Travel Influencers Dominating the World of Marketing: The Analysis of Social Media
Engagement

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Abstract

Through a content analysis of posts from Instagram travel influencers, the research sought to find a clear method for increasing engagement rates, along with the potential for greater generated revenue, through the following travel post elements: appearance of influencer, presence of source credibility elements, type of group featured, presence of brand endorsement, main post subject, price point of travel, and location of travel. Research rooted in the source credibility theory indicates which elements make an influencer more credible, but not necessarily which elements will result in an overall higher engagement rate, specifically in the realm of travel. By focusing on the aforementioned elements in travel posts, the researcher found that none resulted in significantly higher engagement rates. However, it was found that as influencers create genuine content, refrain from mentioning personal relationships, avoid risky brand endorsements, steer away from posts specifically about nature, and maintain a comfortable price point in their post content, they can prevent endangering their engagement levels.

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I certify that I have read this thesis and that, in my opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Professional Communication

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With the growth of social media usage, consumers increasingly turn to social media platforms for their information. As such, people have come to put greater trust in brand recommendations from social media influencers rather than advertisements directly generated by the brand (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg 2011). Instead of utilizing resources to improve their traditional advertising, companies are paying influencers to spread the word about their products and services.

The more followers a social media influencer has, the greater the influencer's generated revenue and opportunities for further growth of their own personal brand will be. An influencer with over one million followers can earn anywhere from $100,000-$250,000 from one social media post (Lieber, 2018). The type of category involved in the posts also can play a role in determining how much influencers can earn. According to research carried out by influencer marketing company, Klear (2019), posts from travel influencers are ranked as the highest earning posts, earning nine times more than the second most lucrative category, fashion. With this in mind, posts from travel influencers were the focus of this study. Although there are multiple variables involved in the quest for a larger following, perhaps a good starting point for this goal is determining what elements are present in posts with higher engagement levels compared to those with lower engagement rates. The current study analyzed and coded the content of 300 Instagram posts from 30 travel influencers.

The information gained from this research can potentially aid travel influencers in producing content that increases their number of followers and the overall engagement rate of their posts. The research can also benefit companies that work directly with influencers and brand ambassadors in formulating messages that are best for the audiences of the type of individual they are working with.

<center>**Literature Review**</center>

Social Media Influencer Marketing

In terms of presenting a message to a target audience, companies have a wide array of communication options available for executing their marketing goals. With planned communications such as websites, campaigns, and advertisements, there is no shortage of ways that a company can reach an audience (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997). However, it is the unplanned communication messages, such as word of mouth referrals, reviews, and general gossip about a brand, that have been found to carry more credibility for consumers than any other marketing method (Dahlen, Lange, & Smith, 2010). As consumers view the source of unplanned messaging as a neutral, third party--who may even be a fellow consumer--they place more trust in their thoughts and statements than those of the actual brand itself (Smith & Taylor, 2010).

These third party sources are opinion formers or opinion leaders. Opinion formers are typically professional experts in the particular field of the brand being discussed (Egan, 2007). For example, an opinion former for a food brand may be an experienced chef, seasoned food critic, or a food scientist. An opinion leader, in contrast, is an individual who carries the reputation of being an innovator, socialite, or someone from a higher social status (Smith & Taylor, 2010). Though these two groups differ in their backgrounds and experience, they both share the ability to persuade audiences to think and act a certain way through their messaging. In today's current world of communication, social media platforms are the primary medium used for disseminating timely and high visibility messaging, and are also the medium of choice for opinion formers and leaders--thus granting them the title of social media influencers (Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017).

Social media influencers are third party endorsers who inform and influence the opinion of consumers by sharing compelling social media content (Freberg et al., 2011). In order to accomplish this, an influencer must be perceived as a model unto others and produce content that is interesting and persuasive through their accounts. Consumers are more likely to follow influencers if they are experienced with a product or service, actively involved in an online community, display frequent participation and contribution to a particular area of interest, or are simply regarded as a connoisseur of wise purchase decisions (Leal, Hor-Meyll, and de Paula Pessôa, 2014).

