

THE INFLUENCE OF INSTAGRAM IN DESTINATION CHOICE FOR GENERATION Z: MEDIATING ROLES OF SOCIAL ESCAPISM MOTIVATION AND PLEASURE

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Abstract

Purpose – Instagram is a social media platform that focuses heavily on visual communication, where photos and videos are shared. The purpose of this paper is to show the possible influences of Instagram on the choice of a travel destination among Generation Z. The aim of this paper is to investigate the determinants of Instagram influence for destination selection for Generation Z according to the attitude, usage of social media, and information reliability, where social escapism motivation and pleasure have a mediatic effect.

Methodology – To understand better the influence of Instagram in destination selection, a theoretical systematization and analysis of previous literature is presented. Primary research was conducted based on an online questionnaire developed from previous research and adapted for the objectives of this paper. The collected data were empirically tested and validated through partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

Findings – The results suggest that the effect of Information reliability and Attitude are mediated by Pleasure and Social escapism motivation, while Usage of social media it is not. Attitude and Information reliability have a significant positive effect both on Pleasure and on Social escapism motivation, while Social media usage has not an significant positive effect on Pleasure and Social escapism motivation.

Contribution – This research contributes to both theory and practice. It identifies the factors that contribute to importance of Instagram in destination selection for Generation Z. The antecedents as attitude, usage of social media, and information reliability in regards to the Instagram influence prove a scientific contribution of the study while contributes to knowledge of Social escapism motivation and Pleasure playing a mediating role. The practical contribution of the paper is that it presents a better understanding of behavioral intentions of Generation Z that can help destination marketing organizations to develop effective digital marketing strategies.

Keywords: destination selection, Generation Z, Instagram, social escapism motivation, pleasure.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of technology has changed the way tourists are planning and living their trips, so websites are no longer the only important tool for online marketing (Buhalis and Amaranggana 2013). Social networks are built on the technological foundations of Web 2.0, enabling the creation and sharing of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Social networks can be used in all stages of the tourism decision-making process, and tourists recognize the need for social media in the tourism industry (Sigala et al. 2012), especially in the travel planning process (Parsons 2017). Among the most

popular social networks, Instagram stands out as a platform for connecting, participating, communicating, and sharing information (ELTayeb 2021), considered as a popular social network for young people (Sheetz 2018). Instagram is one of the most active social networking applications that focus on user-generated content visual content (Tong 2018). Over time, tourists began to search for visual information in all available content to make travel decisions by using media in the form of photos or videos (Prasetya, Jaya, and Thio 2021). According to Kim and Tussyadiah (2013) the importance of social networks use for tourists is to seek support from their social network while traveling. Instagram is more suitable for users to show videos, travel, photos, hobbies, and other daily activities related to creativity and youth. Followers use Instagram to find out about restaurants or other dining establishments, and comments and responses to queries provide useful information for their decision-making (ELTayeb 2021). Positive online feedback, comments, or reviews from social media influencers can improve the perception of tourism products among potential users. Shared information on social media is an important information source (Boley et al. 2018). Travel reviews influence tourists to learn more about a destination and its offerings, evaluate alternatives, but also avoid them, where showed that identification and internalization are critical determinants that increase actual travel-experience sharing on social media as mediated by perceived enjoyment (Kang and Schuett 2013). Therefore, other users' online suggestions/comments of tourism products improve brand image and have a significant impact on purchase intention and destination image (Ye et al. 2011). In tourism and hospitality, consumers interact with influencers throughout the whole travel process (Leung et al. 2013) and are motivated to share their tourism experiences because of personal and community-related benefits, as well as the social capital that influences a sharing of user-generated content (Munar and Jacobsen 2014).

