



university of
 groningen

Master Thesis: Understanding the influence of user-generated content on the tourist experience of Millennials.

Monica van der Veen (S4999509)

MSc Cultural Geography – Tourism Geography & Planning

University of Groningen

Campus Fryslân

June 4th , 2023

Wordcount: 10.396

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Literature review	6
2.1 User-generated content	7
2.2 The role of social media and user-generated content in tourism.....	7
2.3 The tourist experience.....	8
2.4 The role of mobile technology in the tourist experience.....	9
2.5 The role of photography in the tourist experience.....	9
2.6 Motives for capturing and sharing travel photographs	10
3. Methodology.....	10
3.1 Research method	11
3.2 Study area.....	11
3.3 Population and sampling	12
3.4 Sample size	13
3.5 Data collection and analysis	13
3.6 Ethics	14
4. Results and analysis.....	15
4.1 The role of UGC in the anticipatory stage of the trip.....	15
4.2 Negative influences UGC consumption on-site tourist experience.....	16
4.2.1 Interference with living in the moment	16
4.2.2 Trip satisfaction	19
4.3 Photo capturing and sharing and on-site experience	21
5. Discussion.....	22
6. Conclusion.....	25
6.1 Theoretical contribution.....	26
6.2 Contribution to the industry.....	27
6.3 Limitations.....	27

6.4	Recommendations for further research	27
7.	References.....	28
8.	Apendices	34
	Appendix 1: Interview guide.....	34
	Appendix 2: Consent form.....	35

ABSTRACT

Tourism has always been a mostly visual experience and therefore does photography play an important role in the promotion of a destination. Images of landscapes, sceneries and iconic landmarks are widely represented and lead tourists to envision a destination in a certain way. Nowadays, technology influences every aspect of our lives and Web 2.0 applications such as Instagram have empowered travellers to not only gather travel information but also share their own experiences. This is referred to as user-generated content which significantly influence the tourists' expectations regarding the destination they have chosen to visit. However, much of what is shared online is deceptive. While posting to social media, people are engaged in self-presentation and are therefore generally more inclined to select and emphasise the most positive facets. Therefore aimed this research to get a better understanding of how the consumption of user-generated content in the anticipatory stage of the trip influences the tourist experience. With a particular focus on the possible negative experiences as this is a largely unexplored area.

This has been explored with a qualitative research method employing semi-structured interviews in combination with a photo-sharing component. This research revealed that the negative influences were mainly experienced due to a perceived difference between the visual representations and reality and because UGCs are only a limited information resource. Which led to the following negative implications for the on-site tourist experience: (1) interference with living in the moment and (2) trip satisfaction. Furthermore, it was confirmed that expectations play a significant role in travel satisfaction as not only the on-site experience was negatively influenced by contrasting visual representations and the real life situation at the destination, but also the overall satisfaction with the trip. It is therefore recommended that visual representations should exactly reflect the destination, this means that its imperfections should also to avoid disengagement from destination components, which negatively affects the creation of memorable experiences and consequently affects visitor satisfaction levels, revisit intentions, and recommendation decisions.

Key words: User-generated content, social media, tourists experience, trip satisfaction, millennials

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, technology influences every aspect of our lives. This also applies to the tourism industry (Lam, Tam & Oh, 2014) where the internet and travel have become so interconnected that it has completely changed peoples' travel practices (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006). With the emergence of Web 2.0 applications such as Instagram and Facebook, the role of the internet has changed into a social platform where travellers can share their planning processes and motivations, ask questions and interact with other travellers (Jun, Hartwell & Buhalis, 2012). They are empowered (Mendes-Filho et al., 2018) to not only gather travel information but also create and share their own experiences (Jun, et al., 2012). Furthermore, social media and user-generated content (UGC) enhance the information exchange about attractions, destinations and tourist services, while simultaneously increasing the visibility of tourist experiences, mainly by sharing travel photographs (Machado, Santos & Medeiros, 2021).

Tourism has always been a mostly visual experience (Mackay & Fesenmaier, 1997). Urry (1990) describes that when people travel they gaze upon what they encounter, referring to this as the 'tourist gaze'. However, gazing upon the landscape does not come natural and needs to be taught, as according to Urry and Larson (2011, p1). "the pure and innocent eye" does not exist. Instead, the tourist gaze is enabled by the imagery in the media (Urry & Larson, 2011). Thus, the tourist gaze is a distinct way of looking at a destination formed through photography (Lee et al., 2022). Therefore, photography plays an important role in the promotion of a destination (Garrod, 2008). Images of landscapes, sceneries and iconic landmarks are widely represented through different types of media: guide books, brochures, internet advertisements, and picture postcards (Garrod, 2008; Jenkins, 2003). These images influence the way tourist gaze upon a destination and lead them to envision the landscapes in a certain way. Tourists base their experiences on imagery seen in the media by reproducing those photographs. This widespread practice is referred to by Urry and Larsen (2011) as the 'hermeneutic circle'.

Social media and UGC feed into both the tourist gaze and the hermeneutic circle. Through the aligned development of mobile technology, photo-taking devices and social media, images of tourist experiences are becoming increasingly visible as social media provides travellers with the opportunity to instantly share their travel photos (Lee et al., 2022). However much of what is shared online is deceptive. While posting to social media, people are engaged in self-presentation and are therefore generally more inclined to select and emphasise the most positive facets of their lives and themselves (Lin & Utz, 2015; Qiu et al., 2012; Reinecke & Trepte, 2014) In fact, tourists post photos that are deemed "worthy" or otherwise manipulate them through photo editing before they are shared online (Lo & McKercher, 2015). The enhancement of images with filters and the removal of crowds from them is a common occurrence (Sigala, 2019). Yet, destinations are in part evaluated by its visitors based on

pre-conceived imagery of what could be experienced on site (Kladou & Mavragani, 2015; Prayang, 2009; Wang & Hsu, 2010), in which UGC plays an important role. According to Narangajavana et al (2019) UGC significantly influences the tourists' expectations regarding the destination they have chosen to visit. Furthermore, the increased visibility of one's contemporaries' travel experiences on social media are particularly influential for millennials. For this generation travel has become a social status marker and viewing other's travel experiences stands parallel with envying them and a longing to imitate those experiences (Siegel & Wang, 2019). Therefore, it is important to get an understanding of how UGC influence the tourist experience of millennials and the following problem statements have been developed:

How does the consumption of user-generated contents in the anticipatory stage of the trip influence the experience of Millennials?

To aid in answering the problem statement the following research questions have been constructed:

RQ 1: How does the consumption of user generated content in the anticipatory stage of the trip influence the on-site tourist experience?

RQ 2: How is the photo-sharing intention influenced when one is not reproduce images as seen on social media?

The influence of UGC on the tourists experience has been researched to great extent (Cox et al., 2009; Mendes-Filho et al., 2018; Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018; Zhou & Xue, 2022). However, most of this research has been focussed on how UGC contributes to tourists' travel inspiration (Zhou & Xue, 2022), travel planning and decision making processes (Cox et al., 2009; Mendes-Filho et al., 2018) and their adoption of UGC (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018). In addition, most research within this context has emphasised the positive influence of social media on tourism while possible negative influences have remained unexplored (Sigala, 2019). In order to fill this theoretical gap and contribute to the literature this research will be focussed on understanding the possible negative impacts of user-generated content consumption on the on-site tourist experience. This understanding will provide destination management organisations (DMOs) with important insights into the role of travel influencer marketing strategies in the tourist experience which can help them in creating sustainable destination images.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter will take a closer look at the key concept for this research. Starting with an explanation of user-generated content. Followed by the role of social media and UGC in tourism. As this study aims to understand the influence of UGC consumption on the tourist experience, this is

another concept that needs to be explored in detail further and gain an understanding of the components that contribute to the tourist experience such as mobile technology, photography and sharing of travel photographs.

2.1 User-generated content

A distinction can be made between two types of travel representations tourists can encounter while gathering information on social media sites. 1) Organic sources of travel representations, these include user-generated content which can be uploaded by anyone and 2) commercial sources which include posts from official destination management organisations, travel agencies and travel bloggers. As this research focuses on understanding the influence of user-generated content on the tourist experience this section of the literature review will further explain this term. The term user-generated content (UGC) refers to a form of electronic word-of mouth (e-WOM) offering experiential, non-commercial and current travel information to its consumers (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). UGC are shared through social media applications and take the form of comments, online reviews and opinions on products and services used by creators (Mendes-Filho et al., 2018) as well as images (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015). This content has not been created for marketing purposes but is rather a “naturally occurring process of destination consumption” (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015, p.37) Consumption of UGC benefits travellers as it provides them with a clear notion of travel products and services that are offered which can reduce pre-purchase doubts and provide them with travel inspiration (Litvin et al., 2008; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009).