With these characteristics in tow, social media influencers are becoming invaluable assets to companies seeking to build brand awareness and drive product sales. One such example was Nike's brand promotion partnership with athlete and influencer, Cristiano Ronaldo. In 2016, Ronaldo referenced Nike, or made its logo visible, in 347 of his social media posts, which received a total of 477 million interactions, thus generating an estimated $500 million in value for Nike (Forbes, 2017). For many companies, the successful return from influencer marketing is also inducing a change in their overall marketing budget. According to a 2019 survey involving 162 companies from multiple industries across the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Republic of Ireland, Germany, and France, 89% of respondents said the return on investment from influencer marketing has been better or comparable to their other marketing channels. Additionally, 65% of respondents planned to increase their influencer marketing budgets in 2020 (Mediakix, 2019). Overall, the influence and reach of these individuals make them vital players in a brand's goal to inform consumers and encourage the adoption of new products (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). Among the many brands and topics of

interest promoted by social media influencers, those involving travel is of particular interest in this study.

Popularity and Use of Travel Influencers

Prior to the emergence of social media travel influencers, travel experiences were captured through face-to-face storytelling, journaling, and writing books devoted to travel. With the introduction of the internet, blogs shortly appeared in the mid-1990s and became forums for people to easily share information and stories about a variety of topics, including travel (Garden, 2012). Travel blogs, and the sharing of information by travel influencers, fit into the category of infotainment, which Deuze (2001) describes as the convergence of culture and entertainment, challenging the journalistic ideology of objectivity with its often subjective first-person viewpoint.

The prevalence and common utilization of information from travel influencers is largely due to the unique personalities of the influencers and the credibility that readers assign to them. Ramonet (2011) described that news organizations have to rely on branding to be deemed credible by an audience, whereas travel influencers' credibility stems from the non-commercial, personalized identity that each influencer shapes. Unlike travel books, magazines, and documentaries, travel influencers have few limits on what and how they share travel information. This freedom enables travel influencers to create posts that are more intimate and personal (Fürsich & Hanusch, 2014). Schudson (2011) expressed that, similar to audiences being drawn to the personalities of news anchors and radio hosts, consumers develop a level of loyalty and interest in an influencer based on the relationship that they create with their readers through more personal posts. In research conducted by Fürsich & Hanusch (2014), around 100 travel blog posts written on the same topic were systematically analyzed to determine common themes and

patterns. From these posts, it was found that 77 percent of them included first person syntax ('I' or 'we') along with personal stories and anecdotes. Fürsich & Hanusch described that,

> ...the use of 'I' and personal anecdotes, a photo, a biography, shared nationality and a log of posts that help form a narrative around a writer are mentioned as positive points. The personal connection builds trust between bloggers and readers. Coupled with 'insider' content, blogs offer credible and authentic information that helps travelers be a local for a day. (p.92)

The same research conducted by Fürsich & Hanusch (2014) also involved the questioning and interviewing of those who follow travel influencers. From this, it was found that readers equate the work of travel influencers with trustworthiness and authenticity. The respondents rated guidebooks and influencers as the most trustworthy sources of information, with magazines, newspapers, and TV shows holding a lower rating of trustworthiness. Additionally, the respondents rated influencers as having the best information for an authentic travel experience, leaving the other sources of information with, comparatively, very low ratings.

Source Credibility Theory (SCT)

In the realm of communication, messages pass between two communicators, a sender and a receiver. As explained through Barnlund's (2008) Transactional Model of Communication, these communicators exchange messages with one another through one or more channels. The channel, or the medium through which the message is passed, include face-to-face conversations, email, publications, billboards, and many more. Although this communication model explains the basic roles and elements within the process of communication, it lacks the phenomenon that occurs when the credibility of the message and the sender is evaluated by the receiver. This

phenomenon is known as source credibility. Sallam & Wahid (2012) further define this concept with terms such as, "ethos, prestige, reputation, status, authority, competence, etc" (p.93). The source credibility theory (SCT), suggests that receivers are "more likely to be persuaded by a message when they believe the source is highly credible" (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Credibility is considered to be the judgments that a receiver makes regarding the believability of the sender (Callison, 2001). Umeogu (2012) remarked that this believability often stems from the overall ethos or character of the sender.