Instagram today has two billion active users (Statista 2022), and 62% of so-called Generation Z use Instagram daily (Earthweb 2022). According to Borges et al. (2006), a generation is a peer group defined by its demographic characteristics and major life events such as the transition from birth to adulthood. The term first became popular in the 1960s for the rebellious baby boomer generation (Reeves and Oh 2007). Living under similar conditions and same events, and being influenced by similar technologies can lead people to behave similarly. It used to be assumed that there was a specific pattern in the behavior of successive generations and that such a period lasted about 80 years (Kolnhofer-Derecskei et al. 2017), but due to the faster implementation of technological innovations, the generational transition has become much shorter and it is more difficult to determine the transition between generations (McCrinkle and Wolfinger 2009). Although there is no universal agreement on the exact year span of Generation Z, most researchers agree that they were born between 1995 and 2010 (Bencsik et al. 2016) or in 2009 (Goh and Lee 2018). As a demographic cohort succeeding Millennials and preceding Generation Alpha, it is widely believed that this generation was born in the 1990s and grew up in the 2000s, a time of rapid technological change that greatly influenced their lifestyles (Singh and Dangmei 2016). Tulgan (2013) argues that Generation Z represents the most significant generational shift (Gaidhani et al. 2019). Generation Z is characterized by self-control, distrust, attentiveness, speed, and multitasking skills in an ever-changing environment (Naumovska 2017), actively seeks new challenges, and tends to be more impatient than previous generations (Bencsik et al. 2016), lacking communication skills (Cuic Tankovic et al. 2022). Generation Z is mostly

online and accustomed to interacting in a connected world and using technology for various activities (Schroth 2019). Generation Z's social interaction takes place predominantly online, with major presence on social networks (Gaidhani et al. 2019).

Although Generation Z travelers actively follow influencers on Instagram, destination choices do not appear to be made solely based on influencer content, therefore their reliance on influencers is not as great as originally thought (Caruana and Caruana 2022). Therefore, there is insufficient understanding of potential travelers' attitudes about not only posts or reviews from influencers, but other Instagram users as well. This paper aims to fill this gap investigating the determinants of Instagram influence for destination selection for Generation Z according to the attitude, usage of social media, and information reliability, where social escapism motivation and pleasure have a mediatic effect. The theoretical contribution lies in the investigation of the specific determinants of Instagram's influence on Generation Z's choice of travel destinations, as well as the mediating effects of social escapism motivation and pleasure on this relationship. By examining Generation Z's attitudes, usage behaviors, and perceptions of information reliability, this work aims to deepen the understanding of how Instagram content influences their decision-making process when choosing a travel destination. In addition, the work seeks to go beyond influencers and explore the influence of other Instagram users on destination choice, an area that has not been widely explored in previous research. By examining how these psychological factors mediate the relationship between Instagram content and destination choice, this paper offers insights into the underlying motivations and emotions that drive the decision-making process of Generation Z travelers.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Instagram is a free visual social network where content is shared, and it focuses on taking and sharing photos with followers (Krajnović et al. 2019). Instagram has reached more than two billion users and went from the fifth to the fourth most downloaded app in the fourth quarter of 2021 (Sprout 2022), with more than half of the global users being 34 years old or younger. The largest age group is 18-34, accounting for 62.2% of all users. Instagram is one of the largest social media platforms focused on visual communication, and it is also one of the most active (Chaffey 2017), where over 50 billion of photos is shared (Omnicoagency 2022). Instagram's popularity is growing because its users share lives' stories with others, while brands share their products with consumers (Terttunen 2017). Images have a great impact on consumer buying behavior, as they allow consumers to make a visual connection with a product before making a purchase (Tuckman 2012). Instagram has become an important part of DMOs' marketing plans, because photos play a vital role of tourism marketing, where visuals take a central role in marketing communications (Gretzel 2016). According to Siegel, Tussyadiah and Scarles (2022), new social norms of using travel images for impression management were identified, where choreographed movements as photographic practices has emerged that did not exist before the popularization of Instagram. As Instagram grew in popularity, marketers became more interested in this visually rich and creative platform, and it became a powerful tool for content marketing (Terttunen 2017). However, also the reliability of information is considered an important factor that a tourist finds valuable

when using new social networks (Sigala et al. 2012). Reliable and fast information enables a tourist to identify, search, and evaluate the destination and to have specific and new travel experiences, such as exploring different tourism styles, trying new foods, and meeting new people (Chung and Koo 2015). Considering that feeling pleasure and having fun while searching for information can promote tourists' positive intentions toward a particular activity and providing social escapism, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1a: There is a statistically significant and positive relationship between information reliability and social escapism motivation.

H1b: There is a statistically significant and positive relationship between information reliability and pleasure.