2.2 The role of social media and user-generated content in tourism

Social media has drastically changed the way through which tourist information is accessed and used (Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier, 2015). It has empowered travellers (Mendes-Filho et al., 2018) to not only gather travel information but also create and share their own experiences (Jun, et al., 2012). Thus, consumer behaviour in the travel industry is increasingly guided by UGC, shaping tourists’ feelings, perceptions and experiences (Leung et al., 2013; Luo & Zhong, 2015). Every stage of the tourism journey, pre-travel (anticipatory stage), during travel (experience stage) and post-travel (reflection stage) are greatly influenced by social media and UGC (Sigala 2019; Xu et al., 2021). A dominant trend in the tourism industry is travellers’ increased reliance on user-generated content (UGC) in making travel decisions (Amatulli, Angelis & Stoppani, 2019; Oliveira & Casais, 2019). In the anticipatory stage of the trip, UGC provide travellers with information about travel the destination and travel products, form their expectations (Wang, Qu & Hsu, 2016), aid in the development of travel plans (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) and decision making process (Xu et al., 2021). Research has shown that UGC are

particularly influential in travel-related decision-making regarding which destination to visit (Nezakati et al., 2015; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Furthermore, the internet and social media have become useful tools for suppliers to easily connect with and communicate with millions of potential customers (Lam et al., 2014). Whereas, it provides travellers with a platform to express themselves and engage with others (Lee et al., 2015). Social media has thus developed into a significant aspect of contemporary life and is crucial in the formation of one's self-image (Kim, Jang & Adler, 2015). In which personal photography plays an important role. Where the main purpose of personal photography used to be to look back on the trip and savour memories, has social media transformed travel photography into tool for forming identities and expressing oneself (Sigala, 2019). Due to the fact that Millennials place a larger value on experiences than on tangible belongings, research by Siegel and Wang (2019) has shown that travel has evolved into the method by which they gauge their social status. Travel has consequently come to be associated with peoples' innate urge to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to others, particularly for Millennials. Travel-related posts set off this behaviour (Sigala, 2019). While ultimately seeking authenticity, travellers invest a lot of effort into capturing the perfect travel picture, which results in the production of an artificial aspect to their experience (Sigala, 2019).

2.3 The tourist experience

Within the context of tourism, the word experience refers to the evaluated experience which is formed through reflection and by ascribing meaning to it (Highmore, 2002). One of the earlier definitions of the tourist experience refers to it as a person's engagement with an event on a physical, emotional, intellectual or spiritual level (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) which leaves the tourists with memorable impressions (Gram, 2005). While research on the tourist experience is extensive there does not seem to be a consensus on its definition. The continuous, intangible and subjective nature of experiences which makes them highly personal (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010) might contribute to this. Some researchers have aimed at understanding the tourist experience from the on-site destination perspective, such as Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003). They describe it as an interaction between the destination and tourists, referring to the destination as the site of the experience and the tourists as the actors within the experience. While Larson (2007) indicated that "the tourist experience should be defined as a past travel-related event which was significant enough to be stored in long-term memory" (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010 p. 4). Clawson and Knetsch (1996) argued that it is not only the on-site experience that constitute the tourist experience but that the anticipatory and reflection stages also impact it. Nevertheless, most research regarding the tourist experience is connected to the on-site experience (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010) and a large number of scholars have defined the tourist experience as the travellers' engagement with key elements of a destination including the

environment, the people, providers and their products and services (Larsen, 2007; Mosberg, 2007; Nickerson, 2006; O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998).

2.4 The role of mobile technology in the tourist experience

Within the tourists experience the travel motivation plays an important role as this a crucial concept that identifies the reason for travelling and 'how' travel motives are realised (Lee et al., 2022). Within the literature several motives for travel have been identified including: escapism, relaxation, novelty, regression, social interactions, enhancement of kinship and self-development (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Iso-Ahola, 1987). But according to Magasic (2016) is tourists' dependency on mobile technology altering the 'how' and 'why' of travel. While tourism is commonly considered as a way of escaping everyday home and work life (Krippendor, 1987), the continued mobile connectivity while travelling can influence the notion of separation (Lee et al., 2022). There are various reasons for maintaining mobile connectivity during one's travels, both travel and non-travel related, which include information searches, making travel arrangements, navigation, communication, updating and monitoring social media, photography and uploading social media content (Ayeh, 2018; Gretzel, 2010; Tan, 2017; Tanti & Buhalis, 2016; Wang, Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2016). Research into the effect of mobile connectedness during travels have identified both positive and negative influences. According to Gretzel (2010) can it contribute to the enhancement of the tourists experience but when time is spent on non-travel related activities it becomes a distraction to the on-site experiences (Tanti & Buhalis, 2016) which can lead to reduced interactions with those physically present, disembodied experiences and a lower sense of place. Furthermore, mobile connectivity hinders the pursuit of escapism (Tan, 2017), thus altering the sense of escaping (Neuhofer, 2016).

2.5 The role of photography in the tourist experience

Within the earlier views on the tourist experience, tourist photography was viewed as a distraction. The camera was not viewed as a tool of empowerment but rather as a hinder to the experience or as an aid in the reproduction of stereotypical photographic representations (Stylianou-Lambert, 2012). Sontag (2002) views tourist with cameras as voyeurs, merely appearing to participate while in reality this prevents them from fully immersing in the experience. However, more recent research into tourist photography and the tourists experience has found that the tourists' level of happiness is increased by photography (Gillet, Schmitz & Mitas, 2016) and that it makes the experience more enjoyable (Diehl, Zauberman & Barasch, 2016). Furthermore, Lee et al (2022) found that nowadays online photo sharing also significantly contributes to the tourist experience. Therefore, Lee et al (2002) argue for redefinition of the tourists experience that currently is primarily focussed the tourist's engagement with the destination in the physical space, centred around the interaction between the tourist and destination elements. However, they argue that the definition of the tourist experience should also

include the virtual space as being disconnected has become the exception instead of the norm. And therefore they argue for a definition of the tourist experience that integrates “online photo-sharing and interactions facilitated by the increasing functionality of social networking sites” (p.13).

Thus, it becomes clear that the tourist experience is a much debated concept. As tourist experiences are continuous, intangible and subjective and highly personal. Furthermore, the aligned development in mobile technology, photo-taking devices and social networking sites are greatly influencing how tourists travel and how they experience their travels.

2.6 Motives for capturing and sharing travel photographs

The previous paragraph on the role of photography in the tourist experience has shown that capturing photos while travelling has positive effects on the experience. It increases the tourist’ level of happiness (Gillet, et al., 2016) and makes the experience more enjoyable (Diehl et al., 2016). In addition, sharing travel photos on social media has a positive impact on the recollection of the experience (Lee et al., 2022). Thus, capturing and sharing photographs are instruments in the collection of memories (Groves & Timothy, 2001). Further reasons for capturing and sharing travel photos are to express one’s identity (Stylianou-Lambert, 2021), to share experiences (Azariah, 2017) and as a component for social relations (Van House et al., 2004).

From the literature it thus becomes clear that the arrival of Web 2.0 applications such as Instagram have transformed the role of the internet into a social platform. Travellers cannot only turn to it to gather information, but also share their own experiences on it. This has led to an increased visibility of one contemporaries experiences. UGC are especially influential in decision making-processes and are increasingly shaping tourists’ feelings, perceptions and experiences. However, limited research has been done into how the on-site tourist experience is shaped by the consumption of UGC and this study aims to fill this gap.

3. METHODOLOGY

The following chapter will provide information on the research methods used for this study. Starting with an explanation on how data has been gathered. Then, the study area is introduced, followed by a description of the population and the sampling method and sample size. Furthermore, the data collection process and analysis method are thoroughly described. The chapter finished with a discussion of the ethics.

3.1 Research method

The research method refers to the manner in which data is gathered and analysed. For this study the choice has been made for a qualitative research approach in the form of semi-structure interviews. The aim of this study is to get an understanding of the tourists experience and from the literature review it has become clear that the tourist experience is highly personal (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010) and thus varies from person to person. According to Hay (2021) interviews are an appropriate method when the aim is to investigate people's behaviours and motivations and gather a wide range of opinions. As this research is concerned with understanding personal experiences and opinions in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how the consumption of UGC possibly negatively influences the tourist experience, this research can be considered exploratory of nature (Proctor, 2005). Hay (2021) describes that one of the strengths of interviewing is that it allows the researcher to get an understanding of what the participants deem relevant and respond to it accordingly. Semi-structured interviews in particular allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions, based on important aspects the participants referred to (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews provide flexibility which can lead to rich and detailed answers (Bryman, 2012) and its face-to-face setting allowed the interviewee to ask for clarification when questions were not clear (Hay, 2021). In addition to the semi-structured interviews, a filmic approach has been applied, as described by Crang and Cook (2007) in the form of a photo-sharing component. One of the objectives of this research is to explore the type of images the tourist themselves reproduce based on the UGC they have consumed before. Therefore, during the interview, research participants have been asked to share the content that inspired them to travel or visit a certain site, as well as the photographs they themselves captured and possibly shared on social media. This means that the photographs reflect their own chosen representations, without them being influenced by researcher bias. Instead, these photographs contain their own ideas of what should (not) be captured and how it should (not) be presented as participants captured and possibly shared these photographs prior to their knowledge of this research. According to Crang and Cook (2007), employing people's own photographs is a useful technique to gain insight into social norms. Furthermore, using a filmic approach such as photo-sharing within an interview is beneficial in gaining further understanding of the participant's opinions that would not be gained by solely conducting an interview. This technique facilitated the creation of a narrative of their experiences (Bell, 2010).

