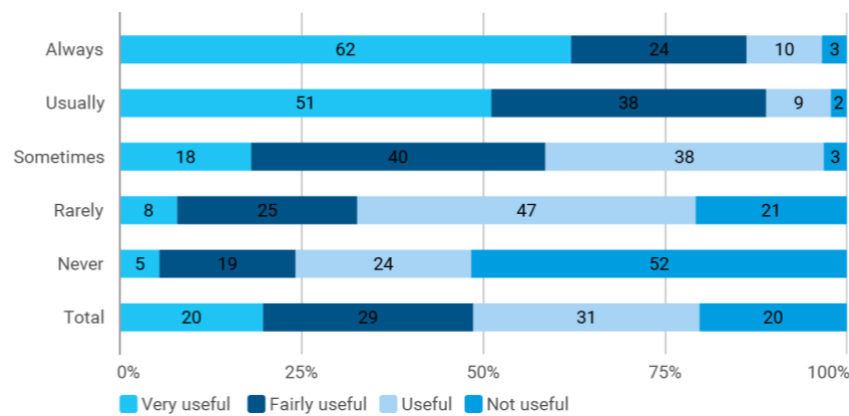


Figure 18. Relationship between how useful respondents find travel videos to gather information about destinations and how often they search for YouTube videos of destinations where they are planning to travel to

4.2.4 Facebook results' and findings

The next 4 questions explored respondents travel behaviours when using Facebook, with the first question seeing how often they used Facebook while travelling. From Figure 19 below just under half of the sample (48%) either rarely (28%) or never (24%) used Facebook whilst travelling, while a further 4% did not have a Facebook account at all. While 23% stated that they sometimes used the platform while travelling, only 13% usually did and an even smaller 8% stated that they always did. This suggests that while Facebook remains extremely popular in general and for travel purposes, as suggested in figure 6 where 92% use Facebook and 57% use it for travelling purposes, users may typically use Facebook for travelling purposes prior to a trip in order to plan and gather information about a certain destination and things to do there, as opposed to during the trip where they want to fully enjoy their experience without using social networks. It could also suggest that users do post content of their trip but typically do so after the trip has taken place, where they can share their experience after it has happened for other users to see and interact with which can then activate the social tourist gaze where users then reproduce images they have seen on social network platforms and display them to their friends and other users online to influence their own travel decision making, thus supporting the idea of a 'hermeneutic circle' brought forward by Urry (2002, p. 129). Alternatively, it could also suggest Facebook is as not as popular as Instagram when using it for travelling purposes as further supported in figure 6 where 70% of respondents used Instagram for travelling purposes compared to 59% using Facebook, which could be down to the popular Instagram Stories feature Instagram offers which let the users share real time photos and videos that vanish after 24 hours (Read 2019). These real time contents can have a significant role in the development of

personal virtual identities, as well as a participative culture as certain contents connects users and generate interactions based on shared interests as argued by (Burgess, Green 2018, p. 23). For instance, while travelling, they allow tourists to share their real time experiences, and therefore everybody is able to see what they are doing which allow other users to make considerations about their preferences and influence where they themselves would like to travel to next. This is becoming a key feature that is transforming the tourism sector, where because of social network platforms and the increasing use of visuality from both users and tourism providers, travellers are able to search, organise, interact with and share travel stories and experiences, leading social networks users to a sort of co-creation of tourism experiences accessible to everyone (Sigala et al. 2012, p. 27).

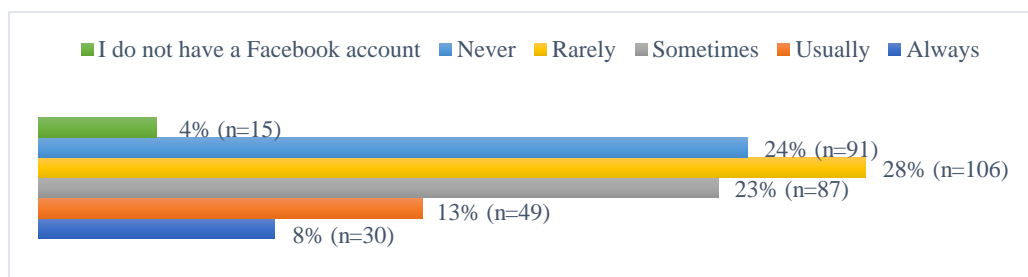


Figure 19. How often respondents use Facebook while travelling

The next question analysed what content, if any, are respondents likely to share while travelling, and from Figure 20 it is evident that visual content is clearly the most likely to be shared, with 89% choosing this as their preferred method of sharing content, as opposed to written content (8%). This strongly highlights the value user's place on and effectiveness of visuality over written content in displaying travel content when influencing other users and tourists and showing others where they have visited. This supports the idea presented by (Benjamin 2015, p. 95) that photography has this powerful role of a storyteller where through visuality it is possible to narrate a place and a site. As a result of this powerful and captivating effect visuality can have by acting on associations of signs with their mental representation of places, other users are more likely to engage with this content compared to written content, and subsequently is more likely to cultivate the participatory culture prevalent among social networks that Burgess et al. mentions is creating new approaches to tourism and forms of interactions, where everyone is now the producer and consumer, and can share but also gather ideas (2006, p. 5).

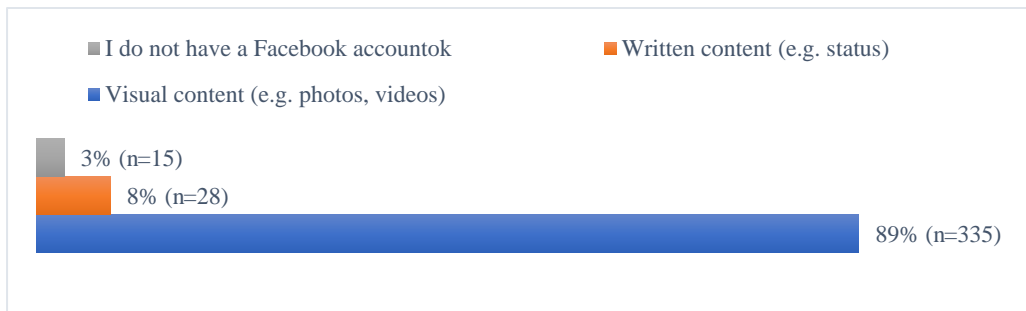


Figure 20. What content respondents are likely to share while travelling

Furthermore, when respondents were asked whether they follow any Facebook travel groups or pages (Figure 21 below), over half (52%) of the sample followed none, while just under a third (32%) followed 1-3 and only 12% followed 3 or more. This suggests that while users place some value on Facebook travel groups, the majority may not find enough use in them to gather information from and influence their travel decisions making. Instead, social networks users may find friends and other users sharing their own experiences in the form of anecdotal evidence more useful when gathering information to make travel decisions and form an opinion on a certain destination. This supports the theory of Leung et al. (2013, p. 4). who states that content from friends and other users perceived as more authentic therefore users rely on them more, as well as because users perceive them to have little or no financial or commercial interests.

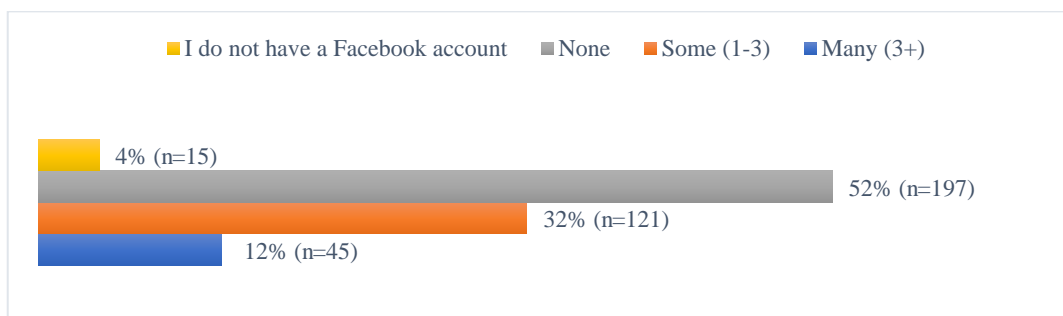


Figure 21. Whether respondents following any Facebook travel groups/pages

This is further supported by the response to the next question, which asked how often the respondents ask for suggestions from other users via travel groups when planning to visit a destination (Figure 22 below), showing similarly that just over half (53%) never doing so and 22% rarely asking, while only 2% stated they always did and just 7% usually did, again supporting Leung et al. theory that users may prefer friends content from friends and other users who are just simply sharing their experiences via their own personal profile and not via a group which is often perceived as more informal, authentic and therefore more likely to trust them (2013, p. 4).

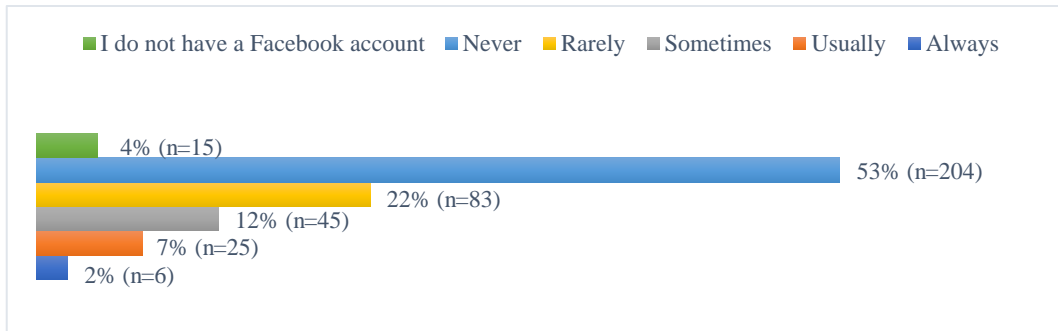


Figure 22. Whether respondents ask for suggestions from other users via travel groups when planning to visit a destination

4.2.5 Instagram results' and findings

The next few questions focused on respondents travel behaviours on the remaining social network platform: Instagram. The first question asked how often the sample used Instagram while travelling (Figure 23 below), with nearly a third (31%) of respondents always doing so and 16% usually did. Only 24% either rarely or never used Instagram while travelling, while 11% did not have an Instagram account at all. Compared to Facebook figures, more people used Instagram while travelling, suggesting it is more useful for travelling proposes than Facebook which could be down to the Instagram Stories feature Instagram offers which let the users share real time photos and videos that vanish after 24 hours (Read 2019). These real time contents can have a significant role in the development of personal virtual identities; for instance, while travelling, they allow tourists to share their real time experiences, and therefore everybody is able to see what they are doing, as well as making considerations about their preferences and influence where they themselves would like to travel to next.

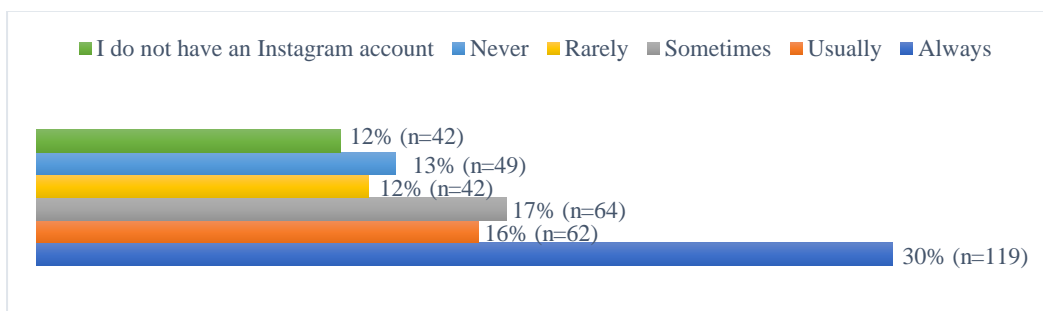


Figure 23. How often respondents used Instagram while travelling

The next question explored whether the sample followed any Instagram travel accounts, with Figure 24 below showing that a sizeable 30% of respondents followed 3 or more and 28% following between 1-3 channels, meaning in total 58% followed at least one travel channel. Contrary to this 31% did not follow any.

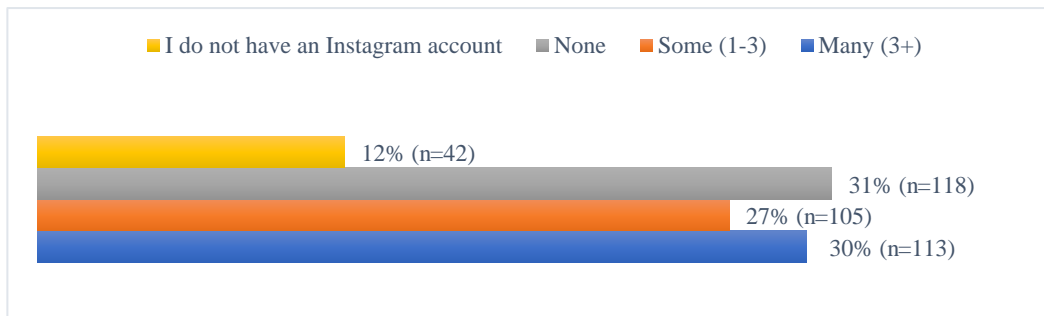


Figure 24. Whether respondents follow Instagram travel accounts

The following question asked whether any respondents had ever contacted an official Instagram travel account for information. Results in Figure 25 below showed that the overwhelming majority (66%) had never done so, 12% rarely had and only 6% responded that they either sometimes, usually or always did. Sometimes photos are edited and use filters, people may prefer anecdotal evidence from other friends and users. This is supported by Leung et al. who argued since users are simply sharing their experiences, they have little commercial or financial motive, and are therefore perceived to be more authentic by users, meaning the greater impact it can have on their travel decisions making (2013, p. 4).