It is assumed that a user is more likely to use Instagram if they have a positive attitude towards the network itself. Users' attitudes can be influenced by various factors, such as the benefits offered by the network or emotions during use. The more positive a person's attitude and desire toward a certain behavior, the stronger his or her behavioral intention. Dai, Toanoglou, and Zhang (2021) indicate that users' attitude positively influences their travel intention. Considering that a positive attitude can lead to intrinsic motivations and pleasure, it is suggested that:

H2a: There is a statistically significant and positive relationship between attitude and social escapism motivation.

H2b: There is a statistically significant and positive relationship between attitude and pleasure.

Instagram use may be motivated by the influence of friends or people whose opinions are important to the user. Most people choose to engage in a particular activity when someone they care about recommends it, and the desire to be valued and accepted by society is also an important factor. Arias-Oliva et al. (2019) define social influence as the extent to which a person believes others think he or she should use a particular technology. Mohd Thas Thaker et al. (2022) find that expected performance, expected effort, facilitating conditions, and social influence significantly influence behavioral intention. However, Arias-Oliva et al. (2019) suggest that the influence of society does not affect usage intention. Although Instagram users are making a list before travelling, they still search for additional information on social media (Prasetya et al. 2021). After the trip, users can share their experiences with the accommodation or activities they participated in, whether they are positive or negative. These experiences can also help other tourists who are still undecided about choosing a certain destination. In the study by Prasetya et al. (2021), one of the respondents stated that they use Instagram in the information sharing phase to share photos from the trip, but rarely express their opinion. Based on the above research, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H3a: There is a statistically significant and positive relationship between Instagram usage and social escapism motivation.

H3b: There is a statistically significant and positive relationship between Instagram usage and pleasure.

The evolution of technology, particularly the growing advent of social networks, has changed the way people form relationships (Zhan et al. 2016). Instagram is an interactive platform where users can post carefree content and communicate to learn about new things and people, which ultimately affects their social lives. The sense of belonging encourages users to keep up with and participate in the activities of their friends and acquaintances. Instagram's numerous features make it easier to interact and communicate, which increases the impact on users' social lives (Zhan et al. 2016). Feeling pleasure and having fun while searching for information can promote tourists' positive intentions toward a particular activity. Satisfaction has a significant effect on technology acceptance beyond utility (Davis 1989). Davis et al. (1992) emphasize that intrinsic motivations lead individuals to use computers because they provide satisfaction. Kaperonis (2018) points out the positive effect of satisfaction on users' attitudes and purchase intentions. Pleasure is the most important factor influencing perceived value and actual use of social media (Chung and Koo 2015), implying that social networks should offer more interesting and entertaining content to attract more potential users. Entertainment has also a positive impact on user attitude and ultimately purchase intention (Kaperonis 2018). Based on that, it is suggested that:

H4: There is a statistically significant and positive relationship between pleasure and Instagram as marketing tool for destination choice.

H5: There is a statistically significant and positive relationship between social escapism and Instagram as marketing tool for destination choice.

H6a: Social escapism mediates the relationship between information reliability and Instagram as marketing tool

H6b: Social escapism mediates the relationship between attitude and Instagram as marketing tool

H6c: Social escapism mediates the relationship between usage and Instagram as marketing tool

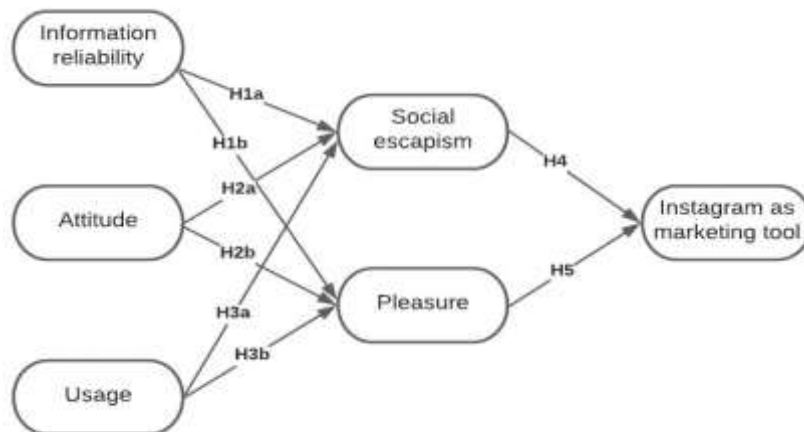
H7a: Pleasure mediates the relationship between information reliability and Instagram as marketing tool

H7b: Pleasure mediates the relationship between attitude and Instagram as marketing tool

H7c: Pleasure mediates the relationship between information reliability and Instagram as marketing tool

Based on the evidence provided above, the theoretical model of the study is created and shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theoretical model of the study



2. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to investigate the determinants of Instagram influence for destination selection for Generation Z according to the attitude, usage of social media, and information reliability, where social escapism motivation and pleasure have a mediatic effect. To achieve this, a structured questionnaire based on previous literature was utilized. The questionnaire consists of seven parts, which were adapted according to the requirements of the study.