3.2 Study area

This study focusses on understanding the experiences of Millennials. Due to the fact that Millennials place a higher value on experiences than on material possessions and for whom travel has become a social marker (Siegel & Wang, 2019) this cohort makes an intriguing target group for this study. Raised

in the digital age, Millennials can be considered digital natives and their behaviour can be an indicator of how people will act in the future (Styvén & Foster, 2018). With this in mind, Edinburgh was selected as area in which to recruit the participants due to the city's efforts in attracting Millennial travellers. In 2018, in support with DMO VisitScotland, the city launched a destination-led campaign to attract young people (Smith, 2018). In addition, a study by Klook Travel in 2018 found that the city attracts more people from generations Z and Y than from any other (Rokou, 2018). Almost 2 million of tourists visiting Edinburgh belong to the millennial generation (Smith, 2018). Therefore it was expected to encounter plenty of possible participants willing to partake in the research. However, this turned out differently, more detailed information on this is given in the following paragraph.

3.3 Population and sampling

The population refers to the overall category of subjects a research is focussed on (Veal, 2011). For this research, the focus is on Millennials which refers to the cohort born between 1981 and 1997, (Kurz, Li & Vine, 2019) with ages ranging from 26 to 38 in 2023.

For the sampling method, use has been made of a combination of purposeful and volunteer sampling. This means that personal judgement of the researcher was used in the selection of individuals from the population to be part of the sample. For this study, individuals have been selected based on the following criteria: (i) they are technological-savvy Millennials, meaning that they own a smartphone and are social media users. (ii) have experience in using social media/UGC in the anticipatory or experiences stages of the trip (iii) have travelled within the past 12 months to ensure that experiences are easy to recollect. Possible participants have been approached both online and offline. Half of the participants have been recruited in Edinburgh where the researcher stayed from the 5th of April 2023 to the 12th of April 2023. During this time the researcher lodged in a Co-living hostel offering both shared and private rooms with a total of 23 beds. Possible participants were approached in the common area of this hostel during times that people gathered here. This was mainly in the evening hours when people were cooking and coming together after being out during the day to share stories of their experiences. During these times, the researcher explained the purpose of the research and invited people to participate. However, as the hostel was not as big and the majority of the guest were there for a long-term stay, only five participants were recruited this way. The other interviewees were recruited online where a call for participants has been placed in the following Facebook groups Backpackers Azie and Backpackers Zuid-Amerika. These specific Facebook groups have been selected because they contain many members that are currently travelling. As one of the criteria for participation in this study is to have travelled within the past 12 months to ensure that experiences are easy to recollect, this was deemed the most sufficient way to guarantee that possible participants fit this criteria. Participants could volunteer to participate in the research and a selection of the

volunteers was made based on the above mentioned criteria. During the selection process, interviewees received an explanation on how the photo sharing component would be applied within this the research.

The table below provides an overview of the characteristics of the sample. As can be seen, the sample consists out of a total of 10 participants between the ages of 27 and 34.

Interview	Pseudonym	Nationality	Age	Gender
1	Daisy	German	27	Female
2	Nathalie and Erik	Belgian	33 and 34	Male and Female
3	Anne	Italian	27	Female
4	Nathan	Afghan	28	Male
5	Rianne	German	29	Female
6	Jessica	Dutch	28	Female
7	Ronja	Dutch	28	Female
8	Zoë	Belgian	27	Female
9	Ryle	USA	30	Male

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample

3.4 Sample size

In qualitative research there is no power analysis to determine an exact number for the sample size. Instead, the appropriate sample size is determined when data saturation is reached. However, there is no *one-size-fits-all* procedure that can be applied to reach data saturation. Instead, there are some general principles to follow. Data saturation is reached when there is no more ability to attain new information, no new themes longer emerge and when further coding is no longer possible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Based on this, saturation was researched after 9 interviews.

3.5 Data collection and analysis

For this study, the data collection process was made up out of two segments 1) in depth-interviews accompanied with (2) a photo sharing component. This photo sharing component served as a supporting element to the interviews. By sharing photographs of their experiences the participants were able to crate narratives around them which allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding the participants' experiences. The interviews took place from the 19th of April 2023 until the 27th of May 2023. Moreover, all of them took place online and were facilitated with the use of Google Meet. The interviews lasted between 15 to 30 minutes and were recorded and transcribed with the use of the Otter.TI application. The interview guide can be found in appendix 1.

After that, the interviews were analysed by means of Boeije's (2010) model for coding qualitative data. This process was facilitated by the use of Atlas.TI. Through the above mentioned model the raw data from the interviews was first segmented into relevant categories after which these categories were provided with codes. This initial step in the process is referred to as open coding and is achieved by breaking down and categorising the data into fragments with the same subject which were then labelled with a code (Boeije, 2010). During this time meaningful quotes were identified. The following step was to apply axial coding. During this process the data is put back together and connections are made between categories (Boeije, 2010). During this stage of the analyses colour coding was applied to simplify the determination of dominant and connecting elements. The final step is selective coding where the resulting categories from the axial coding were linked to theoretical concepts and overarching themes identified. Themes that emerged in this analysis were: contrast between visual representation and reality, limited information resource, interference with living in the moment and trip satisfaction.

3.6 Ethics

While conducting research, it is important to reflect on its ethical considerations. According to Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden (2000) ethical issues exist within any kind of research. Ethics refer to doing good without causing harm. It is the responsibility of the researcher to prevent harm by applying appropriate ethical principles that protect the participants' rights and maintain their privacy (Orb et al., 2000). This research aimed to get an understanding of the experiences of tourists and did not purposefully set out to address sensitive topics that might be too difficult for the participants to discuss. Nevertheless, as this research also aimed to get an understanding of possible negative influences of the use of social media on the tourists' experience the researcher needed to consider the implications of discussing such issues. As social media use in daily life has been linked to negative impacts such as anxiety and low self-esteem (Pantic, 2014) which influences people's mental health and well-being (Meier et al., 2020). This might have made the participants reluctant to discuss certain experiences. To ensure that harm was prevented, it was made clear at the beginning of the interviews that if the participants at any time during the interview were uncomfortable answering any questions for whatever reason, they could choose not to answer. Participants also had the option to end the interview at any given time and had the option to decide to revoke the whole interview even after two weeks had passed since the interview took place.

Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the researcher to prevent harm to the participant. While it was not anticipated that the interviews on the experiences of the tourist would bring about any concerning revelations, the researcher monitored the participants on any signs of distress. When this would have

occurred the interview would not have been continued and efforts would have been made to comfort the participants as best as possible.

As indicated by Orb et al (2000), maintaining the privacy of the participant's is another important aspect to consider. Therefore, names and other information by which participants might be identified are not included in the interview transcripts. With the application of the photo-sharing component within this study there was the possibility that participants would share photographs that portrayed themselves. Therefore the consent form asked for consent on their use in the report. If they did not consent, photographs have only been used for interview guiding purposes and have not been included in the final report. The final report is only viewed by the researcher herself, the thesis supervisor and the second grader. All data, both audio and visual has been safely stored on password protected devices (phone and laptop) and saved to the researchers password protected cloud. By applying these principles the privacy of the participants has been protected.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following chapter will present the results of interviews. The results are split up in two sections. The first section relates to the consumption of UGC and its negative influences on the tourist experience while the second part relates how the capturing/sharing intention of photographs is influenced when tourists are not able to recreate the images they encounter online.

4.1 The role of UGC in the anticipatory stage of the trip

This study revealed that all interviewees consume UGC in the anticipatory stage of their trip. The most popular medium for this is social media site Instagram as it was mentioned by eight of the participants as a source for inspiration when travelling. One of the participants also mentioned that besides making use of Instagram, to also consult Youtube and one other participant described to mainly make use of blogs. Most of the participants indicated to have decided on the destination beforehand after which UGC are consumed to get an overview of what a destination has to offer and to get inspired on which sites, activities or places to visit within the destination. It became clear that participants were more likely to visit well-known and popular tourist attractions, due to their extensive exposure to them. As explained by Daisy when talking about the National Monument of Scotland on Calton Hill in Edinburgh: *"This picture or also variations of this picture is something that you kind of always come across when searching or looking for Edinburgh [...] So it's something that's always there in the back of my mind when I think about the city."* This showcases how influential visual representations are in the formation of the personal gaze of the participants.

On the other hand, findings show that most of the time, UGC are not influential in the selection of a destination, instead, the majority of participants indicated that the consumption of UGC could reinforce their desire to visit the destination they had already chosen. Only one of the participants indicated to have selected the destination for the trip based on the UGC viewed on Instagram. For the participants who turn to Instagram for gathering inspiration on places and sites to visit at the destination, the platform becomes a research tool by making use of hashtags to gather information. Several of the respondents (7) have indicated to solely rely on UGC for gathering inspiration of their trip. Such as Erik and Nathalie who are travelling the Pan-American Highway and solely gather inspiration on where to go and what to do based on the Instagram posts by other travellers ahead of them.

“So we follow each other on Instagram and we see each other's pictures and everything. So what we do is we actually barely plan anything in advance. We just follow people that are in front of us, and then we see on their pictures or videos what we want to do.” – Erik and Nathalie

4.2 Negative influences UGC consumption on-site tourist experience

The following part of the findings relates to the negative influences the consumption of UGC in the anticipatory stage of the travels can have on the on-site tourist experience. The analysis revealed that the negative influences were mainly experienced due to a perceived difference between the visual representations and reality and because UGCs are only a limited information resource. Which led to the following negative implications for the on-site tourist experience: (1) interference with living in the moment and (2) trip satisfaction.

