The Impact Of Travel Posts On Instagram On Users' Travel Orientations: A Qualitative Study From Türkiye

Prof. Dr. Esra Cizmeci Ümit
Yalova University, New Media and Communication
esra.cizmeci@yalova.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000- 0003-1193-9112

Eymen Berber (M.A.)
Yalova University, New Media and Communication
eymenberber@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0008-2084-9673

The Impact Of Travel Posts On Instagram On Users' Travel Orientations: A Qualitative Study From Türkiye

Abstract

Today, social media platforms have become an important area of an influence that shapes individuals' lifestyles in many ways. Instagram, in particular, stands out as a medium where travel and trip content, as well as many different contents related to daily life, have become widespread. Travel enthusiasts, influencers and brands use Instagram effectively to share posts about places to visit hotels, restaurants, and activities. This content can be a powerful tool that affects users' travel preferences. With the visual appeal and discovery opportunities offered by Instagram, this content can guide individuals not only in choosing where to travel, but also in what they will do and what kind of experience they will have in these places. In this context, 21 participants who are different from each other in terms of socio-economic and demographic aspects were interviewed in this study using a semi-structured in-depth interview method. When the findings obtained from the interviews were evaluated, it was determined that active Instagram users follow a travel influencer or a tour company, but they take into account the fact that influencers earn income from these contents regarding the content shared. It was revealed that Instagram travel posts were useful for Instagram users in terms of providing detailed information about places to visit, but these posts caused unhappiness in users who could not realize the trips they saw on Instagram due to the fact that the destinations they saw on Instagram did not meet their expectations or due to some material and spiritual impossibilities such as income status and time constraints.

Keywords: Instagram; travel; tourism; influencer; Türkiye

Introduction

Consumption is defined as "using products, services or mass media content in order to satisfy desires and real or imagined needs" at the Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication (Chandler & Munday, 2011). With globalization, everything has become accessible and consumable for everyone in the world, and with the wind it has received from the development of social media, many forms of consumption have been seen, and consumption habits have been redesigned.

Consumption has come to meet emotional needs rather than meeting compulsory needs. In this way, a transition has been made to a sociological indicator system (level specific to consumption) instead of a bio-functional and bio-economic system of goods and products (biological level of need and survival) (Baudrillard, 2023, p. 92). The consumption style that social media encourages users through brands and famous names enables the person to engage in consumption activity without allowing them the opportunity to think about whether they need the product or not. The commodity has not only given way to exchange value instead of usage

---

[1] This paper was presented at "The 7th International New Media Conference by Istanbul Gelişim University, October 10-11, 2024." This version of the paper is a developed version of this presentation.

value; it has also acquired a second meaning, 'sign value'. Thus, desires fueled by images have taken on an aesthetic form through mass media (Esmer, 2012). People in a consumer society go to bed and wake up with the fear of "missing" pleasure, no matter what kind it is. It is never known whether this or that contact, this or that experience (Christmas in the Canary Islands, eel in whiskey, Prado, LSD, Japanese love) will give a person a "sense" (Baudrillard, 2023, p. 94).

The touristic place images and nature photographs shared on Instagram, often use effects to make them more impressive, make the person feel the need to be there, to visit the same place themselves, and to show that they have experienced this experience by taking and posting the same frame. When social media users make travel plans, they determine the historical places or natural areas they want to see not according to their choices and desires, but according to the places and routes they see in the travel posts they are most exposed to on social media. The person may fall into the illusion that they will experience the same experience they see in the virtual environment in the same way and get the same pleasure, forgetting that the person experiencing it may convey their personal experiences with a sponsor or use the advantages of being a well-known figure.

There are many studies in the literature on the impact of Instagram travel influencers on the travel preferences of followers. When we look at the studies conducted since 2019, when intensive research on Instagram travel influencers began, it is seen that Bilquees and Tholath (2019) conducted interviews with 150 participants in India and found that Instagram travel influencers have a great impact on their followers. In the same year, Barbe, Neuburger, and Pennington-Gray (2019) investigated users' motivations for following travel accounts on Instagram. In later years, Anuar et al. (2021) conducted a study to measure young tourists' trust in Instagram travel influencers and their tendency to travel to promoted routes through a survey method. In the same year, Ünal and İlar (2021) conducted a study to determine social media use and the level of influence of social media on destination preferences of domestic tourists visiting the Kırklareli province Vize destination. Afterwards, Charalambides (2022) investigated the impact of Instagram influencers on the travel preferences of young people in their 20s. Chen et al. (2023) investigated how social media influencers influence the travel behaviors of followers and which elements make them trust them through a survey method. Batın and Kozak (2023) analyzed of the comments on the content of a selected Instagram travel influencer account and found that the influencers were trustworthy. Onan (2024) examined the account of a specific Instagram travel influencer and examined the impact of the posts on this account on the lifestyles of the followers through content analysis. Bǎltescu and Untaru (2024) examined how Generation Z in Romania is influenced by social media influencers in their travel preferences.

As can be seen, most of the similar studies in the literature have been conducted either through an account content/comments review, or only on young people, or through a survey method. Differently, in this study, 21 adult participants with different socio-economic and demographic characteristics (gender, age, marital

status, education level, profession) were interviewed through a semi-structured in-depth interview method from qualitative research methods, and the research was conducted from the perspective of consumption culture. In this context, the phenomenon of travel consumption was investigated in the context of Instagram and consumption relationship with the leading role of influencers today, and not only the positive but also the negative results of the subject in terms of followers/consumers were revealed.