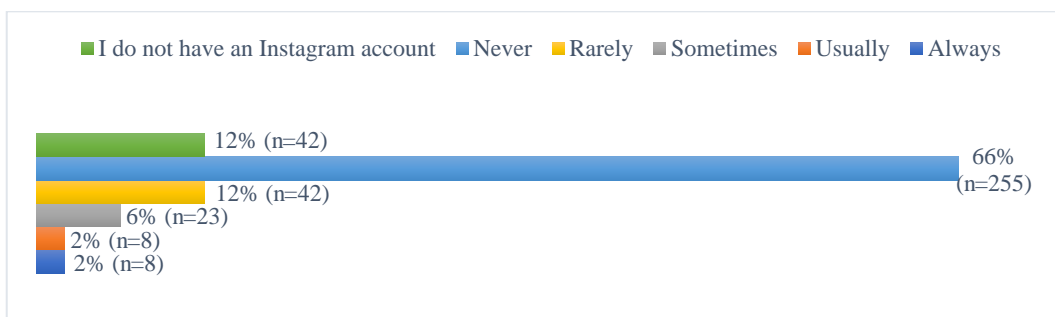


Figure 25. Whether respondents had ever contacted official Instagram travel accounts for information

Similarly, in Figure 26 when respondents were asked if they had ever looked for a destination or a place (e.g. site, restaurant, club etc.) using the “place” section on Instagram, the most common response was that they never had (36%). An additional 12% stated they rarely had while compared to the previous question, 46% stated that they either sometimes, usually or always did. Again, this suggests that thanks to visibility on social network platforms, users now rely more so on gathering

information themselves from other users as opposed to tourism providers to get ideas on where to travel next and what attractions they would like to see, which the “place” section provides on Instagram where users can search for any destination around the world and find the most popular uploaded photos and videos related to that particular place. Furthermore it supports the argument that thanks to visuality on social networks and the participatory culture it cultivates, where users are increasingly able to rely on visual content they can engage with from other users to aid their travel decision making, as it has become a hub for travel information and acts as an electronic word of mouth system that has a greater reach conventional word of mouth, as argued by Xiang and Gretzel (2010, p. 185).

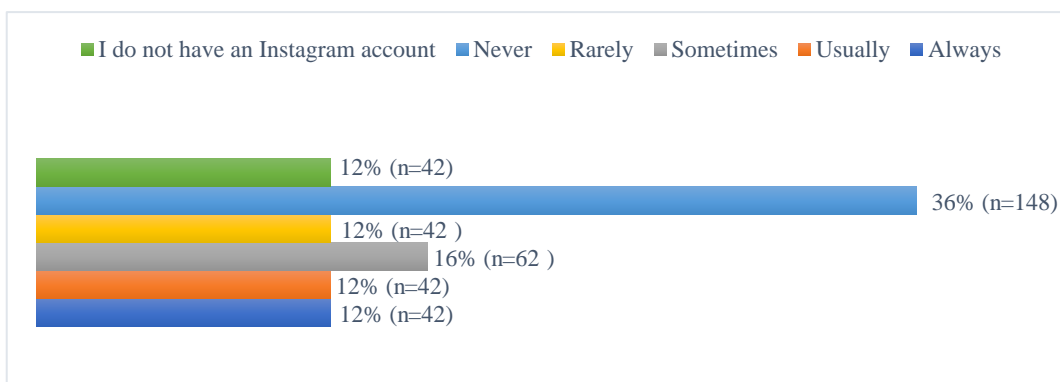


Figure 26. Whether respondents had ever looked for destinations or places using “place” section on Instagram

The next question, as shown in Figure 27 below, asked respondents whether they found the tag of a location useful to find out more information about a destination, as well as to discover new places to visit in the future. The results show that 66% agreed to certain extents, with 52% agreeing while 14% strongly agreed. On the other hand, 27% neither agreed or disagreed, while 5% disagreed and an even smaller 2% strongly disagreed.

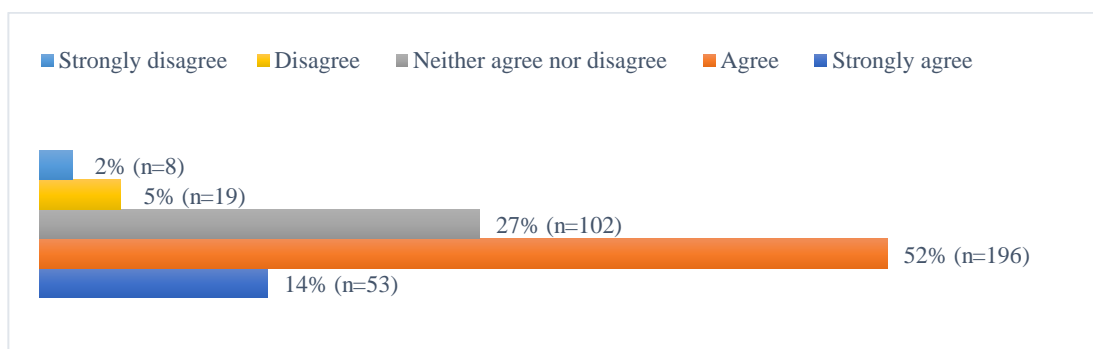


Figure 27. Whether respondents found the tag of location useful to find out more information about a destination

The penultimate question (Figure 28 below) of the survey asked whether participants had ever been influenced by photos and videos on social networks in their choice of booking a destination, the majority (39%) only sometimes had. Just under a fifth (18%) of respondents stated that they usually had, while only 5% always had. On the other hand, 26% stated that they rarely had been influenced by digital content in their choice of booking a destination and 13% ever had.

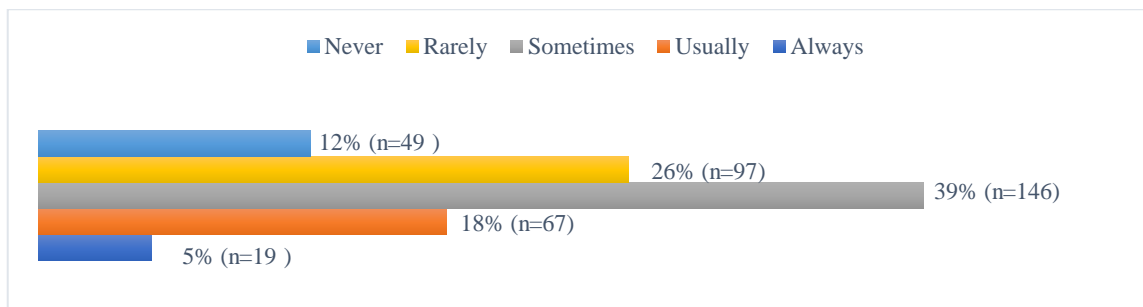


Figure 28. Whether respondents had ever been influenced by photos and videos on social networks in booking destinations

The final question illustrated in Figure 29 below linked closely to the previous one, however this time asking respondents if they had ever been influenced to prefer one destination or attraction over another after seeing related photos or videos on social networks. The results show that 54% of respondents stated that they had while 46% had not.



Figure 29. Whether respondents had even been influenced by photos or videos on social media in preferring destination/attraction over other ones

4.2.6 Overall findings

In summary, the responses to this survey suggest that overall visuality is creating new tourism approaches and forms of interactions both from users and tourism providers. Content that is perceived as more authentic by users is relied on more to gather information to make their own travel decisions, as users engage and interact more so with content from other users and the participative culture it creates where users can interact and ask questions about certain destinations from users who are simply sharing their experience with little commercial or financial interest.

4.3 Summary chapter IV

In summary, after extensive analysis of the photo experiment and online survey, the results highlight the increasing role of visuality in general and on social network platforms, where, thanks to features such as filters that are able to edit and enhance images, users' preferences on what destinations they prefer can be affected and manipulated. On the whole however, the results of the photo experiment indicated there was no significant difference in users' opinion about whether to visit the destinations depicted by edited and unedited photos. Moreover, it shows that users, sometimes, value the cultural significance and its presence on social networks regardless of how a certain visual content appears. Furthermore, the results of the online survey again suggest the significant role of visuality for users as well as how users are increasingly relying on the participatory culture and interactions from others in order to gather reliable travel information for their own decisions.

5 Chapter V: Case studies and findings

This section of the thesis aims to explore three different tourism approaches on Instagram, YouTube and Facebook respectively. The first case study is a travel account on Instagram, managed by an official tourism centre, the second one is a YouTube channel managed by a tourism provider, while the final one explores a Facebook travel group managed by the users of the platform. These case studies are then analysed and compared to the other empirical research in the study and previous literature in order to help answer the research questions.

5.1 The case of @visitnorway on Instagram

Visit Norway is the official tourism centre in Norway, and comprises a vast series of online sources, such as a website, a Facebook page, a YouTube channel and an Instagram account. The Instagram account is called @visitnorway and according to TrackAnalytics.com (April 2020) comprises:

- ◆ 418,420 followers;
- ◆ 1,80% of online influence;
- ◆ 450 circa page-views per day.

The following graph represents the number of Instagram users who followed @visitnorway from February 2019 to April 2020. As it shows, it tends to notably increase:

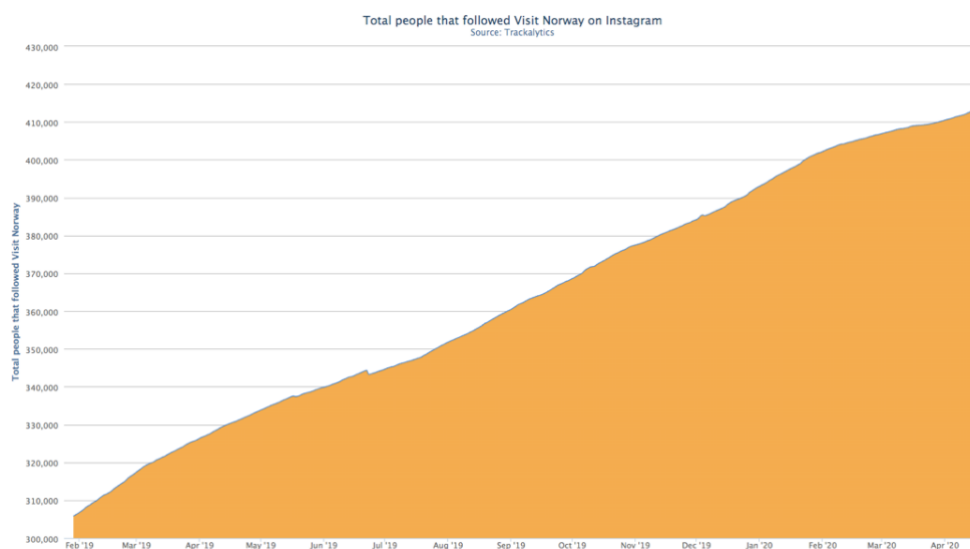


Figure 30. @visitnorway number of followers Feb 19-Apr 20

On the Visit Norway website there is a section called “How to be part of our social media presence” where it explains how the tourism office is promoting and supporting the engagement of users/travellers and their content. The tourism centre looks for “not too commercial or pushy” content which resemble the importance of authenticity in order to transmit trustworthiness and realism. Through Instagram, @visitnorway created a great community by empowering the action of users to develop, post and repost travel moments and experiences. When an Instagram user wants to share his or her content with the account so to make it ‘re-postable’, they have to use the hashtag #visitnorway.

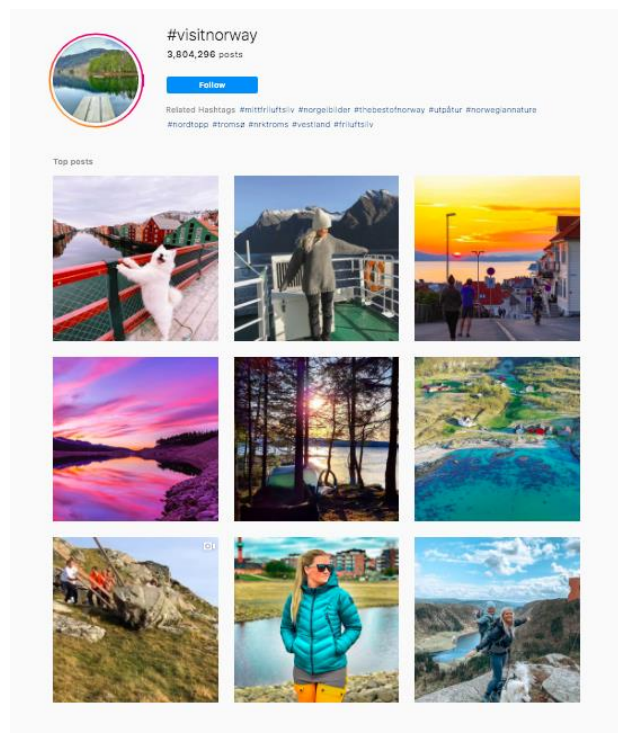


Figure 31. #visitnorway on Instagram

So far, according to Instagram, 3,804,294 of photos were tagged with this hashtag (April 2020). This strategy increases the notoriety of the Instagram account – whether @visitnorway reposted content or not – by creating a flow of user-engagement, where users share their personal content and somehow link them to the tourism provider. Sharing photos and videos of a certain country serves to contribute to its promotion, and to the creation of first-hand information from which other tourists can rely and gaze upon. A result of this is the emergence of social network hotspots like the case of the Norwegian mountain Trolltunga, which became a touristic attraction mainly due to photo sharing on the Internet, as Natalie Wolfe noted in a New Zealand Herald article on September 7, 2016.