4.2.1 Interference with living in the moment

The first theme that arose from the interviews regarding how the on-site experience can be negatively influenced by the consumption of UGC in the anticipatory stage of the trip is that it interferes with ‘living in the moment’. This has been experienced by the participants in different ways. Results show that the most frequent reason for a diminished on-site tourist experience due to the consumption of UGC beforehand, is the perceived difference between the visual representations of the destination/sites online versus what the participants encountered in real life. This can be related to the destination attributes as well as external elements. However, the limited capacity of UGC as information resource is also influential for the on-site experience. Several of the participants indicated that the stark contrast impacted their experiences. Participants described that their feelings of disappointment about the unmet expectations influenced their ability to focus on living in the moment and seeing the destination for what it is.

A frequently mentioned external element that influences the on-site tourist experience are the crowds at the destination. Destinations and popular tourist sites are often displayed in the media void of crowds and even though most participants indicated that crowds can be expected, it interferes with the experience. Several participants described that crowds influence the atmosphere and are a distraction to the experience, As Daisy describes:

“Well, no, the pictures they're always really empty and is really nice. And I kind of expected that to be like I mean, obviously you always have to expect people I think wherever you go, but it was a bit more crowded than I expected it to be.” [...] “And with the monument, people were just climbing on it. So you never had this option to just take it in without being distracted by people climbing national monuments.” – Daisy, interviewee 1

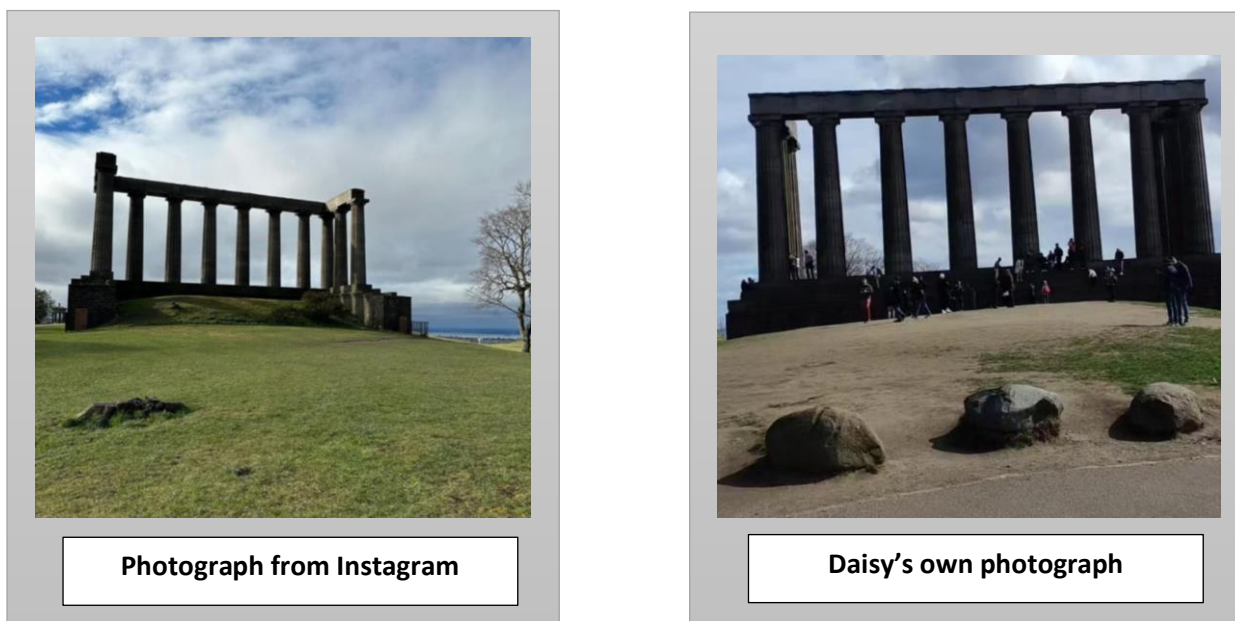


Image 1: Visualisation of the difference between visual representation the National Monument of Scotland

Destination attributes are important factors that amongst others influence where tourists travel and thus can be described as the pull factor (Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Several participants mentioned that the difference between the depiction of destination attributes in images and the real life situation can have an influence on the on-site experience. Participants described that their feelings of disappointment about the unmet expectations influenced their ability to focus on living in the moment and seeing the destination for what it is. For instance, Anne recalled a past vacation to Crete where she was inspired to visit Elafonisi Beach, also referred to as pink beach, by images on Instagram such as the one below (image 2). Based on the picture below she he expected to encounter a *“nice corner of nature that you don't see every day”*. However, when she was there herself the beach looked hardly pink. The quote below exemplifies the perceived impact on her on-site experience.

“I thought of another way in which the picture influenced my experience. Because of the disappointment caused by the unmet expectation, it made me be less present in the moment. I mean it in the sense that it somewhat (not completely of course) discouraged me from seeing the beauty in what was actually there, because it kept me focussed on what I missed.” – Anne, interviewee 3

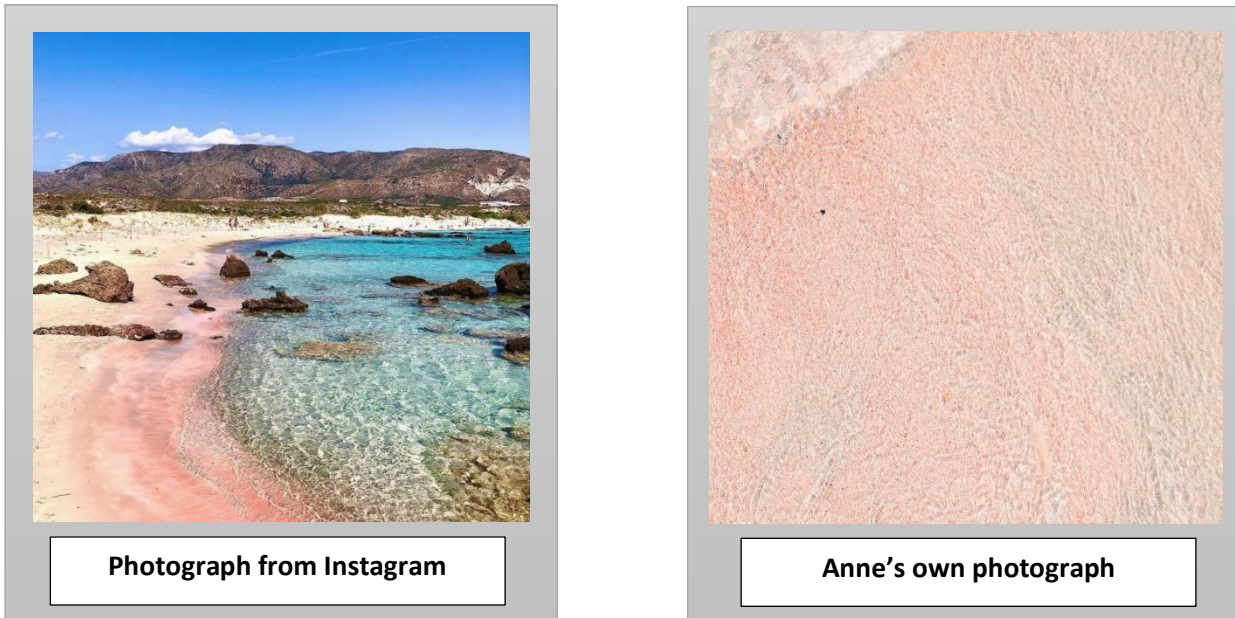


Image 2: Visualisation of the difference between visual representation of Elafonisi Beach, Crete

Another way in which the consumption of UGC beforehand can interfere with living in the moment is when participants indicated that they specifically sought out a certain activity to undertake or site to visit because they had seen it on social media beforehand. This self-inflicted pressure of recreating the experiences of ones contemporaries can lead to becoming too goal oriented and therefore missing out on fully seeing the destination.

“You don't go into the experience with an open mind. You already formed an image, you expect to see and do certain things and you look for them. So this happened to me when I was in Thailand, I visited this waterfall which had 7 levels. Of which the top level is praised as the most beautiful one and therefore my goal was to reach that level but therefore I did not linger as long at the other layers.” – Jessica, interviewee 6

Furthermore, the limited capacity of UGC in the form of photographs and videos to provide information can influence the on-site experience. This was mainly experienced by participants that decided to visit a certain destination/site solely based on viewing others pictures and videos on social media sites. Participants reported on missing out on vital information that would have improved their

on-site experience by only consulting pictures and videos. Leaving them to be distracted from the actual experience as they had to deal with unanticipated problems.

Interestingly, this study found that even though the majority of respondents claim to be aware of the “deceptive nature” of images on social media sites and claim to place limited trust in them, UGC are still highly influential in the formation of their expectations. Several participants have discussed their suspicions of the realness of pictures shared on social media sites, especially when it comes to Instagram, they expect the pictures to be altered and edited. Several participants indicated that this is especially the case for pictures shared by DMOs and travel influencers which are perceived to be unreliable, while a little more trust is placed in pictures shared by “normal” people. As explained by Daisy:

“I think it's it's like influencers or I think the way also probably like promotional companies. I would say not a lot of trust. I think there are faking a lot of it. They probably even editing people out just to share this amazing spot. I don't think it's realistic at all. I think if it's from people like me, for example, that just posted it, like you find it through a hashtag or through something I do think those are more realistic”.