Literature Review
Needs, Consumption and Society

Consumption is defined in the Turkish Language Association dictionary as the use and consumption of things produced or made; the opposite of production. Consumption is not a purely mechanical process, therefore, it is not possible to examine it separately from cultural values, symbols and images (Dal, 2017).

Consumption began to change its shape with industrialization and continues to exist effectively as a subject in which social sciences intensively produce content, contribute to the literature and each discourse has a fair share in its own field and is mostly addressed from a critical perspective. The state of the 21st century, which accelerates globalization with social networks and transforms society, has also redesigned consumption. Although consumption seems to be an activity based on individual preferences, it needs to be evaluated socially, culturally and psychologically within a social structure.

The pyramid of needs shaped by Abraham Maslow, the first name that comes to mind when it comes to needs, results in the need for self-actualization of the needs that are met sequentially (Şeker, 2014). The most important of today's needs and the need for self-actualization that the 21st century man pursues is a need that human beings consider as necessary and important as bread and water. The desire for self-actualization, which is pursued as a magical goal, emerges today as a phenomenon that is shaped and directed by social interaction, rather than an individual existence and positioning. The individuals who choose consumption as a way of self-realization and self-expression attributes meaning and value to everything, they consume, from the goods they consume to even thoughts, while making their existence meaningful and positioning themselves in a certain place. In order for an individual to differentiate himself from other individuals, the style of clothing he uses must be understood and interpreted by other individuals, thus, an individual can differentiate himself only to the extent that he can share some common cultural symbols with others (Bocock, 2009). Today, the goods that consumers buy to define themselves serve the purpose of consumption by creating various images (Dal, 2017). For example, the bag, which offers a practical solution such as easily carrying items by putting them in it, has become a commodity that needs to be seen and obtained, waited for in line, owned by paying a large amount, and therefore, has the purpose of feeling special and showing oneself to be special, rather than serving the purpose of carrying one's belongings. The blessings of daily practical consumption are experienced as a miracle, not as a result of labor or a production process (Baudrillard, 2023, p.24). A bag that provides the need to express

and position oneself and fulfill one's needs, also meets a need by helping one carry one's belongings.

Media has undertaken an important role in shaping the consumption habits of individuals and societies, both as the producer and carrier of the consumer culture. Media plays a central role in shaping the consumer culture, directing the consumption tendencies of individuals and creating consumption desires. In addition to the important channels of traditional media such as television, cinema, newspapers, radio, individuals are constantly introduced to products and services through the Internet and social media platforms. Due to the limited space of the study, the relationship between consumption and traditional media will not be discussed at this point, but the way consumption takes place in social media will be explained.

The Post-Modern Appearance Area of Consumer Society: Social Media
Web 1.0 is a term that was used between 1989-2005, the early stages of the Internet, and can exist with a standard text markup language (HTML) used to create web pages (Güleç, 2016). In the Web 1.0 period, there were websites where users obtained information and since users did not have the opportunity to contribute or provide feedback, it continued to exist as a limited and passive communication area where there was no interaction. In the Web 2.0 Internet version, users started actively participating in the content.

The concept of Web 2.0, one of the concepts that social media is often confused with, was put forward by Tim O'Reilly in 2004. The numbers "2" and "0" in this concept are used to distinguish new versions of computer software from each other (Eşitti and Işık, 2015). Social media is defined at the Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication as "A broad category or genre of communications media which occasion or enable social interaction among groups of people, whether they are known to each other or strangers, localized in the same place or geographically dispersed" (Chandler & Munday, 2011). Social media is a place where we exist with our names or anonymously created social identities and can socialize at any time without any distinction of time or place, and even increases the variety of what we can do with developing artificial intelligence, providing users with an endless area.

In recent years, social media has become one of the most dynamic areas of consumer culture. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and TikTok offer a medium where users are both consumers and producers. Influencers, in particular, directly affect consumption preferences by introducing products and services to their followers (Chen et al., 2024). This process leads to the creation of an idealized consumption world, far from reality, in the lives displayed on social media, and the shaping of consumption behaviors due to individuals' desire to access this world.
As part of the digitalization, social media platforms have become one of the indispensable elements of individuals' daily lives. Instagram, in particular, plays a strong role in shaping consumption habits by distinguishing itself from other platforms with its visual structure.

Instagram and Consumption: The Influencer Effect

Instagram is a photo sharing and editing application that allows free applications of filters and voice-overs on photos (Doğan, et al., 2018). Instagram, one of the most popular platforms of social media, was founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010 as a free photo sharing application. This application, initially developed for the Apple iOS operating system, was later made available for the Android operating system and reached many users in a short time (Kıran, et al., 2019). Instagram, which hosts countless content and users according to interests and visual tastes with its photo, video and story sharing feature that disappears within twenty-four hours, has over 58.5 million subscribers in Türkiye (Kumar, 2025).

Since its launch in 2010, Instagram has rapidly gained popularity as a visual platform that encourages users to share photos and videos. Instagram, where aesthetically appealing content is at the forefront, encourages individuals to define themselves and their lifestyles through a specific consumption practice. This process enables individuals to create a consumption identity through social media and reinforce this identity through social approval.

Instagram functions as a visual presentation area of consumption culture. On this platform, users create a kind of "consumption showcase" by sharing their products, travel experiences, food and drink habits and personal style preferences. These posts create a wide consumption network by being liked, commented on and reposted by followers.