The roots of source credibility extend as far back as 2500 years ago in Ancient Greece. The Greek philosopher Aristotle first developed source credibility in his written work, *The Rhetoric* (Umeogu, 2012). In his work, he deemed that the source of a message was the determining factor of its overall credibility, or persuasiveness, and this credibility is the receivers' perceived image of the source (Andersen & Clevenger, 1963). "Aristotle referred to this image as the source's ethos and suggested that it was the source's most potent means of persuasion" (Teven, 2008, p.393). Later, scholars continued to develop Aristotle's original concept and add further dimensions and elements to the theory. One of the first modern mentions of this theory came from Hovland, Janis & Kelley (1953) when they stated that, "the source credibility theory states that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible. In this research, SCT will be utilized to bring a basis of understanding for the experiments to be conducted.

SCT can be applied to various combinations of communicators, channels, and messages. More recently, this theory is often employed in explaining the credibility that consumers assign to certain companies or brands. In an online setting, most of the interaction between an audience and a web page is nonverbal as it is based on "the look and feel, aesthetics, or design of the

website" (Lowry, Wilson, & Haig, 2014, p.64). Research conducted by Fogg (2003) found that certain visual elements such as color schemes can predict the perceptions that an audience may have of the credibility of a website--and specifically the brand behind the platform. This research explains that even visual aesthetics can play a role in source credibility.

Additionally, SCT helps explain the credibility that an audience may assign to certain brands and celebrities based on the following of these pages on social media. In an experiment conducted by Jin and Phua (2014), it was found that celebrity endorser Twitter accounts with a higher number of followers had significantly higher source credibility ratings compared to celebrity endorser accounts with a lower following. Additionally, these celebrities with a higher following were viewed as more physically attractive, trustworthy, and competent while those surveyed possessed a greater intention to build an online friendship with these celebrities.

Dimensions of Source Credibility

The following elements of attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness will be implemented in the research to guide the researcher's questions and the overall design of the research.

Attractiveness. As physical appearance is often one of the first elements that an audience notices upon interacting with a communicator, attractiveness has a powerful impact upon gaining the attention of an audience and thus being able to persuade them. Overall, this can greatly affect the credibility of a communicator (Epega, 2008). To explain the effects of a source's attractiveness, McGuire (1985) developed the Source Attractiveness Model which links the credibility of the message with the similarity, familiarity, and likeability of the communicator.

Expertise. Researchers have defined "expertise" with terms such as, "authoritativeness" (McCroskey, 1966), "competence" (Whitehead, 1968), "expertness" (Applbaum & Anatol, 1972), or "qualification" (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969). Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) describe it as a communicator's overall capability to provide valid and accurate statements. The communicator's level of expertise is dependent on the believability of his or her knowledge and experience on a certain topic by the receivers of the message (Epega, 2008).

Trustworthiness. Ohanian (1990) stated that trustworthiness is determined by the level of confidence and acceptance that the listener has of the speaker and his or her message. Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) further develop this idea by adding that trustworthiness is determined by the listener's confidence in the actual assertions of the message that the communicator considers most valid. Listeners also determine the trustworthiness of a message based on the communicator's perceived honesty, sincerity, and objectivity (McCraken, 1989).

Research Questions

The literature provides a definition and a basic understanding of social media influencer marketing and the characteristics they possess that allow them to act as an essential connection between consumers and brands. Further, it was discovered that travel influencers are highly esteemed among readers interested in travel and are regarded as credible sources of information. With the presence of this perceived credibility, the source credibility theory and its elements of attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness were reviewed to understand its association with travel influencers. In order to determine which elements of a social media post that readers are more likely to engage with, an in-depth look at the content produced by influencers with varying engagement rates took place.

RQ1: Does an influencer's portrayed appearance affect the engagement rate of travel influencers' Instagram posts?

RQ2: Does the presence of the source credibility elements of attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness affect the engagement rate of travel influencers' Instagram posts?

RQ3: Does the type of group featured affect the engagement rate of travel influencers' Instagram posts?

RQ4: Does the mention of a brand affect the engagement rate of travel influencers' Instagram posts?

RQ5: Does the inclusion of certain post topics affect the engagement rate of travel influencers' Instagram posts?