While others consider everyone to be guilty of portraying things better than they are on social media. As described by Nathalie and Erik: *“But what do you have also with with social media is first of all, you know, we talked about it yesterday, is everybody's gonna show the best picture. So as everybody knows, social media is never really a reality.”*

Yet, the majority of participants rely solely on UGC for gathering of travel-related information and inspiration for their trip. Even after bad experiences with it, the majority of respondents state that they will continue to make use of UGC in the anticipatory stage of their trip. Thus, indicating the increased reliance on UGC in making-travel related decisions.

4.2.2 Trip satisfaction

The second theme highlighted from the interviews is trip satisfaction. Results show that the consumption of UGC in the anticipatory stage of the trip influence the satisfaction with the on-site experience. As with the previous dimension, play both the contrast between the virtual and real world and the limited informative capacity of UGC in the form of photographs and videos a role in this.

Several participants reported on the limited informative capacity of UGC, in relation to dissatisfaction with their trip. Especially when solely relying on photographs and videos for inspiration. Rianne, recalled the ‘disappointing’ visit to Trinity College Library in Dublin, which she decided to visit because

she came across photographs on Instagram, not knowing that it was under construction and a large part of the books were not present.

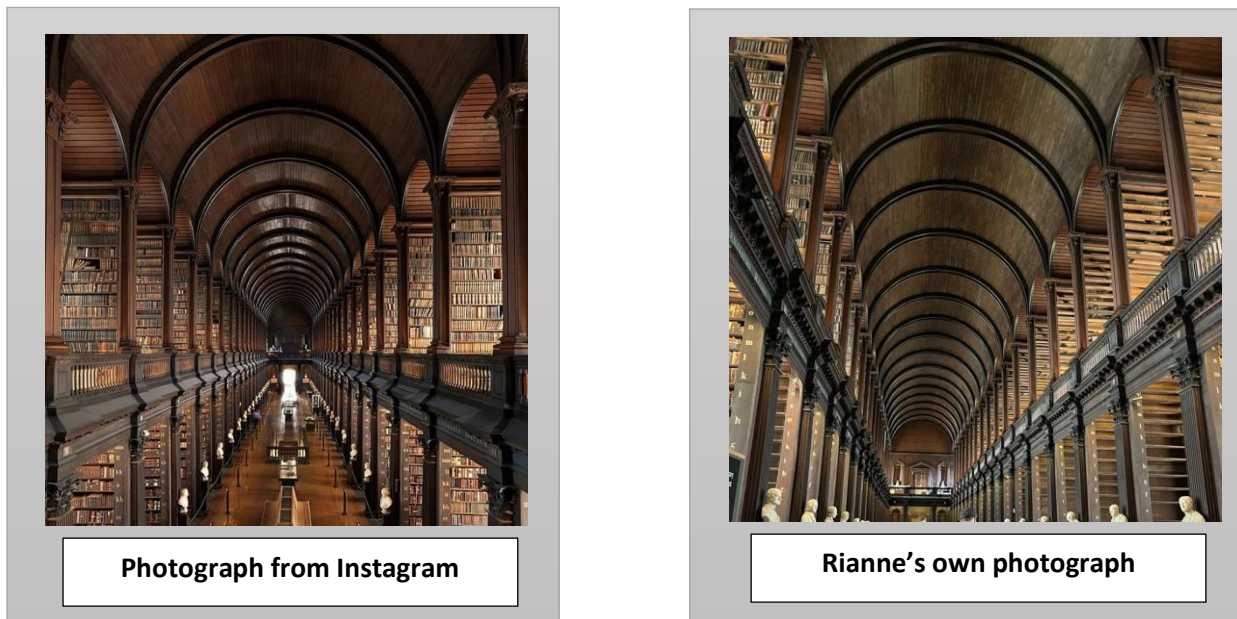


Image 3: Visualisation of the difference between visual representation of Trinity College Library in Dublin

In close relation with the first dimension does the perceived contrast between the online visual representations and the lived experience influence trip satisfaction. Several participants reported feelings of frustration and disappointment during the on-site experience. Which resulted in diminished feelings of enjoyment. Findings show that the expectations created beforehand by the visual representations online play an important role in trip satisfaction. Especially the interviewees that had high expectations before the trip commenced reported on feelings of dissatisfaction with their trip and diminished enjoyment. As was the case for Ryle who recalled his trip to Cartagena in Colombia, expecting to encounter the perfect beach destination. However, his on-site experience was very different, as is visualised in the images (image 4) below.

“Frustrated I would say yeah. Just because I mean, you expect it to be a certain way. And when it's not what your hopes are., it's disappointing, frustrating and almost like, oh man, wish we were somewhere else, you know, at this point. [...] oh man we didn't really enjoy it that much.” – Ryle, interviewee 9

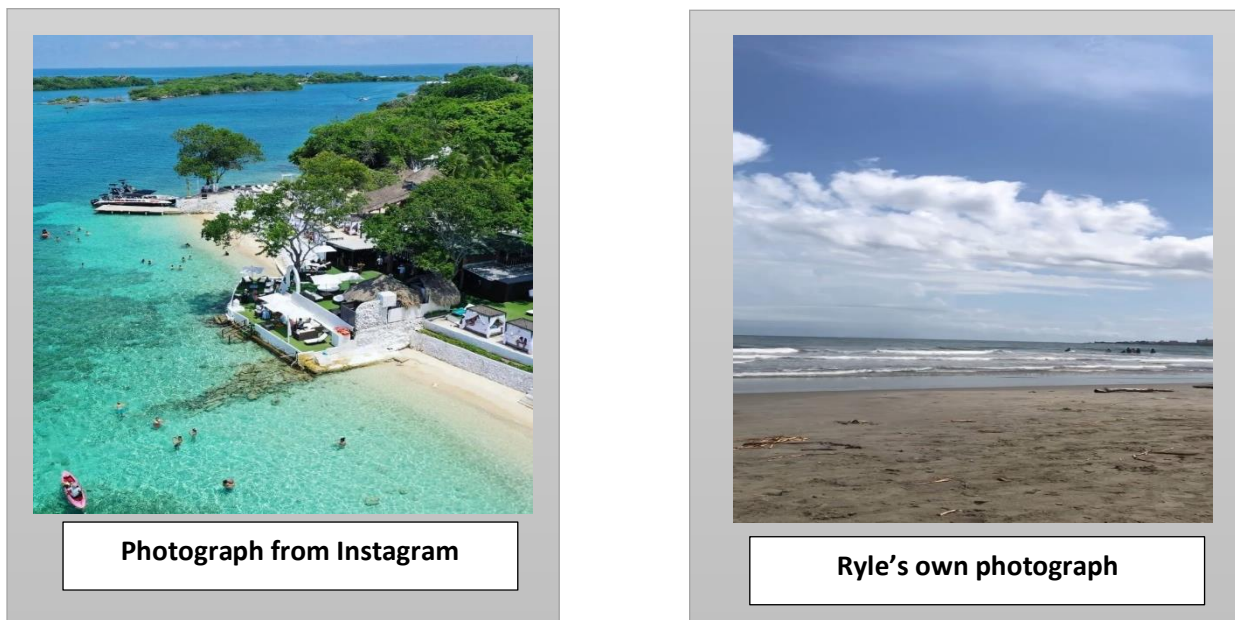


Image 4: Visualisation of difference between visual representation of the destination Cartagena and reality

Furthermore, in multiple cases, did participants not only report on diminished on-site experiences but also indicated that they don't have good memories of the trip, describing lingering feelings of disappointment and regret. Thus, it becomes clear that unmet expectations also influence the post travel reflection stage which is exemplified by the following quotes:

"I was scammed. I feel scammed or I feel Yeah. Yeah. Basically that." – Anne, interviewee 3

"I still feel like okay, maybe we should have just booked another day extra. We should have done more research and had a better experience." – Nathalie and Erik, interviewees 2

"I wish we would have known because I mean we probably would have done a different trip or like done like something else [...] we wouldn't really recommend anyone to come here." – Ryle, interviewee 9

4.3 Photo capturing and sharing and on-site experience

The following section of the report will discuss the findings on how the photo sharing intention is influenced when tourists are not able to recreate images they encountered beforehand.

Almost all participants stated that capturing photographs during their trip is relatively important to them (7). Mainly in order to capture memories and to be able to look back on the places they have travelled to at a later stage. However, none of the participants takes photographs with the intent in mind to later share them to social media. Therefore, they all indicated that it is not their goal to capture 'the perfect photograph' as this can negatively influence the experience because it is time-consuming

and prevents from experiencing the destination. As pointed out by Daisy: *“Like, I’m not spending hours to get the perfect picture, then I’d rather take the experience in.”* Thus, it becomes clear that the reproduction of photographs as seen on social media is of no importance.

When being asked to the importance of posting photographs of one’s travels most participants indicated (8) that it is of no importance for the on-site experience. However, they admit that their Instagram walls primarily contain photographs of their travels and that overall they would post at least one picture of their travels. Main motivations for this are to share their experiences with others, mostly with friends and family. Instagram is the main social media platform to which participants post their photographs and many regard it as an online photo-book. An interesting finding is that the sharing intention does get influenced by the quality of the experience and by the quality of the photographs that are captured. The majority of the participants (8) admitted that when they do post their photographs, only the best ones are selected to be posted to their Instagram wall and one of the participants also indicated to edit the photographs a little bit before posting. When experiences or photographs are regarded as of not good enough quality to be shared to the Instagram wall, several of the participants (5) indicated to still feel the desire to share the experience but then opt to post them to their Instagram stories instead. As described by Ryle:

“Yeah, I mean, I’d like to show off like whenever I’m at a really cool spot. I usually will make a post about it. But since this experiences wasn’t the best, I was here but like, I don’t really have the most amazing pictures. So I shared it to my stories to have something to look back on but I did not necessarily put it on my wall as if it was a huge highlight because it wasn’t really”. – Ryle, interviewee

9

5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to fill the gap in the literature on the influence of consuming UGC on the on-site tourists experience. More specifically, it aimed to get a better understanding of the negative influences this can have on the on-site experience, as this area is only limitedly explored so far.