A detailed examination of the Türkiye section of the Digital 2024 Global Overview report prepared by Instagram, and We are Social and Meltwater were published in January 2024 are useful in understanding the impact and importance of Instagram in Türkiye. According to the report, Instagram is the most used social media platform in Türkiye with a 91.8% rate, even before WhatsApp. Instagram increases the interest of brands in this platform. They want to use this great market power correctly and effectively by working with professionals who prepare content specifically for Instagram (www.datareportal.com). Marketing activities carried out via social media are in greater demand than traditional marketing due to the time, money savings and fast feedback provided to businesses (Mert, 2018). This large market, which has the opportunity to reach 66% of the country's population, naturally offers a competitive

environment where all types of advertising can be applied in order for brands and marketers to openly or secretly place products and promote products within the natural flow of Instagram. This competitive environment has given rise to Influencers, an alternative to people who have become famous in traditional media by revealing their famous faces. Influencers, who have entered our lives with Instagram, have become people to be followed by social media users with the photos, videos and information they share. These people also stand out with their ability to direct communities after a certain recognition process on social networks (Mert, 2018).

Influencer, which Instagram has included in our lives and has been accepted as a profession today, has taken advertising to a new dimension. This marketing technique, which has taken its place in our lives and acts as a bridge between consumers and brands, is called Influencer Marketing. Influencer Marketing is defined as a marketing technique in which a brand's product or service is spread by word of mouth on social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Blog, etc.) via the Internet and awareness is increased (Canöz, et al., 2020). Influencer Marketing, which causes traditional advertisements and campaigns to be inadequate, has difficulty reaching the target audience, and advertising budgets to increase, offers the opportunity to achieve more returns with much less than the budget of a thirty-second commercial film in traditional media.

In the Influencer world, where a new social media celebrity is added every day, standing out and being reliable has become a big issue. Influencers are divided into various fields within themselves according to their interests or their adaptation of the professions they did before becoming Influencers to social media. The number of Influencers who love to travel or who start traveling after reaching certain financial means and because they have to produce innovations due to their job, who travel to attend various invitations and events and turn this into content, is increasing day by day. Influencers sometimes travel with their collaborations and sometimes travel by covering their own expenses.

One of the most obvious impacts of Instagram on consumption is realized through the Influencer culture. Influencers, as individuals with a large follower base, collaborate with brands to promote various products and services. Since these collaborations are usually presented organically and naturally, followers tend to trust these recommendations. Influencers have a high power to influence the consumption decisions of their followers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lin et al., 2021). Especially in sectors such as fashion, beauty, technology and travel, the products recommended by Influencers become a consumption guide for followers.

I Came, I Saw, I Shared: Travel Posts on Instagram
Instagram, with its visuality-focused structure, has become a platform where travel experiences are showcased and popularized. Travel Influencers have emerged as figures who reach millions of users, introduce travel destinations, make hotel and restaurant recommendations, and even directly affect travelers' consumption habits. There was a 60% increase in airfare expenses compared to the previous year, while car rental services increased by up to 40% (www.datareportal.com).

Travel Influencers are individuals who reach a wide audience through social media and share their travel experiences. These Influencers inspire their followers by visually presenting the destinations they visit, the hotels they stay in, the meals they eat, and the activities they experience. Since Influencers usually establish a personal bond with their followers, it is noteworthy that their recommendations are considered reliable and that they have the power to directly affect the travel preferences of their followers (Abidin, 2016). Travel Influencers directly affect the decision-making phase of consumers' travel planning process. Studies show that a

significant portion of travelers shape their travel plans through social media and act according to the recommendations of Influencers (Huh, 2020).

Instagram is one of the platforms that best demonstrates the impact of Travel Influencers. In this medium, the attractive presentation of destinations and touristic products attracts the attention of followers and directs them to certain destinations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Purpose and Significance of the Research

Instagram, the most used social media platform in Türkiye with 58.5 million users according to the 2024 statistics (Kumar, 2025), occupies an important place in people's lives with the market and activity it creates. Instagram creates its language, celebrity and culture, thus can influence and manipulate the masses. Instagram, where every experience and activity is displayed, from a cup of coffee drunk in daily life to a meeting with friends, from a daily routine narrative to a traveled country, is the subject of numerous articles and theses in the field of social sciences. Instagram usage, which is considered from many different points, and its effect on users, has been addressed within a more specific region or line in terms of its effect on tourism consumption, or has been evaluated only on young people.

This study is among many studies conducted in Türkiye on how Instagram affects tourism activities among adults with different educational and social levels, through a qualitative research.

Data Collection Technique

In this study, questions prepared in accordance with the purpose of the research were asked to the participants using the semi-structured interview technique, which is one of the qualitative data collection techniques. Interviewing is a very powerful method used to reveal people's perspectives, subjective experiences, feelings, values and perceptions (Karataş, 2017). Semi-structured interview is a method that provides a balance between structured and free interviews. The researcher prepares questions on a specific topic in advance but can add new questions or focus more on certain topics according to the answers given by the participant(s) during the interview (Bryman, 2012). This flexibility helps the researcher obtain deeper and richer data.