RQ6: Does the price point of travel affect the engagement rate of travel influencers' Instagram posts?

RQ7: Does the location of travel affect the engagement rate of travel influencers' Instagram posts?

Method

Due to the potential that travel influencers have to gain significant revenue and brand awareness from user engagement with their posts, they can greatly benefit from an understanding of which post elements can increase their engagement levels. As a means to gain insight to these questions involving the components of a highly engaging travel post, a content analysis of travel Instagram posts was carried out. The researcher typed the word "travel" into Instagram's search engine to find 30 different accounts relating to travel. In order to ensure the greatest variety of influencers within the study, the researcher used the search results to select 10 influencers with a low following of 1,000-9,999 followers, 10 influencers with a medium following of 10,000-499,000 followers, and 10 influencers with a high following of 500,000 or more followers.

Additionally, the researcher exercised judgement to select a diverse group of influencers with different nationalities, genders, and stylistic choices for their personal appearance.

Once the influencers were selected, the researcher coded each influencer's ten most recent posts, for a total of 300 posts that were coded. The engagement rate for each post was first analyzed by noting the total number of followers for the influencer, followed by the number of likes and comments for the post. Next, the posts were coded for the following elements and their sub-categories: appearance of influencer (professional, down-to-earth/humble, fashion-forward, sex-appeal), presence of source credibility elements (attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness), type of group featured (solo, couple, friends/colleagues, family), presence of brand endorsement (brand mentioned, brand not mentioned), main post subject (natural landscape, man-made landscape, animals, recreation, lodging, transportation, food, campaign/ad, influencer, other people), price point of travel (budget, comfortable, luxury), and location of travel (domestic, international). For all the elements present in a post, a "1" was recorded and if an element was not present, a "0" was respectively given. A post could potentially have multiple elements, or none at all.

In order to ensure consistency in the coding, the following criteria was implemented to the elements within the "appearance of influencers" and "presence of source credibility categories" due to their more subjective nature:

Professional. The influencer is physically presented as someone who dresses and carries themselves with class and poise. They are dressed to play their role as a travel influencer without looking sloppy or too flashy.

Down-to-earth/humble. The influencer dresses in simple, modest clothing and avoids drawing attention to their appearance in their posts.

Fashion-forward. The influencer dresses in trendy or cutting-edge clothing and/or places focus on a particular clothing item.

Sex-appeal. The influencer is portrayed as provocative through their choice of wardrobe or positioning of their body in the images.

Attractiveness. The attractiveness of the influencer and/or the quality of the photography featured in their post.

Expertise. Contains specific, professional, and technical content relating to their experience.

Trustworthiness. Contains less specific content relating to their experience with elements of trust.

Influencers, and the unique content that they produce, have distinctive qualities and characteristics that set them apart from one another. With so many different combinations of physical appearances, writing styles, types of travel companions, motives for posting, post subjects, price points, and featured travel locations, it was imperative that the research capture these diverse categories that, when combined in various series, form the wide array of influencers in the realm of travel. As the presence of these categories was evaluated in each post, the study was able to determine whether each could potentially play a role in affecting user engagement, thus aiding travel influencers in pursuit of higher engagement rates.

Results

As a means to determine if higher engaging Instagram travel posts contain certain elements, research was conducted analyzing 300 travel posts from 30 diverse influencers and the seven element categories of: influencer appearance, source credibility elements, type of group

featured, brand endorsement, main post subject, price point of travel, and location of travel. Following the collection of data, the engagement rate of each post was calculated by adding the post's number of likes and comments and dividing that total by the influencer's number of followers. After determining the posts' engagement rates, each was then assigned a category of either a low (.01-.04), medium (.05-.09), or high (.10 and up) engagement rate. These categories assisted in answering the research questions regarding the effect of Instagram travel post elements on engagement rates.

RQ1 sought to determine whether a travel post's engagement rate is affected by the influencer's portrayed appearance. Results show that appearance does not have a significant influence on a post's engagement rate, regardless of whether the influencer's appearance is professional (X^2= 3.17; df=2; p>.05), down-to-earth/humble (X^2= 3.62; df=2; p>.05), fashion-forward (X^2= .20; df=2; p>.05), or having sex-appeal (X^2= 2.13; df=2; p>.05).