Many scholars (Amatulli, et al., 2019; Lueng et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2019) have explored the role of UGC in the anticipatory stage of the trip and have found that travellers are increasingly relying on UGC in their decision-making processes. This was also confirmed by this study as the majority of respondents indicated to solely rely UGC in the anticipatory stage of their trip. Moreover, several of the respondents relied solely on photographs and videos shared on social media platforms such as Instagram and Youtube. This shows the essential role UGC can play in the decision-making process of travellers (Narangajavana et al., 2017). However, in contrast with previous findings from (Nezakati et al., 2015; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), this study did not confirm that UGC are most

influential in the decision-making process regarding which destination to visit. Instead, the majority of the participants had already decided on which destination to visit and UGC were consumed to gather more information on the destination. This is in line with Xiang and Gretzel (2010), who place a strong emphasis on the use of social media and UGC in the search for travel-related information. It was found that consumption of UGC reinforces the participants' desire to travel to a previously determined destination and to provide a first impression of what the destination has to offer. Indicating that social media and UGC feed into the tourist gaze as the images shared by others lead tourists to envision the destination in a certain way (Jenkins, 2003; Urry, 1990; Urry & Larson, 2011). Furthermore, participants were more likely to visit well-known and popular tourist attractions, due to their extensive exposure to them.

Concerning the negative influences the consumption of UGC content can have on the on-site experience, this research found two main reasons why negative impacts can be experienced. First of all, the contrast between the visual representations of a destination and the situation the participants encountered in real life. Moreover, this can be in relation with the destination attributes and/or external elements. The other reason is the limited capacity of UGC in the form of pictures and videos as information resource. Results show that UGC do not only influence the decision-making process (Nezakati et al., 2015; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Xu et al., 2021) but they also shape the participants' expectations of the destination. When these expectations are not met, the participants' on-site experiences are negatively impacted as it interferes with their ability to live in the moment and leads to distracted experiences. This confirms that social media and UGC feed into the tourist gaze. As the tourists gaze is formed through visual representations which leads tourists to envision the destination in a certain way (Jenkins, 2003; Urry, 1990; Urry & Larson, 2011). When the real life situation does not align with the expectations and perceptions previously formed through UGC consumption, participants cannot get away from the previously constructed destination image, restricting the tourist gaze. This confirms Urry and Larson's (2011, p1) claim that "the pure and innocent eye" does not exist and that gazing upon the landscape does not come naturally (Urry & Larson, 2011).

This research found that the unfulfillment of expectations will continue to impact the generation of travel satisfaction. As the restricted tourist gaze experienced by participants and the subsequent diminished enjoyment of the on-site tourist experience in several cases resulted in an overall dissatisfaction with the trip and feelings of regret. This was especially the case for the participants who had high expectations beforehand. This confirms disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980) which describes that the disconfirmation of expectations theory is typically used to describe the cognitive factor. This theory is used to explain the process of customer satisfaction formation because it is based on

comparisons between expectations and how services or products are perceived (Castaeda, Fras & Rodriguez, 2007; Oliver, 1980; Oliver, 1993). Thus, expectations have a direct influence on travel satisfaction. However, in contradiction with findings from Narangajavana et al (2017) who argue that expectations can only be created when tourists place trust in the UGC that is shared. This study found that expectations are still created even when participants question the reality of what is shared online.

Another way in which the consumption of UGC contributes to an interference with living in the moment during the on-site experience is when travellers become too goal oriented by searching out specific locations to visit which they have seen online beforehand. This can result in distracted experiences. In relation to distracted experiences, was the concept of 'distracted gaze' recently introduced by Ayeh (2018). He conceptualised this term in association with tourists mobile connectedness at the destination that causes tourist's gaze to become distracted. According to Melón et al (2021), distracted experiences cause disengagement from destination components, which negatively affects the creation of memorable experiences and consequently affects visitor satisfaction levels, revisit intentions, and recommendation decisions. This research suggests that the 'distracted gaze' is not only applicable to refer to the distracted experiences caused by mobile use at the destination, but can also be influenced by mobile use in the anticipatory stage of the trip. Therefore the researcher argues for a more comprehensive conceptualisation of the term 'distracted gaze'.

Social media and UGC have enhanced the visibility of tourist experiences (Machado et al., 2021). According to Siegel and Wang (2019), is it the increased visibility of ones' contemporaries travel experiences that has made travel a social marker for the Millennial cohort. Travel has consequently come to be associated with peoples' innate urge to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to others, particularly for Millennials. And it has been argued that this leads to a desire to replicate other's experiences (Siegel & Wang, 2019). This places much strain on travellers to capture the perfect travel picture (Sigala, 2019). However, this research has found no evidence to support these claims. On the contrary, each of the participants indicated not to be preoccupied with capturing the perfect travel pictures as this was perceived to have a negative influence on the on-site experience because it is time-consuming and prevents from experiencing the destination. Nevertheless, it was found that sharing travel pictures on social media is relatively important for the participants. While, this does not directly contribute to the on-site tourist experience participants have explained that it does aid in the recollection of the experience, as argued by Lee et al (2022). Furthermore, Groves and Timothy (2001) have highlighted the importance of capturing and sharing photographs as instruments in the collection of memories which was also confirmed with this study.

An interesting finding is that the quality of the experience and the quality of the photographs captured influence the sharing intention. According to Lo and McKercher (2015) only photographs that are deemed worthy are shared. This certainly applies to photographs to be posted on the wall, as the majority of the participants admitted that when posting to Instagram only the best photographs are selected and sometimes edited before they are posted to the wall. This supports the notion that people engage in self-presentation while using social media (Lin & Utz, 2015; Qiu et al., 2012; Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). However, this study discovered that participants did not completely refrain from sharing photographs that were not perceived as perfect. In these situations they are shared to Instagram Stories. Thus, this shows that there is a differentiation in where the photographs and experiences get shared to depending on their perceived quality.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore the negative influences the consumption of UGC can have on the tourist experience and with this fill the gap in the literature. As this was to a large extent an unexplored area. While the influence of UGC on the tourists experience has been researched to great extent, most of this research has been focused on understanding UGC contribution to travel inspiration, travel planning and the decision making-process. This study aimed to fill the gap in the literature by also looking at its influences on the on-site experience. Based on the previous discussion the following problem statement can be answered: “How does the consumption of user generated content in the anticipatory stage of the trip influence the tourist experience of Millennials?”

Concerning the negative influences the consumption of UGC in the anticipatory stage of the trip can have on the on-site experience, this study discovered two major reasons why negative effects can occur. First and foremost, when there is a perceived difference between the visual representations of a destination and the situation encountered by the participants in real life. Furthermore, this can be related to destination attributes and external elements. The second reason is the limited capacity of UGC as an information resource in the form of images and videos. Results revealed that UGC do not only influence the decision-making process but they also shape the participants expectations of the destination. It became clear that these expectations play a vital role in the on-site experience and overall satisfaction with the trip. When expectations are high and not fulfilled due to a perceived contrast between the visual representations and the situation tourists encounter in real life, the on-site experience can be negatively impacted as it interferes with tourist ability to live in the moment. This diminishes the on-site experience and leads to a restricted tourist gaze.

Furthermore, this research found that the unfulfillment of expectations will continue to impact the generation of travel satisfaction. As the restricted tourist gaze experienced by participants and the subsequent diminished enjoyment of the on-site tourist experience in several cases resulted in an overall dissatisfaction with the trip and feelings of regret. Thus, it becomes clear that unmet expectations not only influence the on-site experience but post travel reflection and therefore the overall satisfaction with the trip.

In addition this research explored how the photo-sharing intention was influenced when one is not able to reproduce images as seen on social media. As previous research suggested that especially for Millennials travel has become associated with peoples' innate urge to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to others. Resulting in a desire to recreate ones contemporaries experiences and pressure to capture the perfect travel picture. However, this research did not find any evidence in support of this. On the contrary, participants indicated not to be preoccupied with capturing the perfect travel pictures as this was perceived to have a negative influence on the on-site experience because it is time-consuming and prevents from experiencing the destination. However, this research did find that the sharing intention is influenced by the quality of the experiences and the quality of the captured photographs. As only the best photographs are shared to the Instagram wall while photographs that are perceived as unworthy are shared to Instagram Stories where they are only visible for a limited amount of time.

6.1 Theoretical contribution

This thesis aimed to get a better understanding of the possible negative influences the consumption of UGC can have on the tourist experience, and with this fill the gap in the literature. This study made several contributions to the literature. First of all, it has clearly link the theory of the tourist gaze with the consumption of UGC. Indicating that social media and UGC feed into the tourist gaze as these visual representations lead tourists to envision the destination in a certain way. Furthermore, it showed that UGC create expectations and that when the real life situation does not align with these expectations and perceptions previously formed through UGC, participants cannot get away from the previously constructed destination image, restricting the tourist gaze. Confirming that gazing upon the landscape does not come naturally.