One of the biggest advantages of semi-structured interviews is that they provide flexibility to the researcher. The interviewer uses the questions prepared in advance as a guide but can direct the interview according to the answers given by the participant. This flexibility allows the researcher to uncover unexpected but important information (Galletta, 2013). In addition, semi-structured interviews offer the researcher the opportunity to understand the participants' perceptions and experiences on the subject from a broader perspective. Participants can not only answer predetermined questions, but also touch on new topics as the interview progresses. This method allows the researcher to test hypotheses and questions more flexibly and to reach participants' original perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Moreover, by paying attention not only to what participants say but also to how they

say it, the researcher can better analyze participants' thoughts and feelings (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). The information that emerges spontaneously during the interview allows for in-depth analysis of the research. This provides a more detailed and rich data set compared to structured interviews. Another advantage of the semi-structured interview is that the researcher can immediately clarify the participant's answers. In cases where the participant does not understand a question or the researcher does not clearly understand an answer, the researcher can immediately ask new questions to eliminate misunderstandings (Flick, 2018). This feature increases the quality of the data and strengthens the validity of the research results. Finally, the semi-structured interview method helps to establish a more personal and trusting relationship between the researcher and the participant. This encourages the participants to give more open and sincere answers (Seidman, 2019). In this way, the participants can share more sincere and in-depth information during the research process. For all these reasons, the in-depth semi-structured interview technique was chosen in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

In this study, a semi-structured interview form prepared in light of the data on the subject in the literature and observations made in social media environments was used. In order to ensure the validity of the prepared form, the questions were presented to expert academicians who have studies in this field and the interview form was finalized in line with the feedback received from them. Before the interview form was applied to the participants, three people who were not included in the research were asked to confirm that the questions were clear and understandable.

The interview data were evaluated by descriptive analysis by quoting the prominent and remarkable answers of the participants. The descriptive analysis aims to bring the data collected as a result of the interview and observation together with the reader in an organized and interpreted way (Baltacı, 2019).

Table 1: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

No	Questions
1	How long have you been using Instagram?
2	How much time do you spend on Instagram daily?
3	What kind of content interests you most on Instagram?
4	Are there any travel influencers or tour companies you follow on Instagram?
5	Does a route/trip/country post you see on Instagram interest you? What attracts you the most, and why?
6	Have you been to a place because you were inspired by a travel post you saw on Instagram? If so, where? How did it make you feel to go?
7	Did a destination you saw on Instagram and visited meet your expectations? What were the reasons why it met or did not meet your expectations?
8	Do you use Instagram when preparing a travel plan/route? In what ways do you use it?
9	Do you think that the travel content you see on Instagram provides useful information? In what way do you find the shared information useful?
10	Does the travel content you see on Instagram answer your questions? For example, what kind of content answered your questions last time?
11	Who are you more interested in when you see travel posts on an Influencer or someone close to you? What is the reason for this?
12	How does it feel to see the posts of people travelling on Instagram?

The research data was collected in June 2024 from people who had been using Instagram for at least one year and who agreed to participate in the research voluntarily. The interviews lasted an average of 20 minutes. The questions asked in the semi-structured interview are shown in Table 1.

Research Sample

21 volunteers were interviewed to collect data in the research. Table 2 includes demographic information about the interviewees.

Table 2: Participant Information

Participant	Gender	Age	Status	Education	Profession
P1	Female	24	Single	Undergraduate	Psychologist
P2	Female	31	Married	Undergraduate	Doctor
P3	Male	34	Married	Undergraduate	Officer
P4	Female	35	Married	Undergraduate	Teacher
P5	Male	31	Single	Postgraduate	Engineer
P6	Female	27	Single	Undergraduate	Farmer
P7	Female	31	Married	Undergraduate	Translator
P8	Male	49	Married	Undergraduate	Teacher
P9	Female	34	Married	Undergraduate	Housewife
P10	Female	24	Single	Undergraduate	Unemployed
P11	Male	26	Single	Undergraduate	Tradesman
P12	Female	27	Married	Undergraduate	Cook
P13	Male	31	Single	Undergraduate	Advertiser
P14	Female	26	Single	Undergraduate	Dietician
P15	Male	34	Married	Undergraduate	Engineer
P16	Female	30	Single	Postgraduate	Student
P17	Female	35	Married	High School	Housewife
P18	Male	32	Single	Postgraduate	Lawyer
P19	Female	26	Single	Undergraduate	Student
P20	Male	31	Married	Undergraduate	Officer
P21	Female	30	Married	High School	Housewife

The interviewees consisted of 3 housewives, 2 students, 2 officers, 2 teachers, 2 engineers, 1 lawyer, 1 advertiser, 1 unemployed, 1 translator, 1 doctor, 1 farmer, 1 dietician, 1 tradesman, 1 cook, 1 psychologist. Of the 21 interviewees, 8 were male and 13 were female, and their ages ranged from 24 to 49. When the education levels of the interviewees were examined, 2 had high school degrees, 17 had undergraduate degrees, and 3 had postgraduate degrees. Of the 21 interviewees, 10 were single and 11 were married.

FINDINGS
Instagram Usage Dynamics
- **Long-term usage**

The first three questions asked to understand the participants' Instagram usage practices indicate that they have had an Instagram account for many years, which means that Instagram usage has become established in society and that they are familiar with Instagram content and language. It was determined that the participants have been Instagram users for an average of five years or more. 3 of them stated that they have had an Instagram account for two years, 2 for four years, 4 for six years, 6 for five years, 5 for eight years and 1 for ten years.

- **Daily usage routine**

The fact that the majority of participants spend two hours or more on Instagram indicates that a daily Instagram usage routine has been formed, thus enabling participants to be aware of trends on the platform and that they are up to date. When the average usage time is examined, 7 of the participants stated that they spend one hour a day, 8 for two hours, 6 for three hours, 2 for four hours, 1 for five hours and 1 for an uncountable amount of time on Instagram.

- **Content preferences**

When the answers given by the participants are examined, it is concluded that the most demanded content on Instagram is recipes and tastings, daily practical information, and content that will contribute to personal development. This result shows that nutrition, which is one of the daily physiological needs, is important for users, attracts attention, and that they like to learn from the preparation of food to its tasting and watch every content about food.

It was determined that the content that attracted participants the most on Instagram was mostly food (recipe, place, etc.) content, and there was a variety of content from education to news, from parenting to magazines:

"Content on topics related to parenting, personal development videos, recipes, news" (P2).