Information reliability included four items from Chung and Koo (2015), while Attitudes toward Instagram usage was adapted from Dai et al. (2021) and contained four items. The Social media usage construct was based from Zhan et al. (2016) and included six items. Social escape motivation was adopted from Arora and Agarwal (2020) and contained nine items, while the construct Pleasure included four items from Kaperonis (2018). Instagram as marketing tool were measured according to the scale developed by ELTayeb (2021) and adapted for tourist destinations. The questionnaire was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 was “strongly disagree” and 5 “strongly agree”. The last part of the questionnaire deals with psychodemographic data such as gender, education level, employment status, and monthly income.

The survey was conducted online between March and July 2022 with a purposive sample. The research population comprised members of Generation Z who have an active Instagram account and have been travelling at least once in the last year. Only respondents who were up to 25 years of age (the age range of Generation Z) were considered for the analysis, thus collecting 215 valid responses. Among the respondents, 65.6% were female and 34.4% were male. The respondents were aged between 22 and 25 years old (74.9%), followed by those aged 18 to 21 (25.1%). Full-time students comprised 48.4% of the sample, while full-time workers accounted for 20.9%. The

35.8% of respondents have monthly income up to 220 euros, 25.6% have income ranging from 450 to 800 euros, 22.3% have income between 220 and 450 euros, and 13% have income between 800 and 1300 euros.

The sample appears to have a higher proportion of female respondents and full-time students than the general Generation Z. However, without additional information about the specific population of Generation Z in Croatia, where the study is conducted, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the representativeness of the sample.

Therefore, this research is a preliminary study, where the results can be considered as indicative.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

All of the manifest variables were assessed for potential outliers with values exceeding +/-3 standard deviations from the variable's arithmetic mean prior to testing the hypotheses for the reflective construct model. To assess internal consistency of reliability and convergent validity, the outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, composite reliability indicator (C.R.), and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated (Table 1).

Table 1: Measurement model analysis

Indicators and Items	Code	Outer Loadings	Std. DEV	t-value
Social escapism motivation Cronbach's Alpha=0.951 C.R.=0.970 AVE=0.870				
Sometimes I use Instagram to escape to a fantasy world	SESC1	0.905	0.017	54.340
Sometimes I use Instagram to get away with pressures and responsibilities	SESC2	0.939	0.010	95.413
Sometimes I use Instagram to escape from reality	SESC3	0.953	0.007	140.633
Sometimes I use Instagram to forget about work, school or other things	SESC4	0.932	0.010	97.899
Information reliability Cronbach's Alpha=0.955 C.R.=0.956 AVE=0.881				
The travel information search on Instagram has usually been composed by someone who knows the places very well.	INF1	0.933	0.015	60.867
The travel information search on Instagram has usually been composed by professionals familiar with the travel destinations	INF2	0.916	0.007	129.886
The authors of the travel information on Instagram are usually trustworthy.	INF3	0.950	0.008	118.195
The authors of the travel information on Instagram are usually reliable.	INF4	0.954	0.015	60.867

Table 1 (continued)