RQ2 asked if a post's engagement rate is affected by the presence of the source credibility elements: attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness. Of the three elements, it was found that there was not a significant difference for posts containing expertise (X^2=2.62; df=2; p>.05) or trustworthiness (X^2= .90; df=2; p>.05). But engagement levels were significantly lower for posts that contain the source credibility element of attractiveness (X^2= 6.16; df=2; p<.05). Of the 211 posts with attractiveness present, there are 132 (62.6%) posts with a low engagement rate, 55 (26.1%) posts with a medium engagement rate, and 24 (11.4%) posts with a high engagement rate (see Table 1).

RQ3 asked if the type of group featured in a travel Instagram post affects its engagement rate. The research found that there was no significant difference for posts featuring solo travelers (X^2= 2.53; df=2; p>.05) or friend/colleague groups (X^2= 1.39; df=2; p>.05). But the posts

featuring couples ($X^2= 7.49$; $df=2$; $p<.05$) and families ($X^2= 11.05$; $df=2$; $p<.05$) were found to have significantly lower engagement rates. Of the 66 posts involving couples, there are 33 (50%) posts with a low engagement rate, 25 (37.9%) posts with a medium engagement rate, and 8 (12.1%) posts with a high engagement rate. Of the 44 posts involving families, there are 36 (81.8%) posts with a low engagement rate, 7 (15.9%) posts with a medium engagement rate, and 1 (2.3%) post with a high engagement rate (see Tables 2 and 3).

RQ4 asked if the mention of a brand in an Instagram post affects the engagement rate. While there was not a significant difference in the engagement level of posts without brand endorsement ($X^2= 5.38$; $df=2$; $p>.05$), it was found that posts that contain brand endorsement have a significantly lower engagement rate ($X^2= 10.03$; $df=2$; $p<.05$). Of the 94 posts with brand endorsement present, there are 69 (73.4%) posts with a low engagement rate, 17 (18.1%) posts with a medium engagement rate, and 8 (8.5%) posts with a high engagement rate (see Table 4).

RQ5 sought to understand if the inclusion of certain topics within a post would affect the engagement level. Of the ten post topics, posts featuring the topic of natural landscape were found to have significantly lower engagement levels ($X^2= 6.41$; $df=2$; $p<.05$), while the topics of man-made landscape ($X^2= 2.67$; $df=2$; $p>.05$), animals ($X^2= 2.28$; $df=2$; $p>.05$), recreation ($X^2= .294$; $df=2$; $p>.05$), lodging ($X^2= .40$; $df=2$; $p>.05$), transportation ($X^2= 2.52$; $df=2$; $p>.05$), food ($X^2= .89$; $df=2$; $p>.05$), campaign ($X^2= 5.78$; $df=2$; $p>.05$), influencer ($X^2= 3.01$; $df=2$; $p>.05$), and other people ($X^2= 1.36$; $df=2$; $p>.05$) did not have a significant influence on engagement. Of the 91 posts featuring the topic of natural landscape, there are 46 (50.5%) posts with a low engagement rate, 31 (34.1%) posts with a medium engagement rate, and 14 (15.4%) posts with a high engagement rate (see Table 5).

RQ6 asked if the price point of travel affects a post's engagement rate. The two extremes of the three, budget (X^2= 16.31; df=2; p<.05) and luxury (X^2= 9.04; df=2; p<.05) price points, were found to cause significantly lower engagement levels in posts, while a comfortable price point (X^2= 4.63; df=2; p>.05) did not. Of the 104 posts with a budget price point, there are 48 (46.2%) posts with a low engagement rate, 31 (29.8%) posts with a medium engagement rate, and 25 (24%) posts with a high engagement rate. Of the 55 posts with a luxury price point, there are 43 (78.2%) posts with a low engagement rate, 7 (12.7%) posts with a medium engagement rate, and 5 (9.1%) posts with a high engagement rate (see Tables 6 and 7).

RQ7 asked if the location of travel affects the engagement rate of posts. The research found that there was not a significant difference for the engagement rates of posts discussing domestic (X^2= 4.15; df=2; p>.05) or international (X^2= 4.15; df=2; p>.05) locations.