"I like to watch funny content, videos of animals and babies and content about food, whether it is making or tasting" (P6).

"Educational content, beautiful photos, pet content interest me. There is also content that I can use in every aspect of life" (P19).

Popular/Desired Routes with Instagram
• **Following travel influencers**
7 of the participants stated that they do not follow any Travel Influencers or tour companies. The striking answers from the participants who stated that they follow Travel Influencers, travel pages and travel tour companies were selected as examples:

"I do not follow many Travel Influencers. I only follow the Şeyma Yolda account" **(P1).**

"I follow the Istanbul Kazan Ben Kepçe, Çocukla Geziyorum, Istanbul Event accounts" **(P2).**

"I do not follow influencers; I only follow tour companies" **(P9).**

"Antiksehirler, mugladahayat, Abbieherpert" **(P12).**

"I follow Uğur Kola, Oğuzhan Tıraş, Yolumuz Bir" **(P13).**

• **Interest in travel content**
Five of the participants responded that route/trip/country posts on Instagram did not interest them. The remaining 16 participants stated that they did, and the answers of some participants were selected as an example:

"Sometimes I come across different, unvisited, beautiful places that I say 'wow, I didn't know that there was such a place'" **(P9).**

"Every place that is popular/unpopular and that I like attracts my attention" **(P15).**

"Posts about a country's historical places, food culture and people's lifestyle attract my attention…" **(P19).**

• **Visiting places seen on Instagram**
While 10 of the participants answered that they did not see a place on Instagram that they were impressed by and travelled to, the other 10 participants stated that they saw places on Instagram and travelled to, and 1 participant answered that there were places they saw on Instagram and wanted to travel to:

"I see and like many countries on Instagram in travel content, such as Switzerland, the Balkan countries, Kazakhstan. They are among the places I want to go to, but I haven't had the chance to go yet" **(P1).**

"I saw it on Instagram and went to Eskişehir. The river is very beautiful, I felt like I went to a different country" **(P3).**

"I went to Üsküdar Bican Efendi Street and Kuzguncuk" **(P4).**

"I went to places in Istanbul. I went to enjoyable places, neighborhoods and restaurants that take a short time to travel. It made me feel happy" **(P12).**

"I went to the Black Sea, I liked it very much" **(P14).**

"I went to Mardin Midyat. Feeling the texture of different cultures, seeing traces of the past made me happy and satisfied my curiosity" **(P19).**

According to the participants' comments, it can be seen that the majority of them follow accounts that produce travel content and like this content. This shows that Instagram users are interested in travel content and like to consume this content. The touristic places and venues offered by travel content producers please the users, and the fact that they make them realize an undiscovered or marginal point of the place they know/live in meets the expectations of the users. Watching someone who discovers places for themselves and gains various experiences from where they are sitting allows the users to enjoy seeing and following, to benefit from someone else's experience, to gain ideas and to be informed.

Trusted Person Effect on Instagram Travel Routes
• **Trusting relatives over influencers**
A group that can be more effective and much more trustworthy than Influencers is their friends, relatives and close circle. The interviews revealed that most/two-thirds of the participants trust the experiences and recommendations of their relatives more.
In this context, 14 of the participants stated that they find their relatives' travel posts more realistic and that they cannot trust Influencers' posts about the places they have visited because they earn money from this job:

"The information I get from my relatives interests me more. I definitely do not trust Influencers" **(P4).**

"Because people I know seem more sincere and I believe they give accurate information" **(P5).**

"Since Influencers go for free, they do not give me confidence in terms of transparency and accuracy" **(P7).**

• **Trusting influencers for professionalism**
On the other hand, 7 of the participants stated that they find the posts made by Influencers on this subject more professional because they earn money from this work, and therefore Influencer posts about travels attract their attention more:

"It feels more natural when there is an Influencer. They express more clearly whether the place they visited is beautiful or not, whether it met their expectations" **(P12).**

"Influencers interest me more because they show and explain in detail" **(P21).**

Benefits of Instagram Travel Content
• **Pre-trip preparation**
When the answers given by the participants are evaluated, the benefits that travel content offers to users can be listed as preparing the person for what they will encounter when they go on a trip before they go, allowing them to prioritize how many places to see while traveling, and suggesting preferable local dishes and products.

For example, it has been determined that thanks to Instagram travel content, it is possible to avoid paying more for a product than it is worth, not to suffer losses when exchanging currency, to be informed about Internet use during international travels, to be able to pinpoint what to take with you even when packing your suitcase, or to recommend central or comfortable places for accommodation, making Instagram travel posts useful for participants.

Most of the participants stated that they found the travel content on Instagram useful and used the information in this content during their travels:

"I try to benefit from every aspect such as transportation process, accommodation, etc." (P1).

"I benefit from it, it is useful for making plans before going, to observe" (P13).

• **Possible future vacations**
"It satisfies my curiosity. The comments of people who have visited before, their likes or dislikes are included under the posts made, and since they even provide information about the location, they answer the questions asked" (P19).

"I was wondering what it was like abroad, thanks to the content I had the chance to see what I was curious about" (P14).

• **Reducing travel risks**
Instagram travel posts are found useful for some participants because they minimize the risks they could encounter during their travel to an unknown location:

"Yes, it can be useful. Benefiting from someone's previous experiences can minimize the risks during the travel process. Of course, it is important to have information about transportation, accommodation, food, and places to visit" (P1).

"Yes. It offers options for hotels to stay in, places to visit" (P10).

"Yes, we learn about places we never knew about, maybe we learn about places right next to us" (P3).