Indicators and Items	Code	Outer Loadings	Std. DEV	t-value
Pleasure				
Cronbach's Alpha=0.926 C.R.=0.928 AVE=0.820				
Searching for information on Instagram is enjoyable	PLEA1	0.928	0.013	73.901
Searching for travel information on Instagram is fun.	PLEA2	0.909	0.014	66.231
Searching for travel information through Instagram is fascinating	PLEA3	0.843	0.021	39.920
Searching for travel information through Instagram is a pleasant experience	PLEA4	0.937	0.011	88.108
Attitude				
Cronbach's Alpha=0.863, C.R.=0.870, AVE=0.710				
In the future, I will refer to information in Instagram to make my travel plan.	ATT1	0.888	0.014	63.234
In the future, I will use Instagram to assist my tourism activities.	ATT2	0.876	0.018	48.822
Using Instagram is my daily habit.	ATT3	0.773	0.033	23.632
Regular usage of Instagram evokes positive emotions in me.	ATT4	0.830	0.026	32.110
Usage of social media				
Cronbach's Alpha=0.863, C.R.=0.870, AVE=0.710				
Instagram is part of my everyday activity.	USE1	0.815	0.026	30.983
I am proud to tell people I'm on Instagram.	USE2	0.807	0.026	30.971
Instagram has become part of my daily routine.	USE3	0.835	0.023	35.927
I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Instagram for a while.	USE4	0.816	0.029	28.283
I feel I am part of the Instagram community.	USE5	0.847	0.021	41.293
I would be sorry if Instagram shut down.	USE6	0.821	0.026	31.945
Instagram as marketing tool				
Cronbach's Alpha=0.946, C.R.=0.948, AVE=0.727				
I usually get the details of travel agencies through Instagram	INST1	0.862	0.019	46.226
I learn about domestic and international destinations on Instagram	INST2	0.875	0.015	57.411
I usually choose my trips from the posts on Instagram	INST3	0.887	0.013	65.828
Instagram keeps me updated about new destinations and hotels	INST4	0.864	0.020	43.584
Destination travel posts have many followers	INST5	0.848	0.021	41.024
I like to view destination and travel post on Instagram	INST6	0.771	0.027	28.167
I engage in conversation on the Instagram about destination and travel post	INST7	0.789	0.027	29.190
I can rely on destination and travel posts on Instagram	INST8	0.908	0.016	58.382

Source: Authors' own calculation

As indicated in Table 1, all reflective indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.6, ensuring valid item reliability (Hair et al. 2019). The outer factor loadings for the analyzed constructs ranged from 0.771 to 0.954.

The composite reliability (C.R.) and Cronbach's alpha exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, and AVE surpassed the minimum threshold of 0.5 (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994; Malhotra 2010). Therefore, the measurement model demonstrates a satisfactory level of internal consistency of reliability and convergent validity.

Table 2 illustrates the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Hair et al. 2019), which was employed to evaluate discriminant validity.

Table 2: **HTMT ratio**

	Attitude	Instagram as marketing tool	Pleasure	Information reliability	Social escapism motivation	Instagram usage
Attitude						
Instagram as marketing tool	0.848					
Pleasure	0.757	0.676				
Information reliability	0.662	0.738	0.625			
Social escapism motivation	0.166	0.148	0.089	0.197		
Instagram usage	0.805	0.597	0.564	0.498	0.189	

Source: Authors' own calculation

The results of the HTMT ratio presented in Table 2 is below the recommended threshold of 0.9, ranging from 0.189 to 0.848. Therefore, the measurement model achieved discriminant validity.

After establishing internal consistency of reliability and convergent and discriminant validity, the formulated hypotheses were tested, and the structural model was analyzed using the bootstrapping procedure (5000 subsamples). Table 3 presents the results of the structural model analysis, which indicates that six out of eight of the formulated hypotheses were accepted.

Table 3: Analysis of the structural model

	Relationship	β	SD	t-value	R ²	Q ²	Effect size	Decision
H1a	Information reliability → Social escapism	-0.552	0.090	6.119	0.128	0.111	0.078	Supported*
H2a	Attitude → Social escapism	0.406	0.131	3.059			-0.056	Supported**
H3a	Usage → Social escapism	0.027	0.118	0.249			-0.003	Not supported
H1b	Information reliability → Pleasure	0.274	0.055	4.971	0.604	0.595	0.200	Supported*
H2b	Attitude → Pleasure	0.496	0.093	5.309			0.362	Supported*
H3b	Usage → Pleasure	0.076	0.088	0.864			0.078	Not supported
H4	Pleasure → Instagram as marketing tool	0.730	0.034	21.506	0.551	0.687	-	Supported*
H5	Social escapism → Instagram as marketing tool	-0.139	0.048	2.910			-	Supported**
H6a	Information reliability → Social escapism → Instagram as marketing tool	0.178	0.090	0.818	-	-	-	Not supported
H6b	Attitude → Social escapism → Instagram as marketing tool	-0.019	0.024	0.814	-	-	-	Not supported
H6c	Usage → Social escapism → Instagram as marketing tool	-0.006	0.118	0.482	-	-	-	Not supported
H7a	Information reliability → Pleasure → Instagram as marketing tool	0.068	0.055	4.181	-	-	-	Supported*
H7b	Attitude → Pleasure → Instagram as marketing tool	0.245	0.093	3.778	-	-	-	Supported*
H7c	Usage → Pleasure → Instagram as marketing tool	0.068	0.088	1.310	-	-	-	Not supported