Moreover, it has provided a better understanding of the negative influences the consumption of UGC can have on the tourist experience. It identified that the negative influences were mainly experienced due to a perceived difference between the visual representations and reality and because UGCs are only a limited information resource. Which resulted in a interference with living in the moment and diminished trip satisfaction. Furthermore, this research highlighted the direct link between the

expectations created based on UGC and the unfulfillment of these expectations on the generation of travel satisfaction. As the restricted tourist gaze experienced by participants and the subsequent diminished enjoyment of the on-site tourist experience in several cases resulted in an overall dissatisfaction with the trip.

6.2 Contribution to the industry

The results of this study are beneficial to DMOs, travel planners and government organisation responsible for the online promotion of their destination. They can use the findings of this study to get a better understanding of the role of UGC in the formation of the destination image and the expectations these images create. Because it became clear that especially the unfulfillment of expectations significantly influence both the on-site tourist experience and overall satisfaction with the trip. It is therefore recommended that visual representations should exactly reflect the destination, this means that its imperfections should also be shown, as the edited and polished up images cause a too big contrast between how the destination is represented and reality. This contrast in particular causes negative on-site experiences and can lead to disengagement from destination components, which negatively affects the creation of memorable experiences and consequently affects visitor satisfaction levels, revisit intentions, and recommendation decisions.

6.3 Limitations

One of the limitations of this research is that it mainly focussed on UGC shared through social media in the form of images and videos. However, UGC content can also take the form of written words such as blogs for example. This is a medium that has been left unexplored within this study. Therefore the results of this research cannot be generalised to other types of UGC consumed via other mediums. Another limitation of this research is that it can be classified as a social science and is thus based on personal opinions and attitudes. Since these are subjective to change as the social world is ever evolving these results only reflect the opinions and attitudes at a certain point in time. In relation to this, Instagram and social media in general are constantly evolving and changing as well as people's use of it. Therefore it should be emphasized that this thesis focuses on the use of Instagram and UGC during a specific time period. The final limitation of this research is related to the time frame in which this research took place. As time was only limited it was not possible to perform a longitudinal study which could have provided even more accurate findings and results.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

As mentioned before in the limitations, this research solely focussed in UGC in the form of images and videos shared via social media sites, mainly focussed on Instagram. Therefore further research could be focused on other forms or UGC or on other type of social media platform such as Facebook and

TikTok. Keeping in mind another limitation of this research, it is suggested to perform a longitudinal study to gather even more accurate findings and results. Which in this case was not possible due to the time frame of the research. Furthermore, this research found that the consumption of UGC contributes to an interference with living in the moment during the on-site experience is when travellers become too goal oriented by searching out specific locations to visit which they have seen online beforehand. This can result in distracted experiences which could be linked to the concept of the 'distracted gaze' conceptualised by Ayeh (2018) in association with tourists mobile connectedness at the destination. This research suggests that the 'distracted gaze' is not only applicable to refer to the distracted experiences caused by mobile use at the destination, but can also be influenced by mobile use in the anticipatory stage of the trip. Therefore it is suggested to formulate a more comprehensive conceptualisation of the term 'distracted gaze'.

7. REFERENCES

- Amatulli, C., De Angelis, M., & Stoppani, A. (2019). Analyzing online reviews in hospitality: Data-driven opportunities for predicting the sharing of negative emotional content. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22(15), 1904-1917.
- Ayeh, J. K. (2018). Distracted gaze: Problematic use of mobile technologies in vacation contexts. *Tourism management perspectives*, 26, 31-38.
- Azariah, D. R. (2017). *Tourism, Travel, and Blogging*. New York: Routledge
- Bell, V. (2010). Visual methodologies and photographic practices: encounters with Hadrian's Wall world heritage site. In *Tourism and visual culture, Volume 2: Methods and cases* (pp. 120-134). Wallingford UK: CABI.
- Boeije, H. (2010), *Analysis in Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, London.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*. OUP Oxford.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2015). *Business Research Methods*, 4th edition. Oxford University Press.
- Cox, C., Burgess, S., Sellitto, C., & Buultjens, J. (2009). The role of user-generated content in tourists' travel planning behavior. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 18(8), 743-764
- Clawson, M., & Knetsch, J. (1996). The Economics of. *Outdoor Recreation*, Johns, 443.
- Crang, M., & Cook, I. (2007). *Doing ethnographies*. Sage.
- Crompton, J. L. (1979). Motivations for pleasure vacation. *Annals of tourism research*, 6(4), 408-424.

- Cutler, S. Q., & Carmichael, B. A. (2010). The dimensions of the tourist experience. *The tourism and leisure experience: Consumer and managerial perspectives*, 44, 3-26.
- Dann, G. M. (1977). Anomie, ego-enhancement and tourism. *Annals of tourism research*, 4(4), 184-194.
- Diehl, K., Zauberger, G., & Barasch, A. (2016). How taking photos increases enjoyment of experiences. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 111(2), 119.
- Elsom, D. (2018, January 10). *Edinburgh is the best city to live in for broke millennials – thanks to its huge number of cheap restaurants.* From The Scottish Sun: <https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/travel/2075938/best-city-millennials-cheap-edinburgh-capital/>
- Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The qualitative report*, 20(9), 1408.
- Garrod, B. (2008). Exploring Place Perception: A photo-based Analysis. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35, 381-401.
- Gillet, S., Schmitz, P., & Mitas, O. (2016). The snap-happy tourist: The effects of photographing behavior on tourists' happiness. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 40(1), 37-57.
- Goeldner, C., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2006). *Tourism: principles, practices, philosophies* (10th ed.). Hoboken: Wiley.
- Gram, M. (2005). Family holidays. A qualitative analysis of family holiday experiences. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 5(1), 2-22.
- Gretzel, U. (2010). Travel in the network: Redirected gazes, ubiquitous connections and new frontiers. *Post-global network and everyday life*, 41, 58.
- Groves, D. L., & Timothy, D. J. (2001). Photographic techniques and the measurement of impact and importance attributes on trip design: a case study. *Loisir et Societe*, 24(1), 311-317.
- Hay, I. (2021). *Qualitative research methods in human geography*. (5th ed). Oxford University Press.
- Highmore, B. (2002). *Everyday life and cultural theory: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Jenkins, O. (2003). Photography and travel brochures: The circle of representation. *Tourism Geographies*, 5:3, 305-328.
- Jun, S. H., Hartwell, H. J., & Buhalis, D. (2012). Impacts of the Internet on travel satisfaction and overall life satisfaction. In *Handbook of tourism and quality-of-life research* (pp. 321-337). Springer, Dordrecht.

- Kim, H., & Stepchenkova, S. (2015). Effect of Tourist Photographs on Attitudes Towards Destination: Manifest and Latent Content. *Tourism Management*, 49, 29-41.
- Kladou, S., & Mavragani, E. (2015). Assessing destination image: An online marketing approach and the case of TripAdvisor. *Journal of destination marketing & management*, 4(3), 187-193.
- Krippendorff, J. (1987). Ecological approach to tourism marketing. *Tourism Management*, 8(2), 174-176.
- Kurz, C. J., Li, G., & Vine, D. J. (2019). Are millennials different?. In *Handbook of US consumer economics* (pp. 193-232). Academic Press.
- Lam, J. M., Tan, S. H., & Oh, Y. L. (2014). Exploring internet influence towards travel satisfaction. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 130, 542-551.
- Larsen, S. (2007). Aspects of a psychology of the tourist experience. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 7(1), 7-18.
- Lee, C., Richardson, S., Goh, E., & Presbury, R. (2022). Exploring the selfie and distracted gaze of the tourist experience through the lens of online photo-sharing: Where to from here?. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 13567667221113079.
- Leung, D., Law, R., Van Hoof, H., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social media in tourism and hospitality: A literature review. *Journal of travel & tourism marketing*, 30(1-2), 3-22.
- Lin, R., & Utz, S. (2015). The emotional responses of browsing Facebook: Happiness, envy, and the role of tie strength. *Computers in human behavior*, 52, 29-38.
- Litvin, S. W., Goldsmith, R. E., & Pan, B. (2008). Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *Tourism management*, 29(3), 458-468.
- Lo, I. S., & McKercher, B. (2015). Ideal image in process: Online tourist photography and impression management. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 52, 104-116.
- Luo, Q., & Zhong, D. (2015). Using social network analysis to explain communication characteristics of travel-related electronic word-of-mouth on social networking sites. *Tourism Management*, 46, 274-282.
- Machado, D. F. C., Santos, P. C. D. C., & Medeiros, M. D. L. (2021). Effects of social comparison, travel envy and self-presentation on the intention to visit tourist destinations. *BBR. Brazilian Business Review*, 18, 297-316