"I search the place I will go on Instagram, so that I have some preliminary information from the photos or videos before I go there" (P19).

Disappointments Created by Instagram Travel Content
• **Unmet expectations**
As an Instagram user, a life where the background is unknown and only what is shown on Instagram is known can make people feel incomplete in every field and cause unhappiness. A person who goes to a destination shown on Instagram can experience that what is shown and what is seen are far apart. Travel routes that are shown as if there is a lot to see sometimes turn out to be only two or three interesting streets, less than expected and the thought that the planned trip was wasted can make the travel experience unpleasant and cause disappointment and dissatisfaction in the person:

"Every destination is generally exaggerated on Instagram. When we go there, often it doesn't meet our expectations" (P2).

"Sapanca was below my expectations, there was no good service, contrary to what I saw on Instagram" (P21).

• **Economic and emotional impact**
Another reason for disappointment is the sadness and questioning caused by seeing people who are always traveling on Instagram but are always working or spending time at home. Seeing people traveling and vacationing at every opportunity in return for the limited time a person has to spend in their commuting life and the income they can only make at the end of the month can create the feeling that only they are working or that they do not have enough resources to make these trips. In this context, some of the participants' answers are as follows:

"If I do not have the time and opportunity to travel myself due to reasons such as school, work, etc., then I can sometimes be negatively affected emotionally" (P1).

"Recently, I have come across a lot of content that starts like this, "That secret place in Istanbul that very few people know about..." I have been living in Istanbul for 13 years and I say how come I don't know this place or how come these people travel so much, am I the only one sitting at home?" (P3).

"This kind of content makes me feel the economic gap even more" (P7).

"I see the posts of the people I follow, and I get sad because I can't go somewhere myself" (P16).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With the globalizing world and developing technology, every individual living in the capitalist order has become both a customer, an influencer and a seller. While our smartphones that we never let go of are the greatest witnesses of every moment of our daily lives, our social media accounts have become a part of our identity. In our world where physical gatherings to socialize and communicate are increasingly unnecessary, consuming and finding viewers from all over the world for our consumption shapes our real personality and honors our persona.

In all periods of time and in every period of history, humans have developed and progressed through interaction. From a student who sets off to learn what he does not know to a king who wants to expand his land, from a merchant who wants to develop his commercial activities to an explorer who seeks to find the unknown, every person has left their mark wherever they step and influenced thousands, perhaps millions. Today, it is enough to pick up your phone and lean back to impress millions. With social media, everything from a pair of trousers purchased to a cup of coffee and a hotel stay has become a commodity in demand. Being an Influencer and a guide is a popular and profitable job that every young person dreams of today. Instagram, the social media platform with the most members in Türkiye, shapes our daily lives and our imagination. The content and ads we are exposed to on Instagram reorganize our list of needs. Instagram, which fuels the desire to see more, know more, and have more, sometimes causes positive and sometimes negative effects. Instagram offers various positive benefits such as motivating people to take up a new hobby, do sports, and create a desire to enroll in a new education, and it opens up new horizons, while also making them rush to adapt to rapidly changing trends. While Instagram meets people's desires to learn, have fun, and discover, it creates individuals who know a little bit of everything, see a little bit of everything, consume a lot, have a low attention span, and have high credit card statements.

One of the areas where Instagram affects people is travel posting. In this context, in this study, in order to understand the effect of Instagram, the social media address most preferred for sharing visual content and directed towards consumption in terms of real and artificial needs of the capitalist society, on people's travel activities, certain findings were reached and various results were obtained as a result of interviews conducted with volunteers of various social statuses and ages who are Instagram users.

According to the data obtained in the study, it was determined that all of the participants are active Instagram users and that they use Instagram to follow content related to food the most, as well as many contents related to daily life, from news to magazines. It is possible to read the fact that the most loved and popular content type on Instagram is about food; the rapidly increasing number of restaurants and cafes today, the increase in professional culinary skills acquisition courses and the visibility of chefs, the increase in the demand for ready-made food and the rise of the food ordering trend.

In the current research, it was determined that most of the participants follow at least one Influencer or tour company account regarding travel content and that travel content attracts their attention. Half of the participants stated that they traveled and experienced routes, mostly domestic locations, after being influenced by travel content on Instagram. Similarly, there are many studies (Ismarisal & Kusumah, 2023; Tešin et al., 2022; Mchavu et al., 2022) in the literature which found that Instagram is an important source of information and inspiration in the destination selection process.

In the following questions of the research, it was observed that although some participants' travel posts from Influencers may be interesting, participants found the travel posts of their close friends and acquaintances more realistic. These participants are aware that Influencers produce content for the purpose of making money within a kind of advertising industry and therefore may produce biased content. This finding shows that "trust" in the Influencer is of great importance when it comes to followers' acceptance of travel routes advertised by travel Influencers and their intention to travel. Similarly, Anuar et al. (2021) found that the attributes of the posts shared by the Instagram Influencers and the followers' trusts towards the influencers influence the followers' intention to visit the places featured by the influencers. Also, Chen et al. (2022) found that highly attractive social media Influencers and similarity with followers can lead to parasocial interactions. When consumers trust and feel parasocial interaction with social media Influencers, they are more likely to consider traveling. Moreover, Yılmazdoğan et al. (2021) found that the trustworthiness and expertise sub-dimensions of source credibility significantly impacted travel intention and played a significant mediating role between the trustworthiness and expertise sub-dimensions of parasocial interaction and travel intention. Relatedly, some participants in the current study stated that they would prefer Influencers' travel posts to those of their relatives, because Influencers create more professional and detailed content as they do this as a job.