As observed at the beginning of September 2019, the hashtag #trolltunga on Instagram was used more than 163,000 times compared to April 2020 where it has now been used a total of 178,000 times (Instagram, Tag).

Furthermore, both locals and travellers have the chance to share their content – hence, such Instagram accounts produces platforms where locals and visitors not only co-exist but interact around similar experiences from different point of views: being a local and being a tourist.

@visitnorway encourages a 360° storytelling where the photos and videos are supported by captions such as historical and fun facts. Generally, 24 hours ‘Instagram Stories’ are posted every day and very often visual content are supported by link and brief insertions:

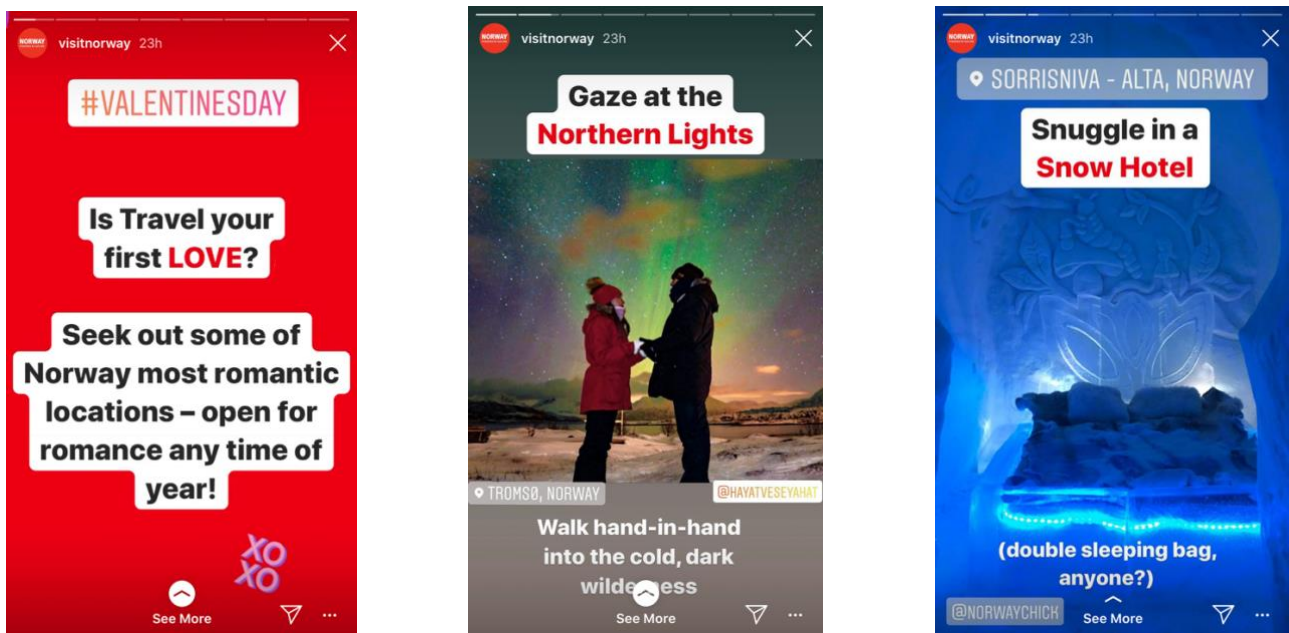


Figure 32. Collection of images from @visitnorway Instagram stories

Another interesting characteristic is the ‘social networks relation’ between different Instagram accounts in Norway and, more generally, the whole of Scandinavia. For instance, after careful observation, it was noted that @visitnorway, as well as @visitbergen, the Bergen tourist board, @visitoslo, the Oslo tourist information centre and @visitsvalbard, the official tourism board of Svalbard all follow each other respectively and use a similar way to operate on Instagram. This generates a great flow of visual content related to Norway where people have the chance to gather and interact with as much information as they like and to virtually experience the country as a whole.

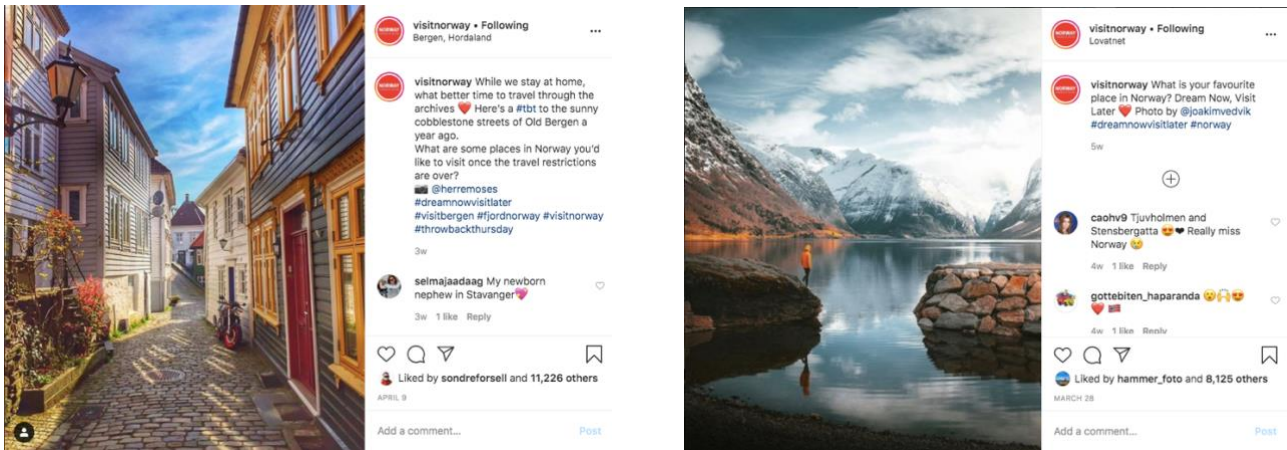


Figure 33. Instagram posts on @visitnorway

Furthermore, often captions of some photos include a question directed to the users, such as “What is your favourite place in Norway?”. This generates a flow of comments from the users who generally share their personal opinion concerning what they like about Norway. Once again, it proves a strong sense of community which arise from interaction of social networks and the importance of visual content combined to written one in order to create a better impact on people’s perception.

5.1.1 Connections to empirical research

This case study epitomises the growing trend of this tourism approach on social networks and is supported by data from the survey and photo experiment. Out of the 378 respondents who answered to the online survey, 28% followed between 1-3 Instagram travel accounts and just under a third (30%) followed 3 or more, thus further suggesting the growing relevance and popularity of these type of accounts, especially on Instagram. This growing trend is also suggested from the result of the photo experiment that shows that the majority of the participants (90%) would like to visit the mountain of Trolltunga, which seems to be one of the tourist places that does not need to be advertised and promoted because of the huge quantity of online related content available. As a result, Trolltunga – and photos depicting Trolltunga – became a real trend.

5.1.2 Findings

As previously argued, before the rise of social networks, travellers relied entirely on travel agencies, guidebooks and print advertisements (Hays et. al 2013, p. 212). This is changing with travellers, who now rely on a combination of information sources, with special emphasis now placed on information provided by social network platforms both from users and tourism providers. This is further supported by Xiang, Gretzel and Stankov et al. who argue that the Web 2.0 has made tourism providers

conscious of the importance to use social network platforms in their strategies to promote destinations (2010, p. 107; 2010, p. 185).

Therefore, tourism providers not only need to acknowledge these transformations, but also remodel the services they offer, given the new active role of tourist-prosumers on the web. They cannot merely promote and advertise destinations and attractions in the traditional way, rather, they must engage tourists as active individuals and, eventually, content creators.

In the interview, Tina Estreich Steiwer, Senior Manager at Wonderful Copenhagen, highlights that, on social networks, tourists are inspired by images and videos posted by their family and friends, but also travel accounts managed by strangers. As a result, tourism offices for destinations such as Visit Norway established their presence on social network platforms and started their own social communities to engage users, which Hays et. al argue is vital in order to try to stimulate conversation, engage users' interaction, and involve new ways of storytelling (2013, p. 234). Moreover, according to Anna Johansson, Digital Media Project Coordinator at Malmö Tourism, photos and videos attract more attention, reach a larger number of users in terms of interest, and generate a greater engagement between tourism providers and tourist, and also between tourist and tourist. For example, photo sharing on Instagram has played a huge role the past few years in transforming hidden or unknown places into places of global social network recognition, as is the case with Trolltunga mentioned above.

Visit Norway, as well as other tourism offices in Scandinavia, such as Wonderful Copenhagen and Visit Stockholm, in the past decade have dedicated their effort to affirm their presence on the most popular social networks – Instagram, especially. This has been extremely relevant for the tourism centre Visit Norway, where social networks have become increasingly relevant in order to attract new visitors to certain destinations and provide more practical and one-hand information that help the travellers to plan their trip. Not only this, but because visual content is a very powerful tool for people to virtually get to know destinations before even visiting them, their content on social networks can both help create awareness for destinations, and inspire users who dream of travelling, to actually planning and booking a trip (Estreich Steiwer, 2019). Moreover, the use of social networks is useful to show a variety of diverse destinations and different features of a destination by operating on the same platform (Johansson, 2019). In the case of the @visitnorway Instagram account, they share a variety of content from mountains, landscapes and iconic attractions within cities. In this way more

diverse content is offered to the public, and the public can rely on the same platform or account for a variety of different and trustworthy content.

5.2 The case of *Il Mio Viaggio a New York* on YouTube

Il Mio Viaggio a New York – translated as ‘my trip in New York’ – is today the number one Italian tour operator in New York, founded in 2013 by the Italian entrepreneur and urban explorer Piero Armenti. Over time, *Il Mio Viaggio a New York* became also a Facebook page, an Instagram account and a YouTube channel that is highly followed with over 1 million followers in total.

His agency offers many tourism services, such as tours of the skyscrapers of New York. However, as Armenti mentioned in the email interview, his presence on social network platforms is solely due to his passion for the storytelling and his love for the city. The aim of his YouTube channel is to show the city of New York and its hidden gems to his followers by using videos in which he goes around the city to narrate and show what he sees. Doing this, he allows people to virtually discover and experience New York and to better support tourists in case they have any questions or desire to discover what the city has to offer so that they can evaluate what visiting themselves.

This graph shows the YouTube Analytics report for *Il Mio Viaggio a New York* of April 2020:

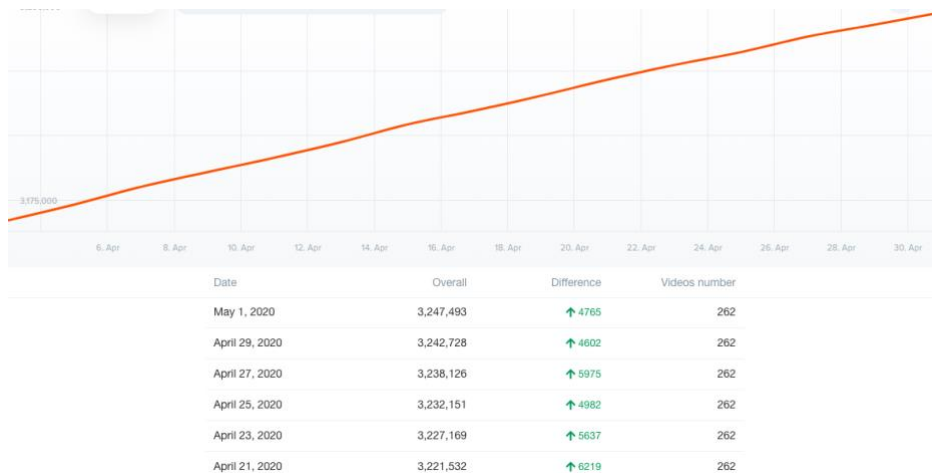


Figure 34. Analytics report for *Il Mio Viaggio a New York* – Apr 2020

Based on observations, the videos are categorised into four different main foci:

1. City-attractions;
2. Events and activities;
3. Everyday life;
4. Fun facts.

Videos of city-attractions comprise the main attractions of New York, such as Central Park, West Village and Soho. These types of videos enable the tourist-users to see and virtually experience the most popular places in the city. Videos of events and activities comprise popular public and social occurrences, such as the Times Square Ball Drop where tourist-users can experience common and frequent events that are part of the American culture, and perhaps uncommon in theirs, so to partially and virtually experience some activities that they would not find anywhere else. Moreover, Armenti, by acting both as director and spectator, tends to express his point of views and communicate his feelings and sensations, so that the viewers can be fully immersed in the activity. Videos of the everyday life comprise daily activities that New Yorkers do in the city, such as taking the train and doing the groceries. These videos enable the viewers to understand more about the society, lifestyle and habits of the inhabitants. When travelling to the city, some tourists may enjoy a more direct and close experience to the culture and the society, rather than having a conventional tourist experience by visiting common tourist places. Videos of fun facts comprises special and original features of New York, such as five cinematography locations or five shops for kids. These videos enable the viewer to get to know about activities, restaurants, shops and locations that are not generally touristic, but are worth visiting according to Armenti. Moreover, these videos seem to be the most appreciated ones as they enable viewers to discover new parts of the city that are not usually promoted by tourist operators. Nevertheless, all the videos offer access to touristic spaces where the shred video-documentaries are seen as a device to virtually visit the city.