- MacKay, K. J., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (1997). Pictorial element of destination in image formation. *Annals of tourism research*, 24(3), 537-565.
- Meier, A., Gilbert, A., Börner, S., & Possler, D. (2020). Instagram inspiration: How upward comparison on social network sites can contribute to well-being. *Journal of Communication*, 70(5), 721-743.
- Mendes-Filho, L., Mills, A. M., Tan, F. B., & Milne, S. (2018). Empowering the traveler: An examination of the impact of user-generated content on travel planning. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 35(4), 425-436.
- Mossberg, L. (2007). A marketing approach to the tourist experience. *Scandinavian journal of hospitality and tourism*, 7(1), 59-74.
- Narangajavana, Y., Fiol, L. J. C., Tena, M. Á. M., Artola, R. M. R., & García, J. S. (2017). The influence of social media in creating expectations. An empirical study for a tourist destination. *Annals of tourism research*, 65, 60-70.
- Narangajavana Kaosiri, Y., Callarisa Fiol, L. J., Moliner Tena, M. A., Rodríguez Artola, R. M., & Sanchez Garcia, J. (2019). User-generated content sources in social media: A new approach to explore tourist satisfaction. *Journal of Travel Research*, 58(2), 253-265.
- Neuhofer, B. (2016). Value co-creation and co-destruction in connected tourist experiences. In *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2016: Proceedings of the International Conference in Bilbao, Spain, February 2-5, 2016* (pp. 779-792). Springer International Publishing.
- Nezakati, H., Amidi, A., Jusoh, Y. Y., Moghadas, S., Aziz, Y. A., & Sohrabinezhadalemi, R. (2015). Review of social media potential on knowledge sharing and collaboration in tourism industry. *Procedia-social and behavioral sciences*, 172, 120-125.
- Nickerson, N. P. (2006). Some reflections on quality tourism experiences. In *Quality tourism experiences* (pp. 227-235). Routledge.
- Oliveira, B., & Casais, B. (2018). The importance of user-generated photos in restaurant selection. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 10(1), 2-14.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of nursing scholarship*, 33(1), 93-96.
- O'Sullivan, E. L., & Spangler, K. J. (1998). *Experience marketing: strategies for the new Millennium*. Venture Publishing Inc.

- Pantic, I. (2014). Online social networking and mental health. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 17(10), 652-657.
- Pine, B. J., Pine, J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The experience economy: work is theatre & every business a stage*. Harvard Business Press.
- Prayag, G. (2009). TOURISTS'EVALUATIONS OF DESTINATION IMAGE, SATISFACTION, AND FUTURE BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS—THE CASE OF MAURITIUS. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 26(8), 836-853.
- Proctor, T. (2005). *Essentials of Marketing Research* (4th ed.) Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Qiu, L., Lin, H., Leung, A. K., & Tov, W. (2012). Putting their best foot forward: Emotional disclosure on Facebook. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(10), 569-572.
- Reinecke, L., & Trepte, S. (2014). Authenticity and well-being on social network sites: A two-wave longitudinal study on the effects of online authenticity and the positivity bias in SNS communication. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 30, 95-102.
- Rokou, T. (2018, November 11). *Edinburgh draws in crowds of of Gen Z and Millennials*. From Travel Daily News.com: <https://www.traveldailynews.com/regional-news/edinburgh-draws-in-crowds-of-gen-z-and-millennials/>
- Sherif, M., and C. I. Hovland. 1961. *Social Judgment: Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Communication and Attitude Change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Sigala, M. (2019). The bright and the dark sides of social media in tourism experiences, tourists' behavior, and well-being. In *Handbook of globalisation and tourism*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Sontag, S. (2002). *On photography*. London: Penguin Books
- Stamboulis, Y., & Skayannis, P. (2003). Innovation strategies and technology for experience-based tourism. *Tourism management*, 24(1), 35-43.
- Siegel, L. A., & Wang, D. (2019). Keeping up with the joneses: emergence of travel as a form of social comparison among millennials. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 36(2), 159-175.
- Smith, K. (2018, June 7). *Edinburgh aims to attract younger tourists*. From Scottish Field: <https://www.scottishfield.co.uk/travel/edinburgh-aims-to-target-younger-tourists/>
- Stylianou-Lambert, T. (2012). Tourists with cameras:: Reproducing or Producing?. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(4), 1817-1838.

- Styvén, M. E., & Foster, T. (2018). Who am I if you can't see me? The "self" of young travellers as driver of eWOM in social media. *Journal of Tourism Futures*, 4(1), 80-92.
- Tan, W. K. (2017). The relationship between smartphone usage, tourist experience and trip satisfaction in the context of a nature-based destination. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(2), 614-627.
- Tanti, A., & Buhalis, D. (2016). Connectivity and the consequences of being (dis) connected. In *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2016: Proceedings of the International Conference in Bilbao, Spain, February 2-5, 2016* (pp. 31-44). Springer International Publishing.
- Urry, J. (1990). *The tourist gaze*. London: Sage
- Urry, J., & Larsen, J. (2011). *The tourist gaze 3.0*. Sage.
- Van House, N. A., Davis, M., Takhteyev, Y., Ames, M., & Finn, M. (2004). The social uses of personal photography: methods for projecting future imaging applications. *University of California, Berkeley, Working Papers*, 3, 2005.
- Veal, A. J. (2011). *Research methods for leisure & Tourism: A practical guide* (4th ed.). Harlow, England: Pearson.
- Vermeulen, I. E., & Seegers, D. (2009). Tried and tested: The impact of online hotel reviews on consumer consideration. *Tourism management*, 30(1), 123-127.
- Wang, C. Y., & Hsu, M. K. (2010). The relationships of destination image, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions: An integrated model. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 27(8), 829-843.
- Wang, D., Xiang, Z., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2016). Smartphone use in everyday life and travel. *Journal of travel research*, 55(1), 52-63.
- Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism management*, 31(2), 179-188.
- Xiang, Z., Magnini, V. P., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2015). Information technology and consumer behavior in travel and tourism: Insights from travel planning using the internet. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, 22, 244-249.
- Xu, H., Cheung, L. T., Lovett, J., Duan, X., Pei, Q., & Liang, D. (2021). Understanding the influence of user-generated content on tourist loyalty behavior in a cultural World Heritage Site. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 1-15.

Yoo, K. H., & Gretzel, U. (2011). Influence of personality on travel-related consumer-generated media creation. *Computers in human behavior*, 27(2), 609-621.

Zeng, B., & Gpneerritsen, R. (2014). What do we know about social media in tourism? A review. *Tourism management perspectives*, 10, 27-36.

Zhou, L., & Xue, F. (2022). Effects of Instagram user-generated content on travel inspiration and planning: An extended model of technology acceptance. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 28(3), 239-260.
travel planning

8. APENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Interview Guide

Part 1: Questions related to the UGC they saw before

1. What about this content stood out?
 - a. Why did you save this?
2. What did you expect to experience based on this content?
3. What was your goal/objective/aim in searching out this place/site?
 - a. Were you able to locate it?
4. What was your on-site experience?/ What did you see/experience yourself?
 - a. How did you compare your own experience to what you've seen online?
5. Based on your experience, how different are the visual representations of a destination on social media/ UGC from the actual destination?
 - a. How did this make you feel
 - b. How would you describe your experience?
 - c. Has this negatively influenced your on-site experience in any way?

Part 2: Questions related to their own experiences (photo taking/sharing)

6. What photographs did you take?
 - a. Why did you take this specific shot?
 - i. Was this inspired by content you have seen before?
 - ii.
7. What are your main reasons for taking photos during your trip

If the interviewee did not take any pictures: Why not?

8. Did you share any pictures to social media from this location?
 - a. Why did you share this specific shot?
 - i. Was this inspired by content you have seen before?
 - ii. How has this influenced your experience?

9. What are your main reasons for sharing photos on social media?

If the interviewee did not share any pictures to social media:

10. Why did you not share any pictures from this location?
 - a. How important is sharing travel pictures for your experience?

11. How has this influenced your experience?
 - a. How has this influenced how you look back on your trip?
 - b. Has this in any way negatively influenced your experience?

Appendix 2: Consent form

Consent form for participation in master thesis research

Master thesis | Tourism, Geography and Planning | University of Groningen, Campus Fryslân

Title: Understanding the influences of user-generated content on the tourist experience

Dear participant,

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for taking the time to help me with my research for my thesis. The aim of this research is to get an understanding of how the consumption of user-generated content influences the tourist experience. During the interview you will be asked about your own experiences. The interview will take about half an hour to an hour. If you are unable or unwilling to answer any question(s), you can indicate this at any time. You are also free to stop the interview early or withdraw your participation completely. Also up until two weeks from now.

This interview will be recorded with the voice recording app on my phone and then transcribed. This transcript will be used to further analyse the interview. The information that emerges from this interview will be used to answer the research questions. The audio file and your data will be treated confidentially. This also applies to the photographs you have shared with me. Only with your consent will the photographs be included into the report. The audio file of the interview will be deleted once it

has been transcribed. Any personal information that emerges during the interview will not appear in the report and you will remain anonymous, your name will not be mentioned in the report.

If at a later stage you have any questions or concerns regarding the interview my contact details can be found at the bottom of the next page. Here you will also find contact details of my thesis supervisor and the Campus Fryslân ethics committee.

I hereby declare that:

- I understand what the research entails.
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that at any moment in time I can choose not to answer certain questions or to stop the interview early.
- I understand that participation in this research is confidential and that any further personal information that emerges during the interview will not appear in the report.
- I understand that the photographs shared with the researcher will only be included in the report if I explicitly give my permission to do so below. And that this report will only be read by the researcher, her supervisor and the second grader.

I hereby I declare that:

- I give consent for photographs shared by me of destinations/sites/landscapes etc. to be included in the report
 - YES
 - NO
- I give consent for photographs shared by me that feature myself to be included in the report
 - YES
 - NO

Name:.....

Date:.....

Signature participant

Signature researcher

.....

.....