The positive aspect of travel details posted on Instagram, whether by Influencers or relatives, is that they guide in terms of showing what to do and how to do it when going to that route. Before the trip, knowing the important points of the destination, places to eat well, and clean and suitable accommodation opportunities can make the trip more comfortable. When you look under a travel photo/video posted on Instagram, it is possible to find comments from many users who have been there before. Comments where everyone writes their own experiences and recommendations can provide a great advantage for the person planning the trip and reduce the possibility of negative experiences such as theft and fraud that may be encountered when going there, while providing the opportunity to use time more efficiently. According to the participants, the travel content produced on Instagram informs people in detail before traveling to that route and actually offers a kind of ready-made planning for users on important issues such as places worth seeing, places to eat or shop. In this sense, travel posts on Instagram are useful in terms of both facilitating people's travel planning and providing solutions in advance for the difficulties they may encounter during their travel to that destination.

The negative and disappointing aspects of Instagram travel routes for the participants are that the travel posts watched do not meet the dreams and expectations, the financial (income) or spiritual (free time) opportunities to go to those travel routes are not available, and therefore the feeling of "I can't travel while everyone else can" is created. Related to the last finding, Asdecker (2021) interpreted similar results in his study differently as travel Influencers stimulating their audiences' wanderlust through "benign envy". In our study, however, the state of envy is interpreted more as a resentment arising from not being able to make the same trips.

In terms of not meeting the expectations, the fact that the posts made are "polished" as a normal of the media for the purpose of financial gain, in other words, the element of highlighting the good aspects and hiding the shortcomings becomes apparent. Although the travel posts seen due to financial and time-related impossibilities create an enthusiasm in the person, the negative feelings created by not being able to go show that the fact of always feeling that others live a better life than oneself on social media also emerges in travel posts.

In conclusion, the findings of our research are largely consistent with the studies in the existing literature. Instagram and other social media platforms are seen to have a significant impact on users' travel decisions and expectations. However, sometimes social media content does not match real experiences, which can cause users to be disappointed. Therefore, it is important to present social media content in a realistic and balanced way.

The need to travel has increased with the use of social media in addition to various factors such as the rising level of education, increasing economic conditions, and developing awareness. The idea of going on a trip, which comes to mind with Instagram travel content, can become people's motivation to work or a goal to achieve. It has become a necessity to make a budget adjustment for the whole year, to shop for the planned trip and to show followers by visiting every viral spot without missing it, and to show that these opportunities can be reached like everyone else, along with the desire to live the moment. It should not be ignored that Instagram makes life easier and answers curiosity with a lot of information in a short time, while meeting the need for entertainment and leisure, and offers users the opportunity to momentarily break away from the worries and stresses of daily life, and makes the idea of bringing their lives to certain standards appealing.

Witnessing the trips of Influencers and relatives followed on Instagram is shaped by the current mood and situation of the people and can also encourage people in a positive way and stimulate their sense of curiosity. The fact that the scenery and the play being performed are seen by the audience, not the backstage, can keep the travel content within a certain framework for people and overshadow their negative aspects. Instagram, with its potential as a guiding force today, enables the idea of seeing what you can't see, tasting what you can't taste, and penetrates into every area of people's lives, from what they consume to their habits, and sets an ideal standard of living beyond advertising and collaborations, making everyone the

same, melting all life diversity and ideals in one pot and selling the same experiences

In the times when there was no social media, the places seen in documentaries and travel programs watched on TV did not make viewers question themselves and their lives and did not have such a negative effect on their emotional state. On Instagram, users share sections of their lives about almost everything they do, and Influencers open up their experiences that they enjoy very much as "one of us" to the public, causing viewers/followers/users to feel many experiences they see as a need rather than a desire. As a result, the "feeling of being left behind" that is induced in people as a result of social life or facing the material and spiritual difficulties of following trends can disappoint people; it can lead to results such as isolating oneself from the environment, blaming oneself, or depression.

References

Abidin, C. (2016). Visibility labour: Engaging with influencer culture. MediaInternational Australia, 161(1), 86-94.

Anuar, F., Zaid, A. A. A., Zabidi, I. Z., & Kamal, S. N. J. A. (2021). Young tourists' trust in Instagram travel influencers and their intention to visit travel destinations. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 11(16), 304-317.

Asdecker, B. (2022). Travel-related influencer content on Instagram: How social media fuels wanderlust and how to mitigate the effect. Sustainability, 14(2), 855.

Baltacı, A. (2019). Nitel araştırma süreci: Nitel bir araştırma nasıl yapılır? Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 5(2), 368-388.

Bāltescu, C. A., & Untaru, E. N. (2025). Exploring the Characteristics and Extent of Travel Influencers' Impact on Generation Z Tourist Decisions. Sustainability, 17(1), 66.

Barbe, D., Neuburger, L., & Pennington-Gray, L. (2019). Follow Us on Instagram! Understanding the Driving Force behind Following Travel Accounts on Instagram. E-review of Tourism Research, 17 (4), 592-609.

Bayın, D. M., & Kozak, M. A. (2023). Gezilecek yerlerin tanıtımında sosyal medya fenomenlerinin rolü. Güncel Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi, 7(1), 63-83.

Bilquees, K., Tholath, D.I. (2019). The Influence of Instagram Travel Influencers and Travel Motivation on Destination Image and Travel Intention. International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE), 8(4S3).

Baudrillard, J. (2023). Tüketim Toplumu. (Çev.: N. Tutal; F. Keskin), Ayrıntı: İstanbul.

Bocock, R. (2009). Tüketim, Dost Kitapevi Yayınları, (Çev.İrem Kutluk), 3. Baskı, Ankara, Temmuz.