Figure 35. Clip taken from *Il Mio Viaggio a New York* on YouTube

All the videos are recorded as documentaries, where the language used is informal and almost playful so that to allow the viewer to be virtual spectators, but also to enable the feeling of being perceived as friends. Armenti talks directly to his viewers, in a colloquial way – as a consequence, the comments enable a total friendly interaction that often leads to conversations, anecdotes and jokes.

Armenti's initial idea was to tell New York via photos and give some insight into the history of certain places and attractions. From there, users began to ask him many questions about New York, about locations not directly touristy but about life in general, and from there he had the idea of creating a real physical agency, which is based in Times Square. This, according to him, gives people security. His approach, which he himself calls "ultra-realistic", is innovative in the tourism sector. He does not want to show viewers the perfection of the city, but rather he wants to create authentic and realistic videos. According to him, artificial perfection alienates users whereas Armenti wants to show the city for what it is with its strengths and weaknesses in order to make viewers live what they see with their eyes, even if through a digital instrument. His motto is "live the city with me". He goes around the city making videos without a ladder, without programmed texts and without music, so that he can show his followers the videos as they come, with the typical noises of a metropolis, the people who pass by and so on. This realism makes people feel physically there, as well as generating authenticity and trust (Armenti, 2020).

5.2.1 Connections to empirical research

This case study helps identify the increasing value people place on travel videos in influencing their travel decision making and the visual authenticity they perceive them to have, as suggested in the online survey where, out of the 378 respondents, 80% find videos on social networks useful to gather information or discover a destination.

5.2.2 Findings

Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier argued about the three phases – anticipatory, experiential and reflective – in which tourism providers interact and act as mediators between tourists and tourism services, whether these are tours or attractions (2009, p. 25). The authors seem to categorise these three phases in three different temporal dimensions: before, during and after a trip, meaning that for instance the experiential phase can happen only when the tourists are actually on a trip. On the other hand, the case study *Il Mio Viaggio a New York* comprises these three phases in one, as anticipation, experience and reflections are validated instantaneously and on the same level. Videos of New York allow tourist-users to virtually discover the city, hence some just enjoy them as a form of entertainment,

some others use the information to anticipate and organise what they will visit and be interests to them or not or not during an actual trip there. Consequently, these videos permit viewers to experience the city even though only virtually and indirectly. However, this does not seem to bother those who follow the channel, and as observed many comments from users indicate this, expressing how ‘the videos make them feel like they are physically there’. At the same time, the comments activate the recollection phase as users might express their enjoyment and disappointment, leave feedback and ask for further content which surely are useful to improve and offer new and exciting services and, ultimately, contents.

The authenticity of Armenti’s realism approach in his videos is further highlighted by Burgess and Green who point out that the relationship between the producer and the consumers is central in the creation of trustworthy interactions (2018, p. 39). The informal way Armenti speaks to his viewers produces an authentic interaction as suggested by the comments that the users post, mentioning how they perceive him and his content as valuable source of trustworthy travel information. As a result of this approach he has managed to create a community that sees him as something more and not just as a tour operator, for example he has become a real character in Italy.

Burgess and Green continue to argue that that it is not just the digital content produced by the social network platforms that makes it so popular with users, but instead something deeper that connects the users and content creators together by creating a community where people can interact with others and engage with content to create an intimate and authentic experience (2018, p. 44). In the case of Armenti, this authentic approach that he has been able to cultivate through his videos by employing innovative solutions to bring distant people and places virtually together by using technology-based mediators, is nowadays what consumers look for.

5.3 The case of *Travel Insider Bucket List* on Facebook

Created in 2018, *Travel Insider Bucket List* is a very popular travel group on Facebook with over 150,000 members from all over the world: it is a community for adventure-seekers, travellers, and future tourists. Members post about travel stories, but mostly they share photos and videos from their travels. Also, some of them ask for virtual contents in order to have a better idea of the destination where they are planning to go. The purpose is to inspire each other to hop on a plane. There is a great and constant activity of the users – on a daily average, there are more than 50 posts shared on the group. After careful observation, it was noted that the majority of the shared posts include requests or invitations to comment on that post with photos or videos of certain destinations. As these two

images below show, one user asks to be brought to Italy through photos, and the other one is asking further users to post their favourite travel video. In the group the content that is most commonly shared is visual, specifically mostly photos as opposed to videos. These are shared either through users directly asking for photos or videos to be shared of a specific destination such as in these images:

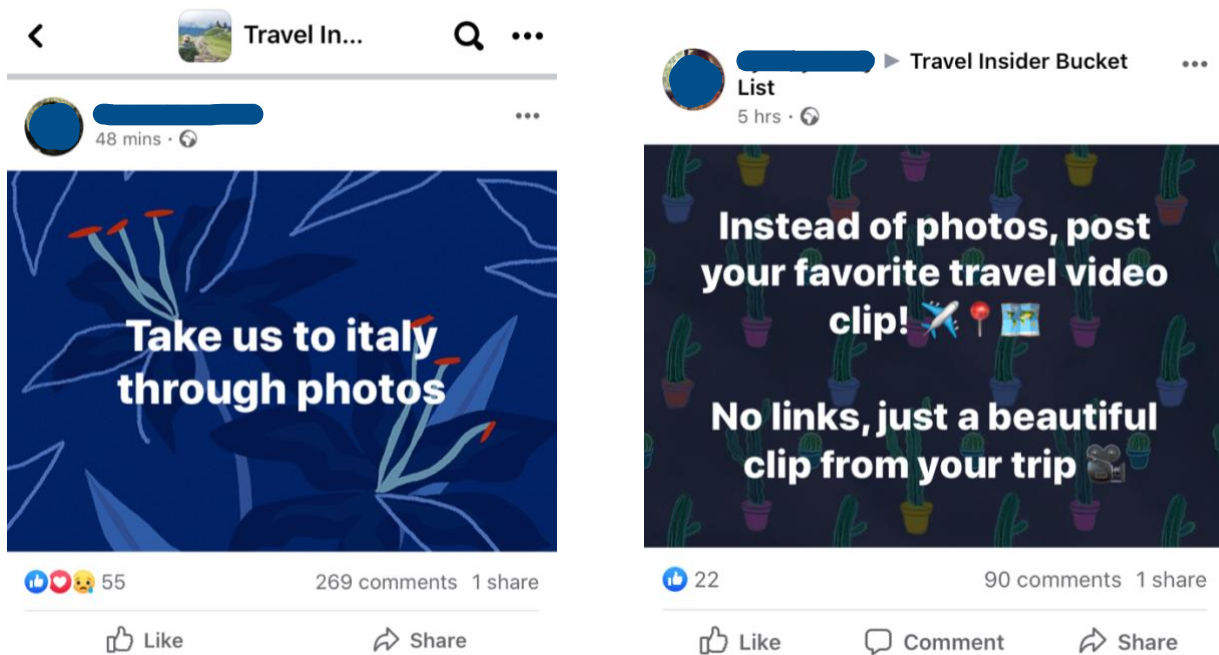


Figure 36. Posts taken from Travel Insider Bucket List

As well as this images like this are shared indirectly when users ask for general information about destinations or attractions, through which other users respond with visual content complemented with a short caption explaining what it shows. As observed, the interactions between users is predominantly via images shared between one another.

Through a Facebook post which I personally shared, members were asked to give a direct answer to the following question asked to my respondents in the survey: Have you ever been influenced to prefer one destination/attraction over another one after seeing related photos/videos on Social Networks?

Respondent One	“Posts on here make me change my holiday destinations! People sharing beautiful pictures of places have been of much help when I had to decide where to go next.”
Respondent Two	“Absolutely! I'm a photographer and images of the Faroe Islands blew me away. I had to go there...so I did.”
Respondent Three	“I have. When I was on an assignment in Ireland, I was not too sure on going to Rome. But then I saw some pictures about Rome. They mesmerized me, and I decided Rome had to be a destination. Visited it within the next two months.”
Respondent Four	“Yes definitely. I was planning on going to Thailand, but after seeing a few photos of Cambodia's temples they look more genuine and more ancient I travelled there instead.”

Table 4. Answers from users on Travel Insider Bucket List

The group has produced a large virtual community that users can rely on to gather travel data they perceive as trustworthy and authentic through simply sharing their own personal experiences of trips they have been on.

5.3.1 Connections to empirical research

Having explored this case study it is also in agreement with the survey results according to which 80% of participants find useful travel photos and videos to gather information about destinations, with specifically 20% of respondents finding them very useful, 29% finding them fairly useful and around a third (31%) finding them just useful. Moreover, it is also consistent with the result of 59% of respondents using social networks for travelling purposes, before, during or after a trip, and with the results of 54% respondents who indicated to have been influenced to prefer destinations and attractions over others after seeing related content on social network platforms.

5.3.2 Findings

Social networks have a role in creating new forms of sociality among tourists and future travellers as it provides the chance to gather and share travel information, but also to create new tourist interactions. This case study confirms the theory of Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier according to which contents showed by real travelers have a better impact on viewers than the ones which are meant to be marketing tools (2009, p. 27). The group is a travel community of people who share the same interest and who do not have the purpose of selling anything, therefore the photo/video-sharing has a stronger social significance, as it enables others to enjoy first-hand contents. Moreover, the comments are extremely important as they carry out conversations where users 'communicate about their trip with words' and share travel information and personal opinions or perceptions about the destination.

Photos and videos shared on the group enable the anticipation phase and the remembrance of previous experience. As a result, the primary sources of information are the users' experiences. Hence, every user who shares his or her content is acting as a sort of tourism provider, where shared experiences are lived directly by them and, therefore, may be perceived as more real and authentic by the others. This shows that sharing experiences with others is an important need of tourists (Brown and Chalmers 2003, p. 337). This group is a great example of the use of Facebook for gathering travel information, and it is in agreement with the survey results according to which a total of 80% of participants find at least some use in travel photos and videos to gather information about destinations, highlighting the significant role visual content has in the tourist decision making process.

These answers also support the argument of Berger according to which visual contents are more precise and faithful than the written ones (1972, p. 10). Photos and videos are not only mere records of figurative representation, but they act on our imagination through visuality by allowing us to picture ourselves in similar conditions and situations. Although this can also occur with written stories, visual content activates a more powerful form of imagination, as our mind and perception are subconsciously influenced by what our eyes are seeing.

Social networks are also designed to create and increase social interactions between users, who have the chance to create their own communities where the same interests are shared with other users, whether friends or strangers (Middleton et al. 2009, p. 267). That is the case of travel groups on Facebook such as this case study, where users join in order to discuss, gather information and share travel experiences. Seeing as the information being supplied is from real travellers, Leung et al. argue that contents users-generated are perceived as more reliable than the ones supplied by travel agencies

as the first mentioned have no commercial and financial interest, rather they are simply sharing personal experiences and anecdotal evidence (2013, p. 4).

5.4 Comparison between case studies

The three case studies analysed present the usage of three different social network platforms which serve different purposes of content sharing: YouTube is a video sharing platform, where videos are the centre of interaction. Conversely, Instagram is a photo sharing platform hence photos are the most share contents, even though it is possible to share videos and add short stories of 15 seconds available for 24 hours. On the other hand, Facebook has completely different purposes as the initial usage of this platform was mostly ‘literal’ and users could and can share status’, links, articles as well as photos and videos. Despite this, the result of the survey linked to the usage of Facebook when travelling shows that 89% of participant are likely to use it to share visual contents, rather than written ones, again highlighting the popularity of visual contents for travelling purposes, even on social network platforms where this is not the obvious main feature.

Visit Norway is a tourism provider comprising a group of people that share travel related content produced by users for the benefit of other users to engage and interact with as well as raise awareness of touristic experiences and destinations that future tourists may find attractive based on previous shared tourism experiences. Comparatively Piero Armenti with *Il Mio Viaggio a New York* presents a different kind of interaction between the producer and consumer, whereby one person who acts as a tour operator documents his experiences of touristic destinations though a camera to a mass audience of users who can virtually experience destinations around the world through his content. *Travel Insider Bucket List* symbolises the emergence of the prosumer culture thanks to the introduction of Web 2.0, whereby it is controlled solely by the users themselves, who are able to share travel related content through their own touristic trips they have experienced which other users can use to gather Information on to make their own travel decisions.

Moreover, while Visit Norway shares content from other users that has often already been edited or enhanced through features such as filters, Piero Armenti’s realism approach attempts to provide a more authentic experience by providing users content that is completely unedited so that his audience can get a real sense of what exactly his experience of a certain touristic destination was like. Similarly, the *Travel Insider Bucket List* group also uses this approach with users often sharing completely unedited content that allow other users to make informed and reliable travel decisions without any edited features applied in order to make touristic places seem more appealing.

5.5 Summary chapter V

To summarise, after analysing these case studies, it is evident that thanks to the rise of visuality on social network platforms, a variety of new tourism approaches have been created. From the Visit Norway travel page on Instagram it has enabled a connection between users and tourism providers without the need to directly contact them for information. Instead users can engage and interact with content on their page which has been provided by other users. Meanwhile, the Piero Armenti case study demonstrates a new informal and conversational approach that is now popular on social network platforms, most notably YouTube, where users are able to experience places virtually and use them as reliable sources of information due to their perceived authentic style. Lastly, the Facebook group *Travel Insider Bucket List* follows a similar approach to @visitnorway where users can engage with each other's content, but differs slightly in that it is run solely by the users themselves as opposed to a tourism provider, whereby users can ask to view content from others who have already travelled to certain destinations. This, like Arment's approach, also creates an authenticity that users find important nowadays to make travel decisions.