* p<0.001
 ** p<0.05

Source: Authors' own calculation

The results of the structural model show the construct Information reliability has a significant and negative effect on Social escapism ($\beta=-0.552$; $p<0.001$) and a significant and positive effect on Pleasure ($\beta=0.274$; $p<0.001$), supporting H1a and H1b. Similarly, Attitude significantly and positively affect Social escapism ($\beta=0.406$; $p<0.05$),

Hypothesis 2a, and Pleasure ($\beta=0.496$; $p<0.001$), Hypothesis 2b, while H3a and H3b have not been supported because Usage has a non-significant effect both on Social escapism ($\beta=0.027$; $p>0.05$) and Pleasure ($\beta=0.076$; $p>0.05$). Pleasure ($\beta=0.730$; $p<0.001$) has a positive and significant effect on Instagram as a marketing tool, supporting the hypotheses H4. Social escapism has a significant and negative effect on Instagram as marketing tool ($\beta=-0.139$; $p<0.05$), hence H5 is supported.

The effect of Information reliability, Attitude and Usage on Instagram as marketing tool is not mediated by Social escapism (H6a, H6b, H6c are not supported). The relationship between Information reliability, Attitude on Instagram as marketing tool is mediated by Pleasure ($\beta=0.068$; $p<0.001$; $\beta=0.245$; $p<0.001$). Therefore, H7a and H7b are supported. However, Usage and Instagram as marketing tool is not mediated by Pleasure ($\beta=0.068$; $p>0.05$).

The coefficients of determination (R^2) for the endogenous variables are 0.128 for Social escapism, 0.604 for Pleasure and 0.551 for Instagram as a marketing tool, therefore they are explained by their predictor variables respectively by 12.8%, the 60.4% and the 55.1% of variances. Additionally, the blindfolding procedure was used to obtain the Stone-Geisser Q^2 values, which are all greater than 0, indicating predictive relevance the PLS model (Hair et al. 2017).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This paper discusses the importance of Instagram for the tourism industry, especially for Generation Z, which has unique characteristics and preferences compared to other generations. Instagram offers many features for editing and sharing content, making it a popular platform for user-generated content among potential tourists. The paper draws on several studies to support the use of Instagram for destination choice.

Although this research is of a preliminary type and indicative nature, it contributes to a better understanding of the usage of Instagram by Gen Z. Unlike Arora and Agarwal (2020), who found a statistically significant and positive relationship between social avoidance motivation and social media ads, confirming the usefulness of Instagram as a means of social escape for users, this paper found that Social escapism motivation had a significant and negative effect. Similar to Prasetya et al. (2021), Instagram can influence the travel process by inspiring and providing entertaining travel-related content, with a significant and positive relationship between Pleasure and Instagram as a marketing tool. According to Chung and Koo (2015), information reliability has a significant but positive effect on Pleasure and a negative effect on Social escapism.

There are some limitations to the results of this study. The study was conducted with a limited sample of Generation Z, so there is no insight into the perception of Instagram for destination selection for other generations, which limits the generalizability of the study. Respondents are mainly between 22 and 25 years old and represent only a portion of Generation Z. Therefore, future studies should include a larger sample and focus specifically on younger Generation Z. In addition, the study should be expanded to other

regions and countries to test the generalizability of the results. For example, future studies could investigate how tourists understand videos, photos, or texts, whether there are differences and preference. Future research could also include the social return factor (Boley et al. 2018), which calculates the amount of positive social feedback one's social media posts receive from travellers. Also, DMOs can understand what tourists expect from a marketing communication on Instagram. This article highlights the need for tourism marketers to quickly adapt to the changing preferences and behaviors of Generation Z. As Instagram continues to play an important role in the travel process, future research could explore the role of Instagram in each stage of the process of selecting a destination among Generation Z.

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