Bryman, A. (2012). Social Research Methods. Oxford University Press.

Canöz, K., Gülmez, Ö., & Eroğlu, G. (2020). Pazarlamanın yükselen yıldızı influencer marketing: Influencer takipçilerinin satın alma davranışını belirlemeye yönelik bir araştırma. Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Meslek Yüksekokulu Dergisi, 23(1), 73 -91.

Chandler, D., Munday, R. (2011). Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication. Oxford University Press.

Charalambides, A. (2022). Instagram's role in youngsters' travel decision making: How does IG content inspire you to travel in your twenties?

Chen, W. K., Silaban, P. H., Hutagalung, W. E., & Silalahi, A. D. K. (2023). How Instagram influencers contribute to consumer travel decision: Insights from SEM and fsQCA. Emerging Science Journal, 7(1), 16-37.

Chen, Y., Qin, Z., Yan, Y., & Huang, Y. (2024). The Power of Influencers: How Does Influencer Marketing Shape Consumers' Purchase Intentions? Sustainability, 16(13), 5471. https://doi.org/10.3390/su16135471

Dal, N. E. (2017). Tüketim toplumu ve tüketim toplumuna yöneltilen eleştiriler üzerine bir tartışma. Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 9(19), 1 21.

Doğan, M., Pekiner, A. B., & Karaca, E. (2018). Sosyal medyanın turizm ve turist tercihlerine etkisi: Kars-Doğu Ekspresi örneği. Seyahat ve Otel İşletmeciliği Dergisi, 15(3), 669-683.

Esmer, G. (2012). Tüketim Kültürünün Mekansallaşması: Bodrum Örneği. Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi.

Eşitti, Ş., & Işık, M. (2015). Sosyal Medyanın Yabancı Turistlerin   Türkiye'yi Tatil Destinasyonu Olarak Tercih Etmelerine Etkisi. Karadeniz Uluslararası Bilimsel Dergi, 1 (27), 11-33. https://doi.org/10.17498/kdeniz.26307

Flick, U. (2018). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. SAGE Publications.

Güleç, E. (2016). Kullanım ve doyumlar yaklaşımının sosyal medya kullanım niyeti ve turistik deneyim üzerindeki etkisinin belirlenmesi (Master's thesis, Balıkesir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü).

Galletta, A. (2013). Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication. NYU Press.

Guest, G., Namey, E. E., & Mitchell, M. L. (2013). Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research. SAGE Publications.

Huh, J. (2020). Travel influencer marketing and its effect on travel decisions: The role of credibility and parasocial interaction. Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 37(4), 473-487.

Ismarizal, B., & Kusumah, A. H. G. (2023). The Instagram effect on tourist destination choices: Unveiling key attraction elements. Journal of Consumer Sciences, 8(2), 124-137.

Karataş, Z. (2017). Sosyal bilim araştırmalarında paradigma değişimi: Nitel yaklaşımın yükselişi. Türkiye Sosyal Hizmet Araştırmaları Dergisi, 1(1), 68-86.

Kıran, S., Yılmaz, C., & Emre, İ. (2019). Instagram'daki Influencer'ların   Takipçiler Üzerindeki Etkisi. Uluslararası Yönetim Bilişim Sistemleri ve Bilgisayar Bilimleri Dergisi, 3(2), 100-111.

Kumar, N. (2025). How Many People Use Instagram 2025 (New Statistics). Retrieved, 19.03.2025: https://www.demandsage.com/instagram-statistics/

Lin, C. A., Crowe, J., Pierre, L., & Lee, Y. (2021). Effects of parasocial interaction with an instafamous influencer on brand attitudes and purchase intentions. The Journal of Social Media in Society, 10(1), 55-78.

Mchavu, S. U., Ali, I. M., & Yılmazdoğan, O. C. (2022). How Perceptions of Travel Influencers on Instagram Affect Visit Intention? A Research on Generation Z from Zanzibar. Balkan Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 11(22), 1-9.

Mert, Y. L. (2018). Dijital pazarlama ekseninde influencer marketing uygulamalari. Gümüşhane Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Elektronik Dergisi, 6(2), 1299-1328.
Onan, M. M. Seyahat Influencerlarının Yaşam Biçimlerine Etkisi: "Biz Evde Yokuz" İçerik Analizi. Maltepe Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Dergisi, 11(1), 28-47.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data. SAGE Publications.

Seidman, I. (2019). Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences. Teachers College Press.

Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. Journal of retailing and consumer services, 53, 101742.

Şeker, Ş. E. (2014). Maslow'un ihtiyaçlar piramiti (Maslow hierarchy of needs). YBS Ansiklopedisi, 1(1), 43-45.

Tešin, A., Pivac, T., Besermenji, S., & Obradović, S. (2022). Exploring the influence of Instagram on travel destination choice. The European Journal of Applied Economics, 19(1).

Ünal, A. & İpar, M. S. (2021). Turistlerin Destinasyon Tercihlerinde Sosyal Medyanın Etkisinin Belirlenmesine Yönelik Bir Araştırma: Sakin Şehir Destinasyonu Vize Örneği, International Journal of Eurasia Social Sciences (IJOESS), 12(45), 510-527. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.35826/ijoess.2983

We are Social. Global Digital Report. (2024). Retrieved, 09.06.2024: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024   turkey

Yılmaz Doğan, O. C., Doğan, R. Ş., & Altıntaş, E. (2021). The impact of the source credibility of Instagram influencers on travel intention: The mediating role of parasocial interaction. Journal of Vacation Marketing, 27(3), 299-313. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766721995973