6 Chapter VI: Discussion of overall findings

This chapter focuses on the discussion of the overall findings and presents the results of the empirical research and case studies together to help answer the research questions about the construction of the social tourist gaze, and how new tourism approaches and interactions are arising thanks to visibility through images and videos on social network platforms. In the previous chapters (IV, V) the focus on tourists and their new approaches to tourism demonstrates that social networks and visual communication have changed the tourism industry worldwide. Now, it is reasonable to open the discussion around the significances and issues that arise when photos and videos shared on social network influence – positively or negatively – people’s perceptions by creating new tourism approaches, such as further ways of gazing and recognising authenticity, and new tourist practices.

6.1 Construction of the social tourist gaze

This study argues the theory of Urry and Larsen according to which the tourist gaze is a subconscious activity through which tourists emotionally perceive a destination, more than just looking at it. They also argue that the objects of the tourist gaze suggest a contrast with the everyday life, and the viewers gaze upon destinations and landscapes which separate them from familiar and common experiences (2011, p. 4); hence, the act of gazing occurs in different locations than one own’s house and work place. My study demonstrates that visual contents on social networks can still offer a distinctive contrast with the everyday life, even though in different forms. Travelling offers both a physical and mental detachment from the ordinary life as it involves a geographical movement of people to new and different destinations, which in turn allows new mind sets and perspectives for the tourist who may discover completely new sensations and environments.

To an extent, social networks play a part in constructing the tourist gaze because they allow creations of new dimensions, where the geographical location does not change, but the emotional consciousness of the tourist-user is activated. In the digital age in which we now live, new approaches to tourism are born and continue developing, as the online feature is now fully embodied into tourism and tourism practices. Consequently, these digital evolutions will probably also lead to the creation of new tourism methods and approaches. Urry and Larsen explain that tourists gaze upon unique objects, particular signs, unfamiliar and extra-ordinary aspects, and suggest that the majority of the objects of the tourist gaze are unusual or out-of-the-ordinary sight to the tourist (2011, p.4). The authors further claim that the concept of the tourist gaze expresses all the dynamics associated with construction of tourist experiences, which take place from pre-existent expectations and are afterward visually consumed through a lens (ibid, 4). However, when it comes to the tourist experience on social

networks, the mere focus on the sight is too limiting, as the tourist experience is not meant anymore as mere physical movements of people, or to the organisation and consumption of a trip. Instead, social networks now plays an increasingly significant role in influencing the tourist gaze and demonstrates how tourism is changing in the travel organisation phase – when tourists use online services for their travel inquires and to collect data – but also in how tourists are perceived and, above all, feel and act according to perceptions now generated by online content. The result is the construction of the tourist gaze through social network platforms, which is a digital and virtual extension of the tourist gaze that can be referred to as ‘the social tourist gaze’.

This study supports the theory of Ellen Strain who introduced the concept of virtual gaze and aims to examine new perspectives of the social tourist gaze (1998, p. 150). Moreover, the study moves from the consideration that the tourist gaze is intrinsically fixed to contemporary experiences and affirms that experiences that are consumed on social networks – or which results from inspirations on these platforms – are changing the way that one is gazing (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 97). The power of visuality allows signs to be constructed, and people to picture themselves in the photo or video; hence self-imagination is activated and leads tourist-users to engage desires of experiencing what is pictured and be themselves the main subjects of the representation. Urry and Larsen agree that the tourist gaze is generally constructed through these signs (2011, p. 4). When it comes to the social tourist gaze, these signs and associations are still operating, but they are processed digitally and virtually and are still activated because when we look at something – regardless of whether the vision is consumed physically or virtually – we still always tend to think of the relations between that scene and ourselves, as argued by Berger (1972, p. 9).

Thanks to shared visual content on social networks, my research suggests that the objects that tourist-users typically gaze upon are:

- Attractions, local activities and destinations;
- People (inhabitants);
- Themselves.

Attractions, local activities and destinations activate people’s imagination and the desire to be in the places represented as active participants. This is the case of all the three case studies analysed: @visitnorway mainly shares popular tourist attractions in Norway, so that everyone is able to associate an image to their expectations or memories. Piero Armenti with *Il Mio Viaggio a New York* uploads realistic videos about New York so that his followers have the chance to really get to virtually know the city and feel emotions and pleasure from this ‘imaginative trip’. Similarly, on *Travel Insider Bucket List* the users tend to share images of stunning destinations and attractions.

People, especially the inhabitants, activate a deep cultural-societal pleasure, and a desire from user-tourists to understand a certain culture and its habits, as exemplified in the case of Piero Armenti and his videos of the everyday life of the New Yorkers: in this case, tourist-users feel pleasure in gazing upon the usual and everyday life of others.

As mentioned above the third object that user tourists-gaze upon can be themselves Dinhopl and Gretzel argue the concept of 'tourist selfie' as an increasingly popular social practice and a tool that is now changing the tourist gaze (2016, p. 126). As previously argued selfies on Trolltunga became a popular tourist attraction as much as the touristic attraction itself as a result of all the posting and reposting of the selfies that many of the tourists/hikers aim to take once they have reached the edge of the mountain. The object of the tourist gaze may now be the selfie itself rather than the landscape as it is what they have been expecting by going there in the first place. For instance, if the web offers Trolltunga content related where the majority of images depict extraordinary selfies, it is understandable to consider that the anticipations which arise from previous views is not only the mountain itself, but also the desire of taking the same – or similar – images, and sharing it on social network platforms. Hence, the desire to frame the self in a picture taken to be shared with an online audience is activated (Dinhopl and Gretzel 2016, p. 127). This then activates the social tourist gaze as one feels pleasure at gazing at oneself not only for the experience they have had, but also because firstly others can then see what they have done when they display the content on social networks and secondly because they have got their own version of the tourist selfies that they have seen and consumed online.

The concept of 'tourist gaze' expresses all the dynamics associated with the construction of the tourist experience, meaning that it is activated from the moment in which visual anticipations are created, up to the physical visual experience (Urry and Larsen 2011, p.5). Comparatively, the concept of 'social tourist gaze' expresses all the dynamics associated to the creation of mediated tourist experiences, where instead of the physical visual experience taking place, tourists are able to form anticipations, experience destinations and engage with tourists virtually, through visual content on social networks. Thus, with the 'social tourist gaze' the traditional tourist experience does not take place and is replaced by a virtual alternative. Moreover, the 'social tourist gaze' is supported both by virtual visuality, and by new approaches formed by tourist and tourism provider on social networks.

These new virtual approaches to tourism generated by visual content on social networks and the effect they can have on people's emotions and perceptions, can lead the user-tourist to act in a certain way:

- in the organisation of their travels, for example by going to search for more content on social network platforms;
- in interacting with other tourist-users, for example with comments on posts;
- in interacting with tourism providers accounts on social networks, for example by participating in their content sharing initiatives with tags or certain photo-sharing activities;
- in the approach of taking photos or making videos with the main aim to share them on social networks.

Therefore, the social tourist gaze is supported, and simultaneously can create smart tourism practices that can enhance the tourist experience in the sense that, thanks to online content and improved digital tools (e.g. smartphones), the user can virtually act as a tourist and have digital tourist experiences as opposed to having to physically travel to the destination. For instance, those who are unable to travel can rely on visual content on social networks as a valid alternative. It is important to highlight the word 'alternative' as virtual and visual content can in no way fully replace traditional and physical tourism; however, on social networks it is possible to generate an alternative tourist experience as there is the possibility to see places through visual technologies and digital content (such as attractions and tourist destinations), interact with other user-tourists, and also share their experiences.

In *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, Urry and Larsen have related the concept of the tourist gaze to mere visibility – in agreement with the authors, the social tourist gaze is generated by visibility, and by the emotions that arise when observing a certain object and interacting with others. Visual contents on social networks can influence the user-tourist's emotions, opinions and behaviours not only thanks to their visual feature, but also thanks to related comments on Instagram, reactions to posts on Facebook or the number of likes or subscribers to a certain channel on YouTube. As Franklin and Crang point out that “tourists are seeking to be doing something in the places they visit rather than being endlessly spectatorially passive” (2001, p.13). On social networks they can do more than just gazing upon visual content, they can engage with other users and express their opinions – for instance, on the Facebook group *Travel Insider Bucket List* users often engage with each other's content and ask to be taken to destinations through pictures and videos from other users' personal collection of travel images. As well as this it can create a post comprising a flow of content relating to a certain tourist place; when a user shares travel content about Italy, it sparks a reaction from other users who also post their own photos or videos of their favourite moments in Italy. The 'social tourist gaze' cannot only be

constructed and influenced through social networks, but it occurs simultaneously with new tourism approaches and forms of interactions.

6.2 Visuality and tourist destinations

Visuality on social networks has led to a variety of new approaches to tourism both from the users and tourism providers. The results of this study supports Susan Sontag's theories that photography is an affective medium (1977, p. 85) but goes further and argues that the emotional influence that is generated on social networks which arises from visuality, is also influenced by the popularity of existing content on social networks such as viral content of popular destinations that is frequently shared online, resulting in new tourism approaches such as..

This means that a certain photo or video is attractive because of the object it represents, but also how it is visually expressed and presented to the public, which can have a big impact on how it influences tourists in deciding where they would like to travel to. For example, in the photo experiment out of the 30 participants, 82% showed interest in visiting the specified locations in the edited photos while 65% showed interest in visiting the specified locations in the unedited photos, suggesting it is not just visuality on social networks that affects users' perceptions, but also how the visual content is presented and consumed by tourists. With the emergence of social networks such as Instagram, the ability to enhance photos using tools such as filters is often employed by users to make images appear more appealing and enticing, especially when it comes to images of touristic places. Consequently, this forms new tourism approaches as users exposed to these edited images can often cause them to choose a certain destination over another based on preferring what they have seen. This is also suggested to an extent in the online survey, where most of the respondents (54%) stated that they had been influenced before to prefer one destination or attraction over another after seeing related photos or videos on social media, thus highlighting the potential impact edited images and visuality can have in influencing users in the travel decision making process. This can be especially the case with Instagram, where one of its key features allows users to edit and enhance images through features such as filters that can make touristic destination appear more attractive and enticing than they actually are in real life.

Moreover, as the experiment results suggest, users are more likely to be interested in visiting destinations depicted by edited content compared to unedited ones. This is creating new approaches to tourism, where some people can now be influenced not only by what destination the photo actually represents, but also by how the photo itself is presented. Despite this however, in some cases the cultural and societal value of certain attractions comes into account, meaning that how the photos are

presented sometimes becomes irrelevant. From the photo experiment this is suggested by the Northern Lights unedited photo, where out of the 30 respondents, 33% were disappointed, while 67% were unconcerned when told the Northern Lights do not always appear as bright and crisp as many photos and videos present them. This suggests that while visuality on social networks is certainly creating new tourism approaches from users, it does not always have the same effect of influencing tourists travel decisions and raising awareness of particular destinations that are already iconic and well known by tourists around the world where, regardless of how iconic destinations such as the Northern Lights are portrayed through visual social media, tourists will still travel to see them.

Following on from this, the introduction and usage of visual social network in the tourism context has resulted in the creation of mediascapes defined as “the various images, sounds, and programs presented by the mass media” (Merriam-Webster). Therefore, a new approach to tourism is the creation of ‘social tourist mediascapes’ which refers to the representation of spots, corners, peculiarities of a destination through visual contents on social network platforms. When this becomes viral tourists may catch the mediascape. For instance, many people travel to Nordic countries during wintertime to see the Northern Lights which are undoubtedly one of the main attractions that the countries can offer. For some it can represent the experience of a lifetime, as they may see them once in their life. Knowing this they take a photo or a video as a memory of this incredible experience that they can keep forever and provides visual proof they visited them. In a hypothetical scenario in which around 60% share these visual contents on social networks, the simple gesture of taking them produces a continuous cycle that Urry referred to as a hermeneutic circle, whereby the more visual content is shared on social networks, the more they become attractive and the higher chance that tourists will specifically look for these contents (2002, p. 129).. With reference to Nordic countries in general, one of their tourist mediascapes has become the Northern Lights, and because of these social tourist mediascapes users are now able to associate specific peculiarities to countries, even though they have never been there.

Sontag argued that much of tourism has become a search for the photogenic, and travels may look like a strategy of photographic memory collection (1977, p. 178). However, photography has been crucial in constituting the very nature of travelling and gazing as it has constructed what is worth to visit, as well as what needs to be photographed and visually memorised. Urry and Larsen stated that “Photography gives shape to much travel and gazing” (2011, p. 178). Social network users seek out particular views that are ‘social photogenic’ and aim to reproduce their objects in their personal photos and videos. This is again supported in the results of the online survey where the majority

(89%) of respondents stated that they were more likely to share visual content on Facebook when travelling as opposed to written content, again highlighting the powerful effect visuality can have in narrating a particular place. as suggested by (Benjamin 2015, p. 95). This preference for digital content compared to written is also implied in the case study of *Travel Insider Bucket List*, where even when users of the group asked other users to post information on a certain destination, the most common replies were in the form of photos depicting the destination followed by a brief description, again highlighting the significant effect of visuality. Along these lines, there is an ever-ending process where visual contents depicting tourist attractions and destinations, are produced, propagated and perpetuated. This supports Urry’s notion of a hermeneutic circle, where visual contents are tracked down and recaptured, and tourists have a propensity to reproduce them themselves and then display them upon return home as evidence of the trip (2002 p. 129). Similarly, Jenkins conceptualised a ‘circle of representation’ where the images of popular attractions that people have consumed via the mass media before a trip are then recreated by tourists visiting those places which then influence others through a repetitive cycle (2003, p. 308). My study uses her concept as a basis for the argument that this process can occur through social networks too, whereby when users share travel content on their accounts of a place they have visited, it causes other users who view the content to reproduce the images that have been projected onto them when they visit the destination themselves. This then starts a continuous cycle whereby they too then post the same visual contents on social network platforms.

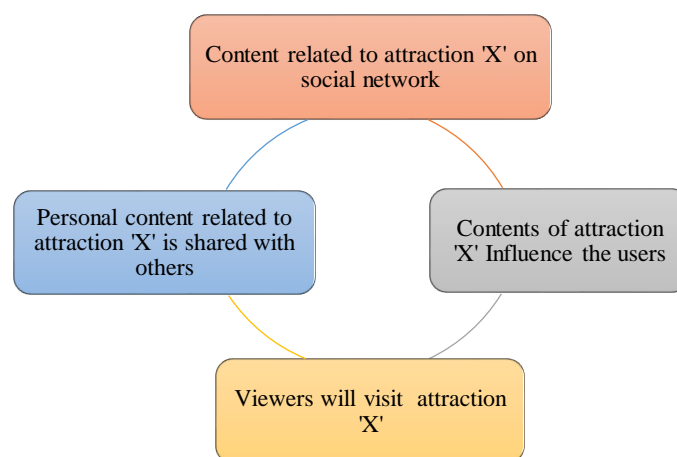


Figure 37. Circle of representation on social networks

This cyclical process has an impact on the social tourist gaze whereby it can restrict the themes and type of content related to a certain destination that users are exposed to on social network platforms. When tourist-users virtually experience the destination, they often gaze upon the same content that

have been continuously project onto them by other users. This restricts what they see of certain tourist destinations, meaning they can potentially miss out on other iconic features linked to that destination. Moreover, with the introduction of the social tourist gaze, the purpose of seeing a certain tourist place becomes a social construct generated by a sense of ‘what is worth to visit because is so viral on social network’ Moreover, with the introduction of social networks and, especially, photo-sharing, another purpose is introduced: take photos and videos with the aim to post them social networks as a way of doing storytelling, but also in order to show what one has visited and experienced during a trip to the public space.

Having observed the content in which @visitnorway was tagged on Instagram from August 2019 to April 2020, the main attractions displayed are the Northern Lights, the mountains and the fjords. This may be limiting for the social tourist gazer as they have less sights to gaze upon and be exposed to that accurately depict Norway, compared to the more opportunities that one has when physically travelling and gazing upon Norway. Moreover, having observed that one of the major tourist hotspots for photos in Bergen is the red church known as Johanneskirken (St. John's Church), I went past there for 4 days in August 2019 where there were plenty of tourists, and out of curiosity I asked them if they knew what the monument was and many of them were only able to tell me that they thought it was a Viking church. As a matter of fact, however, this church was actually built in the 19th century – this has led me to consider the tourists’ belief as a misconception, driven perhaps by the ancient Norwegian history. Regardless, all of them had already taken several photos.

Social networks are nowadays a new source of information, and the visual ones are powerful as they represent – or are supposed to – reality, and allow users to see places, landscapes etc. wherever they are. Consequently, when the social tourist gaze is activated through visibility on social networks, there are both positive and negative consequences for tourism destinations and attractions. In some cases, as previously argued, a tourist place becomes popular thanks to how many users share content related to that certain object. On the other hand, some places become less popular and, consequently, less visited by tourists because there is a not great number on related content on social networks. Along these lines, a sort of repetition of tourist places is created; one may argue that this happened even before the introduction of ICTs in the tourism industry with brochures, documentaries or TV, and someone else may argue there has always been – and there will always be – some attractions or destinations that are more popular than others.

In the tourism context both visual and verbal triggers have been used to sharpen companies and products; for instance, Visit Svalbard, the official tourism operator at Svalbard use a bear logo because it is well known that there are more bears than people up there, and therefore it is easy to relate the bear image to the destination taken into analysis. Tourists incorporate the destination and its attractions as part of an extension of their identity. Also, the tourist should tend to visit places which match their preferences or personalities and so on. Creating a brand image means understanding and matching feelings, attitudes and ideas of the target tourist. The brand image can be narrowed down as the answer to the question of how we are perceived by the surrounding. It is arguable that visual contents embodied the history of a place, and more specifically the history of how the people consider it. This is fascinating, but on the other hand quite dangerous because they can generate archetypes which may lead to the reduction of destination to mere clichés. However, this is more or less what is happening with touristic places. A destination, a place becomes a tourism attraction because people visit it, and therefore a continuous number of tourists has made it popular and the more it is popular the more the number of visits will grow until, precisely, it becomes one of the main destinations of the city or town in which it is located.

At this point a criticism is that many times we stop to take photos or videos of archetype of a city, we photograph that specific place because others have done it before us, but in this way a circle is created in which a place becomes popular thanks to the presence of tourists and the continuous influx of tourists it becomes one of the symbols of the city, even if it is not the most important site or the most significant site for the history of that city. In some cases, visual contents, due to their strong impact on the human being, can outclass and surpass the story and we say, in a certain sense, rewrite it. Locations were described by Florek, Inch and Gnoth as a sum of social systems that evoke images and expectations (Cited in Bayraktar and Uslay, 2017). Therefore, the image of a place is vital for the touristic stakeholders because it has a relevant impact on its branding process and context.

With the combination of knowledge, imagination and mental anticipation, individuals may travel to see, consume, objectify, and take photos and videos of a certain tourist place. Taking and collecting photos and videos has become a mandatory activity whilst travelling – as a matter of fact, the online survey shows that 94% of participants have admitted to usually taking photos and videos when they travel. On social networks, the visual experience is balanced by the participatory culture, where every user can influence the others' tourist gaze by sharing their contents. In this sense, however, the gaze may not be completely authentic, but instead conditioned by the opinion and emotional visuality of others.

6.3 Interactions, authenticity and participatory culture in tourism

In some cases, authenticity seems to be a very important factor in regards to content on the internet because some people also tend to trust less regarding content on the internet because however, especially if they are shared by someone who is not part of their circle of friendship, or someone who is part of tourism first-hand, so maybe there is a sense of insecurity in trusting certain content that can be found on the web. On the other hand, however, there is this sense of participatory culture which also tends to create virtual friendships which are friendships that require less effort than a face-to-face friendship.

Tourists can record their own travel route via photographs taken at the destination to share information with friends (Jenkins 2003, p. 308). Moreover, on social networks there is the possibility of having direct contact with people through comments, reactions and so on. If on the one hand there are those who tend to trust less because they do not know the other user first-hand, because there is no friendship in real life. On the other hand, there is a sense of community that is created on social networks: if you are part of a certain social community, then you share the same interests and you tend to have a more elastic mentality regarding interaction with other people and potential friendships and you tend to trust relatively more. As for example, the tourism provider Piero Armenti stated that he does not know directly the people who contact him for tourist help, they are not friends, but tourists treat him as if he were their friend because his videos are only realistic and convivial. He treats his users as if they were his friends, in his videos it is as if he had a conversation with them. Therefore, this trait helps to make tourist-users feel part of something, part of a not only tourist but also social community. He proudly stated to have this beautiful relationship with his followers because he speaks to him in a realistic way, he does not only try to sell content so for them it is as if he were a friend. This is also suggested in the results from the online survey showing that 80% found some use in them, with 20% finding them very useful and 29% and 31% finding them fairly useful and useful respectively. This supports the view of Leung et al. about how users value content that is more authentic (2013, p. 4); in addition, it enlightens how video content such as Piero Armenti's realism approach helps build a relationship of trust between user and producer that serves to have a greater impact on users travel decisions as mentioned by Burgess and Green and Munar and Jacobsen (2018, p. 19; 2014, p. 47).

Likewise, the *@visitnorway* case and other Instagram accounts in Scandinavia show the power of this direct way of communicating with users. Communication is no longer one to one - as can be the case

when contacting a tour operator through the employee and the tourist - but it is one to many. There is direct communication to tourists as if they were people, not just people to whom they must sell. This idea is further supported in the results of the online survey where the majority (67%) stated they had never contacted an official Instagram travel account for information, while an additional 11% rarely had. This suggests that as a result of the increasing use of social network platforms, particularly in the tourism context, users feel less need to contact the tourism providers. This is because the tourism providers have remodelled their services and approach by creating online virtual communities on social network platforms in such a way that users are central to their travel pages, like in the case of @visitnorway, where users can easily interact and engage with content from other users which is shared through their official Instagram travel account. This is what users increasingly value and what Xiang and Gretzel argue has significantly changed the way travel is planned and consumed (2010, p. 179). Thus, the need for users to contact official tourism accounts for information becomes less. Moreover, this one to many communications also creates a sense of community and therefore the fact of including other users in the initiatives, such as asking them to share photos of a certain theme, like for example the most beautiful photo of Bergen. This contributes to making the tourist user feel part of something and is supported by Burgess et al, who argue the participatory culture that social network platforms create leads to an online community of users who contribute to the dissemination of tourism destinations and experiences across the world (2006, p. 5). This, although we cannot call it a traditional tourist experience, in the sense that we are not talking about a person who has gone to the tourist place and who is traveling and who is having a physical travel experience, but is still an indirect and virtual in the sense that the account interacts with tourism providers, with other tourists, shares something that has already lived and allows both to relive his memories of a past trip, and to make live, even if not in the first person, the journey he has lived and made. This supports Kaplan and Haenlein and their idea according to which tourism providers need to have social network accounts in order to have online relevance and be part of cyberspace (2010, p. 67).

As for the realistic representations of a certain attraction, destination and tourist place there can be two consequences. In the first case, when contents that are not strictly faithful to the real representation of the represented object are shown. In this case, a negative tourist gaze arises, meaning that if one sees something on social networks that is represented in a certain way, perhaps edited and enhanced, if then they go there as tourists and see that it is completely different from what they have been offered and they found on social networks, the tourist experience, as well as the tourist gaze systematically becomes negative because they previously created self-expectations of something that was not actually faithfully and accurately represented. This thing can happen with other mass media,

but on social networks, it can happen that interaction with other users affects people socially and mentally. The interaction that users have with each other, such as when they expose their opinion, can reason of influencing and conditioned further users to not to visit certain destinations or attraction, as the *Travel Insider Bucket List* case on Facebook highlights. In this way, the tourist gaze is also influenced by the opinion of others. The discussion always returns that the interaction between users on social networks is a fundamental condition for the creation and preservation of the social tourist gaze.

Nowadays, with the growth of social networks in every aspect of our lives, information and communication is created by everyone, available to everyone and with no limitations. Travellers look for recommendations from their social circles, but also from their ‘virtual friends’. As in the case of the *Travel Insider Bucket List*, those who have a social network account can create their own network of informants from whom they gather information necessary for a trip, or simply join out of pure interest. In this case, therefore, it is the user who decides which information to consider and where to collect them – for instance, by choosing one platform instead of others. In this way, a participatory culture is created that is based on the same interest and where the tourists themselves act as tourism providers. However, they do not broadcast a general brand message to tourists-consumers in order to advertise destinations and attraction, but instead these communities enable personal storytelling to be communicated through a wider circle of people with the same interests. In the case of visual social networks, the interaction is characterized by users who exchange photos and videos of tourist experiences. Clearly, these are supported by written texts, but the result is a much deeper interaction, because based on a common ‘visual experience’. As Berger argued, when one looks at images, they are subconsciously aware of the reason why the photographer chose that specific subject. Hence, users not only engage the photogenic aspects of visual content, but also embody the emotions of its producer (1972, p. 10).

6.4 Summary chapter VI

To summarise, this chapter focused on leading a discussion that summarises the finding of my empirical research while linking them to previous literature in order to answer the research questions. From the existing literature it is evident that the construction of the tourist gaze is closely linked to visuality. The ‘hermeneutic circle’ by Urry and the re-conceptualisation of the ‘circle of culture’ by Jenkins are also occurring on social network platforms, leading to the creation of a ‘social tourist gaze’. Furthermore, the emphasis on visuality in the form of photos and videos shared on the social network platforms taken into consideration, is leading to a variety of new tourism approaches which

support and contribute to the construction of the 'social tourist gaze'. On the one hand, user-tourists are changing how and who they gather travel information from, while on the other hand, tourism providers are remodelling their approach and setting up social virtual communities to engage interests and interactions from social network users and future tourists. As a result, visual content supports these two approaches by creating a strong participatory culture that tourist-users are increasingly relying on, and which contributes to their virtual tourist experience.

7 Chapter VII: Conclusions

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that social networks can impact the construction of the tourist gaze which, as argued by Urry, is the link between tourists and their environment (1990, p. 97). The concept of the tourist gaze allows the understanding of how tourists see destinations, and how they are influenced through emotions and sensations, other than the mere act of seeing. This study elaborates on this concept by suggesting that this idea can also be present on social network platforms, where the variety of new tourism approaches occurs simultaneously with the social tourist gaze.

Furthermore, the results of this study strongly suggest that visibility through photos and videos on social networks have the potential to substantially affect people's perceptions in the travel decision making process when leading the tourist-users towards particular destinations and attractions and allowing the creation of virtual tourist experiences. Although Urry suggested the death of tourism due to the introduction of new digital technologies and services, they simply have created new approaches to tourism and ways of connecting people (2002, p. 141). Visibility leads tourist-users to have these different tourism approaches, such as looking at destinations and attractions through photos and videos shared on Instagram and YouTube or joining Facebook groups where first-hand information is directly created by other tourist-users. Along these lines, tourism providers can no longer ignore the increasingly significant role of social networks in distributing travel-related information— hence, they have begun remodelling the way that they offer tourism services by joining social network platforms, and creating new social communities, like in the case of *@visitnorway* and *Il Mio Viaggio a New York*. Such communities are nowadays perceived as part of one's social life, where users place special value on content they perceive as more authentic and reliable. Both participatory culture and social interaction play a huge part in the negotiation and construction of places in tourism, and all these new tourism methods lead to touristic mediated experiences, which are a combination of your own perception, reactions, and emotions.

As well as this, the interactions among tourist-users on social networks help to produce a participatory culture, and a sense of community linked to similar travel related interests and passions that users share with each other. To this extent, social networks offer user-tourists a flow of visual content which give them the chance to receive feedback – visual and written – on places that they are interested in from users that have already been there. Images and videos shared on social networks are now a source of vital information by offering a direct visual overview of what attractions and activity a

destination might offer. As a result, tourist-users choose their itinerary by considering what is depicted in those content.

7.1 Strengths of the study

Since the research question of this study has never been carried out before, the study is innovative and aims to analyse a topic that has been treated and largely discussed on different fields of research, such as marketing and business, but with a novel approach.

Due to the high number of responses (378) to the online survey, although data cannot be considered statistically relevant, they do allow suggestions to be made from them by representing users' and producers' experiences. Moreover, applications in real life, represented by the case studies analysed, support and express the validity of the results.

The multi-methodological approach resulted in diverse data points, which have been extremely helpful in cross analysing the findings and in answering the research question thoroughly.

7.2 Limitations of the study

While there was a plethora of research available on the main themes covered in this study, there was however a lack of prior research studies related to my specific research questions and has been a consistent limitation. There is a considerable literature addressing the tourist gaze, tourism and social networks and visual social networks, but the purposes and research questions of those studies were very different. For instance, this study deals specifically with 'tourist decision-making', which have been previously limited to marketing and business development studies.

The interview method used to collect the data was a limitation as some of the interviewees withdrew and consequently, I had to focus on a reduced number of such data which did not allow me to make further comparisons and analysis.

The online survey was conducted on the SurveyXact platform without the collection of IP addresses, as I had a limited amount of time to complete my study, and I was not sure how long this would have taken after I notified my study to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). This meant that I could not link the responses to a particular respondent and make further analysis.

'The tourist gaze' is a very technical and narrow concept, and people who are not familiar with the related literature reviews may not be aware of its meaning. Consequently, I did not insert any

questions directly referencing the tourist gaze in the online survey, which could have been useful for one of the purposes of the study.

Moreover, the online survey was carried out online and the social desirability bias arose as a limitation, especially because there was no direct interaction with the respondents. For instance, the question “How often do you take photos/videos when travelling?” may have led the majority of respondents to answer positively because taking photos and videos when travelling is a sort of social construct of our society.

The number of female participants (n=22) in the photo experiment considerably outnumbered the male participants (n=8); therefore, after having carried out an analysis based on gender results, the findings did not show relevant differences to make meaningful comparisons from. Hence, a more general analysis had to be made and, for the most part, it did not show statistically significant results.

7.3 Future research

The online survey results show a median age of participants in the age between 18 and 29 years old (68%). Since youth are usually more frequent consumers of information and communication technologies, perhaps a future research based on a broader age range might show different results.

This study does not focus on a specific tourist’s destinations or a certain reason for travelling (e.g. pleasure or business). A future research could focus on a certain destination or on specific travel purposes, given the fact that different destinations and potentially the purpose of the travelling may affect tourists in different ways. The cultural and geographical aspect is also relevant; hence, a further research may take into considerations a certain country or population.

Future research could also investigate other less known social network platforms and their different features and approaches, rather than the main ones, to give a better insight into how they incorporate visual content to influence users.

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YouTube Press. <https://www.youtube.com/about/press/>

1. Photographers

1. Thomas Eriksson, as @thomas_pasaga on Instagram
2. Kumaran Pondicherry, as Kumaran Pondicherry Photography on Facebook

2. Instagram accounts

1. @visitnorway
2. @visitsvalbard
3. @visitbergen
4. @visitoslo
5. @visitcopenhagen
6. @visitstockholm

Appendix

1. Interview questions to Wonderful Copenhagen and Malmö Tourism

Section 1:

What do you think about tourists' behaviours? Are these relevant to create further tourism experiences?

On average, how many tourists have visited your destination in the last three years (2016 – 2019)?

Do you think visual contents (e.g. photos, videos) now have a major impact on tourists (for instance, visual content on social networks, rather than article on websites)?

Do you consider Internet and Social Networks as relevant tools for destination marketing in your area? Why?

How can social networks (e.g. Instagram, Facebook) influence potential tourists on their decision making?

What is the most relevant strategy/implication/mechanism in the creation of tourism destination brand? How did your city become a tourism destination brand?

7) How would you define the relations between your tourist information centre and the other Scandinavian ones? Is there any sort of collaboration?

8) What are the key positive and negative (if any) effects of ICTs on the tourism sector in your city?

9) Do you believe that smart tourism can create a sustainable future? Or do you believe the opposite?

10) What are the causes of over-tourism in your city/destination?

Section 2:

1) How do you gather data from tourists or touristic experiences?

2) What sort of data do you collect?

3) Are tourists aware of this data collections?

4) How do you use this data in real applications?

5) Which data is relevant to create further and better touristic contents and experiences?

2. Interview questions to Piero Armenti – *Il Mio Viaggio a New York*

- 1) How did you come up with the idea of going around New York and do storytelling via videos shared on Facebook?
- 2) How important do you consider the presence of social networks within the tourism sector? Do you think is social networks changing the way to do tourism?
- 3) How would you define the interaction and relationship between you and your followers? What are the pros and cons?
- 4) Do you believe that – in circumstances where it is impossible to move – videos or photos (made with smartphones, drones and so on and then published on the web) could, in some way, replace traditional tourism?
- 5) In your opinion, what expectation do people create based on your Facebook videos and the activities/attractions you advertise and propose? Do you believe are these expectations actually met, based on the reviews you receive, or comments on Facebook?

3. Experiment questions

Section 1:

- 1) What is your age?
- 2) What is your gender?

Section 2:

- 1) Would you like to visit this place?
- 2) Do you think this photo is a faithful representation of the represented place?

Section 3 (unedited photo of Trolltunga):

Would you feel disappointed to know that the place shown in the first photo is actually like this?

Section 4 (unedited photo of Northern Lights):

Would you feel disappointed to know that an unedited photo of the Northern Lights is actually like this?

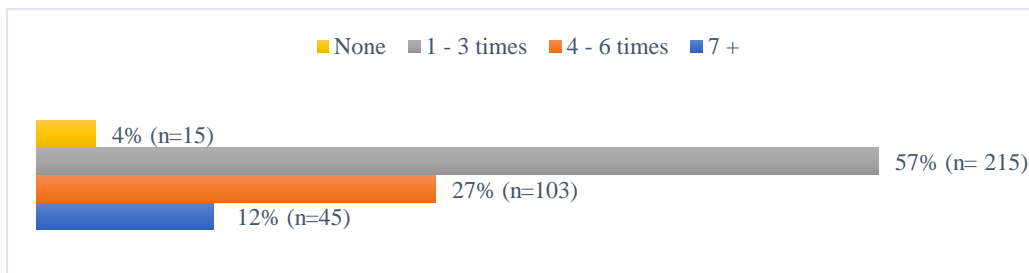
4. Online survey questions and responses

Section 1:

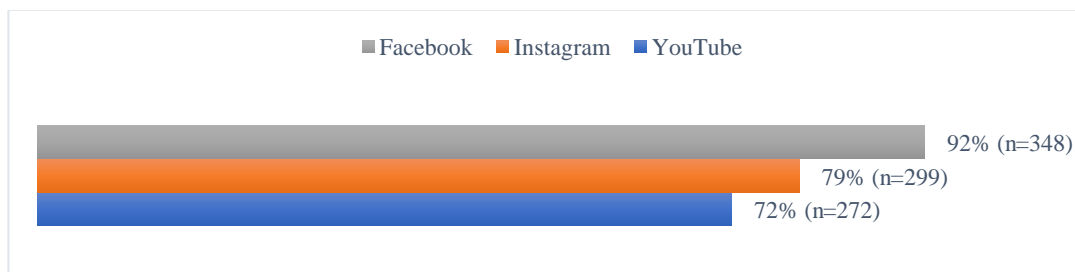
- 1) What is your age?
- 2) What is your gender?
- 3) What is your nationality?
- 4) Are you currently...? (Occupation)

Section 2:

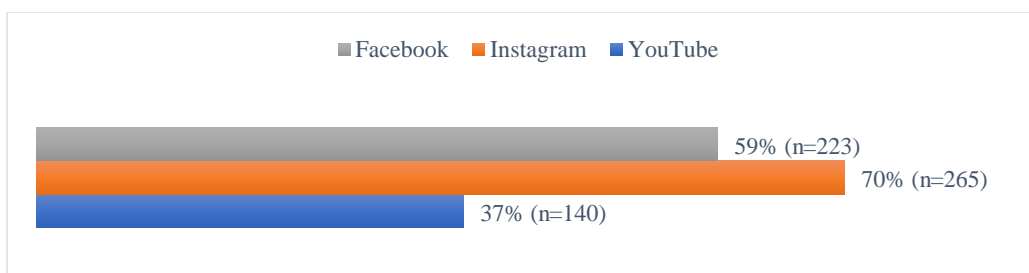
- 5) On average, how many times do you travel each year?



- 6) Do you use any of the following Social Networks? Tick any that are applicable to you:

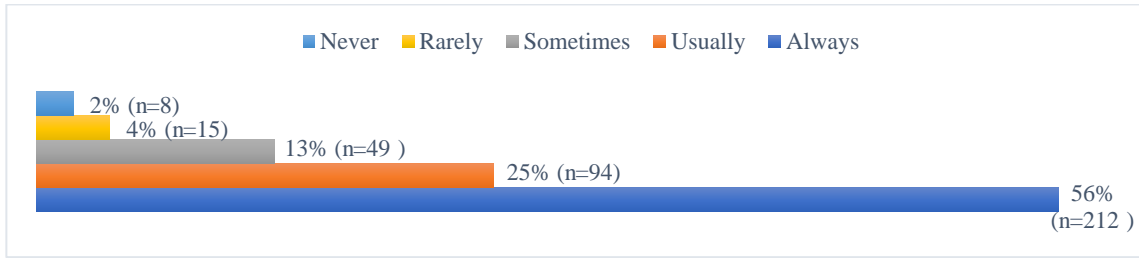


- 7) Do you use any of the following Social Networks for travelling purposes (i.e. before, during or after a trip)? Tick any that are applicable to you:

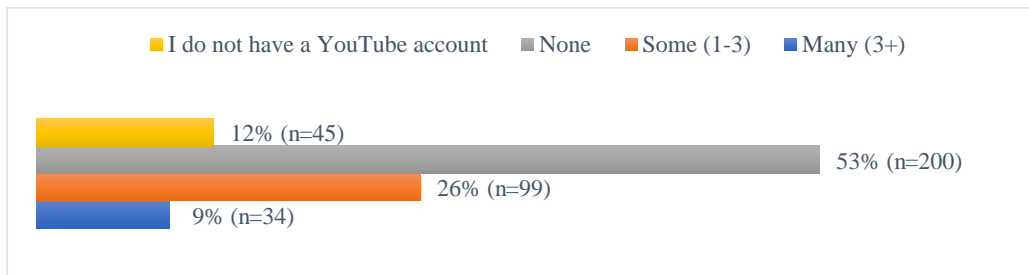


Section 3:

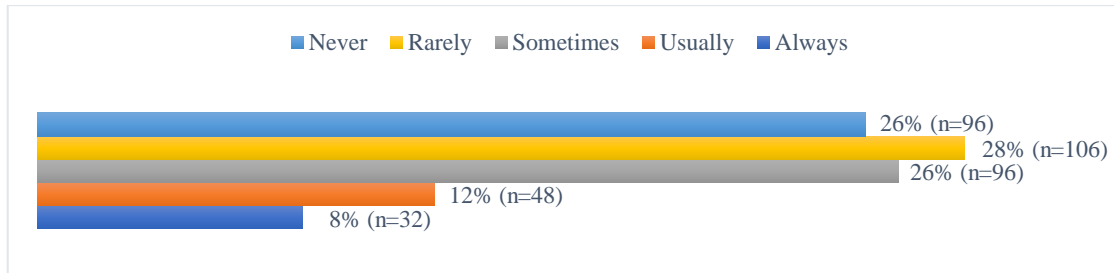
8) How often do you take photos/videos when travelling?



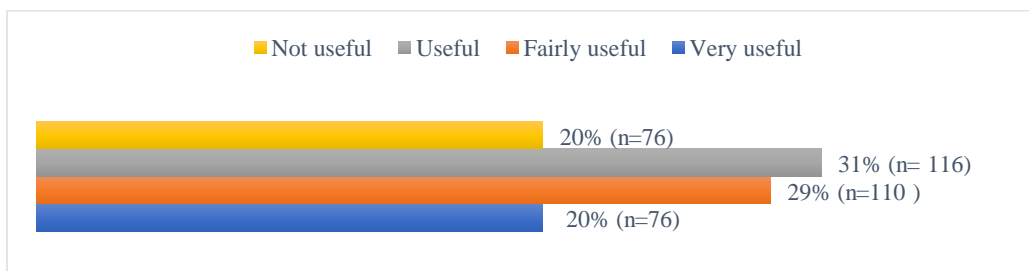
9) Do you follow any YouTube travel channel(s)?



10) How often do you search for YouTube videos of destinations where you are planning to travel to?

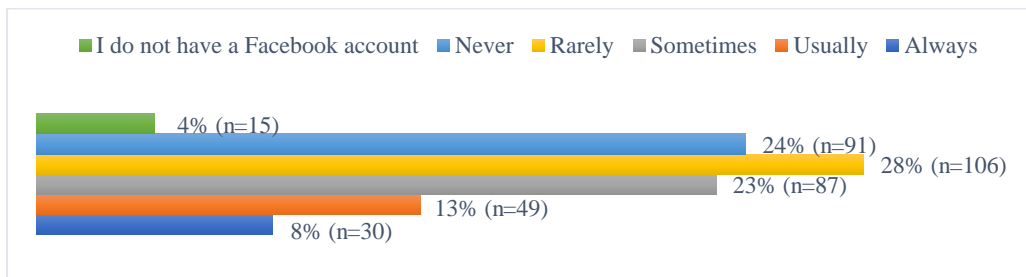


11) On Social Networks, how useful do you find travel videos to gather information about destinations?

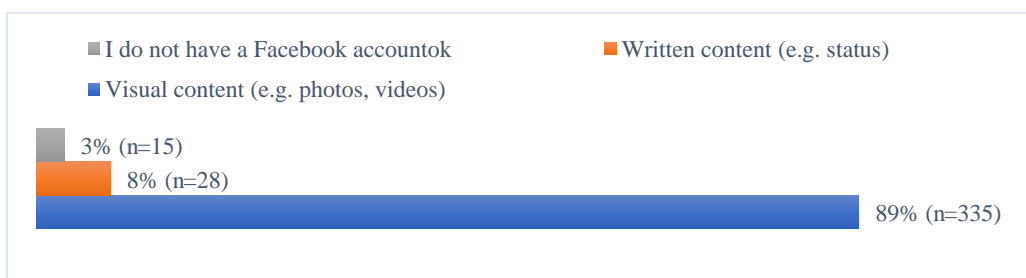


Section 4:

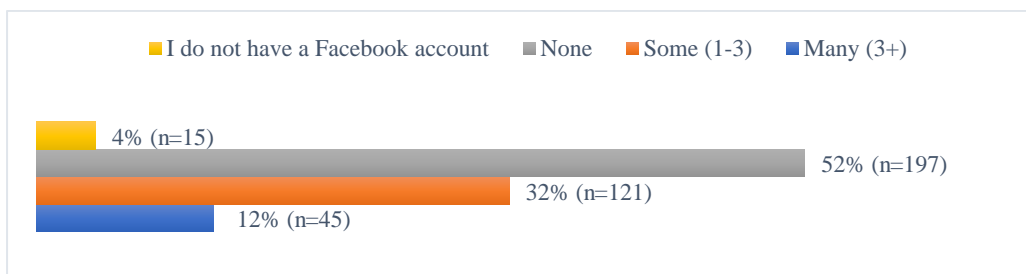
12) How often do you post on Facebook when travelling?



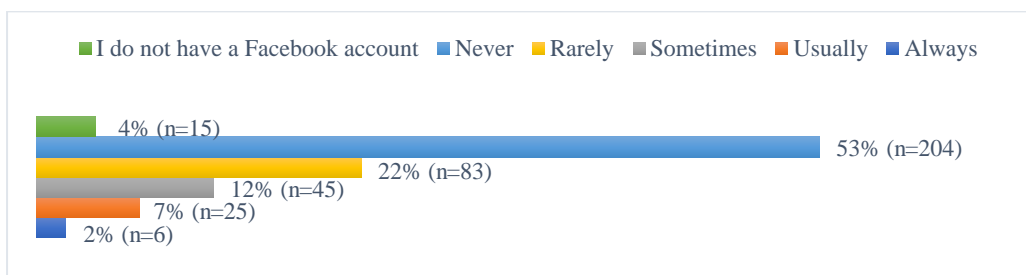
13) On Facebook, what content are you most likely to share when travelling?



14) Do you follow any Facebook travel group(s)/page(s)?

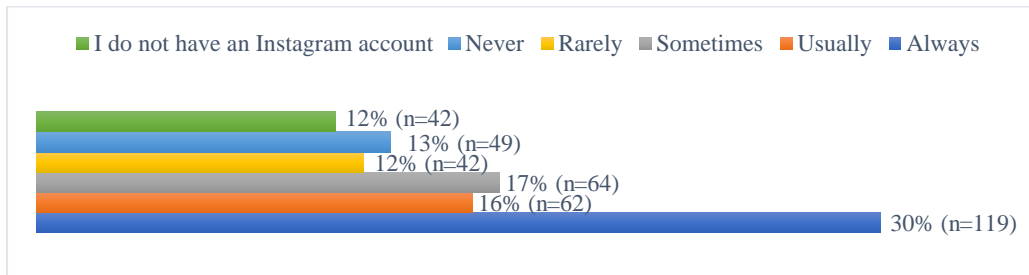


15) When planning to visit a destination, how often do you ask for suggestions on places to visit to other Facebook users via travel group(s)/page(s)?

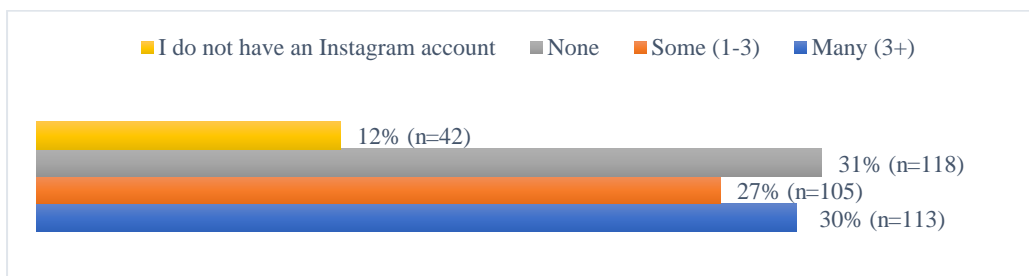


Section 5:

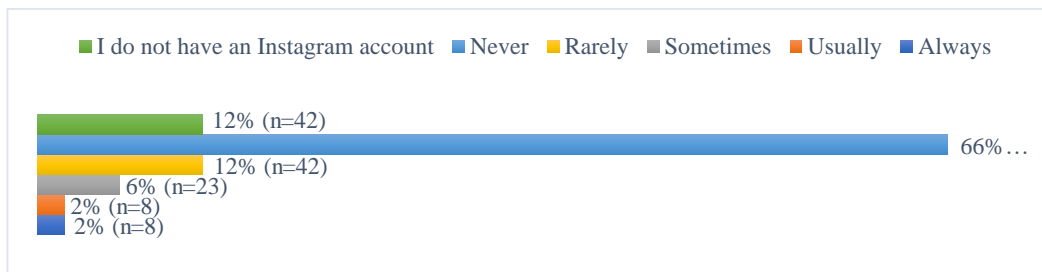
16) How often do you use Instagram when travelling?



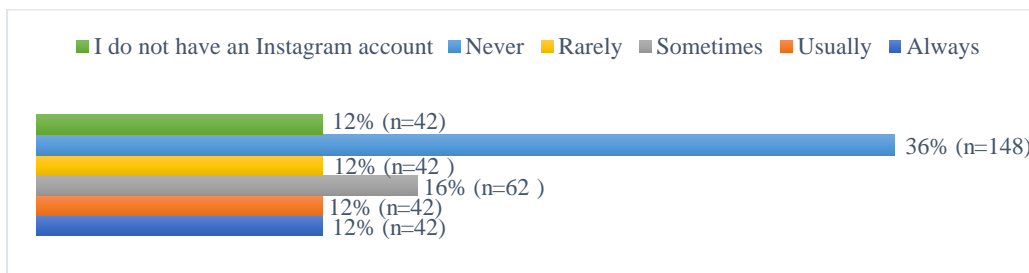
17) Do you follow any Instagram travel account(s)?



18) Have you ever contacted an official Instagram travel account for information?

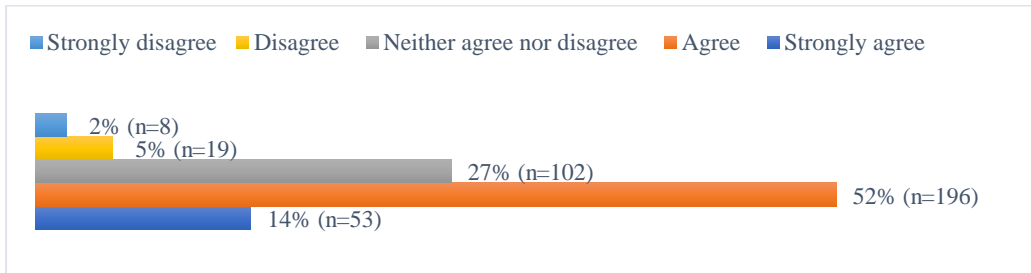


19) How often do you look for a destination of a place (e.g. site, restaurant, club etc.) using the “Place” section on Instagram?

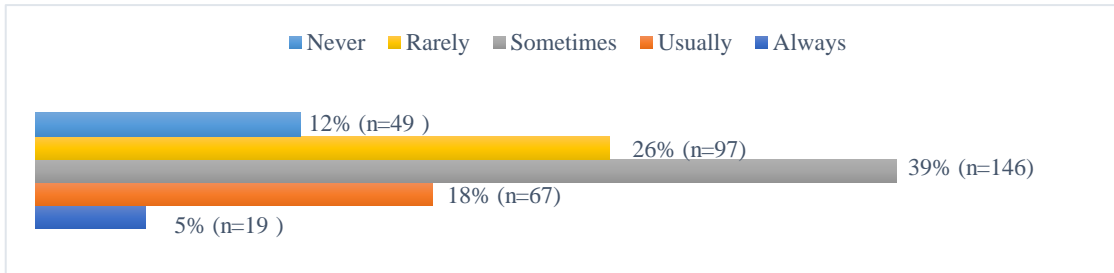


Section 6:

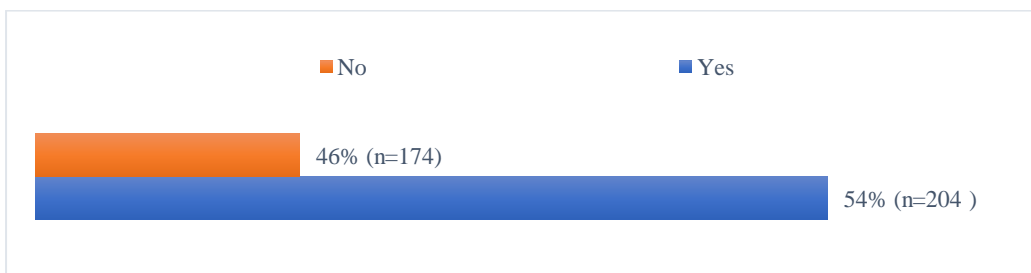
20) Do you think the tag of a location on photos/videos on Social Networks is useful to find out more information about a destination, as well as to discover new places to visit in the future?



21) How often have you been influenced by photos/videos on Social Networks in your choice of booking a destination?



22) Have you ever been influenced to prefer one destination/attraction over another one after seeing related photos/videos on social Networks?

























5. Empirical Research tables

Table 1. – Online survey results

		No. Individuals	Percentage
Gender	Male	132	64 %
	Female	243	35 %
	Transgender male	3	1 %
Geographical area	North America	23	6 %
	South America	8	2 %
	North Europe	109	29 %
	South Europe	166	44 %
	East Europe	31	8 %
	North Africa	2	1 %
	Africa	4	1 %
	Australia	2	1 %
	South Asia	20	5 %
	East Asia	5	1 %
	West Asia	8	2 %
Age	18 – 29	255	68 %
	30 – 45	73	19 %
	46 – 60	43	11 %
	60 >	7	2 %
Occupation	Employed for wages	134	36 %
	Self-employed	31	8 %
	Out of work but not currently looking for work	7	2 %
	Out of work and looking for work	13	3 %
	Student	178	47 %
	Retired	1	0 %
	Trainee	14	4 %

Table 2. – Photo Experiment Results

			N. Responses		% Responses	
			Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree
1a		Visit	3	27	10%	90%
1b		Faithful representation	21	9	70%	30%
2a		Visit	7	23	23%	77%
2b		Faithful representation	15	15	50%	50%
3a		Visit	7	23	23%	77%
3b		Faithful representation	20	10	67%	33%
4a		Visit	2	28	7%	93%
4b		Faithful representation	11	19	37%	63%
5a		Visit	8	22	27%	73%
5b		Faithful representation	13	17	43%	57%
6a		Visit	16	14	53%	47%
6b		Faithful representation	3	27	10%	90%
7a		Visit	4	26	13%	87%
7b		Faithful representation	4	26	13%	87%
8a		Visit	5	25	17%	83%
8b		Faithful representation	18	12	60%	40%
9a		Visit	11	19	37%	63%
9b		Faithful representation	4	26	13%	87%
10a		Visit	16	14	53%	47%
10b		Faithful representation	7	23	23%	77%
11		Disappointment (Trolltunga)	9	21	30%	70%
12		Disappointment (Northern Lights)	20	10	67%	33%

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