Discussion

With the aim to discover which travel post elements might induce the greatest engagement on Instagram, the research presented findings that can aid travel influencers in their quest for highly engaging content. The initial presumption of this research was that the inclusion of certain elements would bring about significantly higher engagement levels. However, it was interesting to note that not a single one of the travel post elements included in the research led to significantly higher engagement levels in the posts of the selected travel influencers. Despite the fact that the research does not present a significant finding regarding which elements could result in higher engagement for influencers, it does indicate which elements could cause significantly lower engagement levels. In other words, instead of this research becoming a teaching opportunity for influencers to know "what to do" to improve their posts' engagement, it has become a lesson of "what not to do".

Attractive Content Lacks Reality

With significantly lower engagement rates for posts containing the source credibility element of attractiveness, the findings indicate that the presence of attractive content does not necessarily make followers view an influencer as more credible. The lack of engagement suggests that users may even hold negative perceptions of attractive posts. Perhaps content perceived to be attractive is actually viewed as fake, thus reducing a user's desire to engage with attractive content. Cooper (1994) suggests that as travel photography undergoes a series of adjustments through framing, cropping, and the application of filters, the mood and overall perspective of an image can be heavily altered from its true reality (p.145). With the prevalence of these images, it is possible that users have been so heavily exposed to photoshopped and staged images of travel--deemed as attractive--that they seek a more raw and genuine perspective of traveling provided through the content of Instagram influencers. Although users may seek legitimacy among the influencers they follow, they are particular about the portrayal of the influencer's personal relationships.

Featuring Relationships Limits Engagement

With both couple and family centered posts having lower engagement rates, one could infer that people want to focus more on the influencer and their interests alone rather than the influencer's personal relationships. Possibly, Instagram users do not relate to posts emphasizing relationships--whether romantic or familial--if they do not share similar relations in their personal lives. Further, even if users do share similar relationships, they may simply pay less attention to the influencer's relationships as it could inhibit users from vicariously experiencing the influencer's travel adventures if they have to factor in other people. Travel influencers may

have more success with engagement if they simply focus on the main travel advice and inspiration that users search for rather than incorporating their personal relationships into their accounts. Despite the fact that the research did not directly indicate that posts about solo travel had higher engagement rates, it seems plausible that by excluding posts regarding couple or family travel, influencers could at least avoid lower engagement rates.

Brand Endorsements are Risky

The study found that Instagram users do not engage well with travel posts geared toward the endorsement of brands. Users may refrain from engaging with brand endorsement posts as they are likely in search of genuine and original content from the influencer, rather than an advertisement. Although working with a brand can be beneficial for influencers seeking to gain revenue from their content, caution should be exercised in this endeavor as their own personal brand image, and engagement levels, could be at risk. To further support this finding, it should be noted that posts with a campaign--which often features brand endorsement--as the main subject were notably close to having a significant level of lower engagement.

Content About the Outdoors is of Limited Interest

Interestingly, of all the main post topics reviewed in the study, natural landscape was the only one that resulted in significantly lower engagement levels. This finding could stem from a series of possible reasons. Potentially, those who are on Instagram are not necessarily looking for the outdoors. Rather, they could be in search of the more material aspects of travel like nice hotels, high-end dining, and shopping for unique souvenirs. The people who are deeply interested in the outdoors may not care to spend their time on social media when they can be outside physically exploring the areas featured on Instagram posts. Additionally, with many top

influencers--who often yield higher engagement rates--being sponsored by brands that can afford to bring them to five star hotels, ritzy restaurants, and luxury attractions, these influencers are probably not venturing to natural landscapes as frequently. Whereas, influencers with less of a following are more apt to travel to natural landscapes as these places may be more in their price range.

Extreme Price Points Do Not Appeal to Users

The price point of travel that influencers share through their content can affect their engagement. As posts featuring budget or luxury price points had significantly lower engagement, it is apparent that users want their travel experience to fulfill their hopes and wishes without being too ostentatious or, on the opposite end, too frugal. Luxury travel may feel too impractical for users, but the thought of "budget" travel might seem beneath them. With the possibility that users disengage with certain content as it appears fake or unfitting for their lifestyle, in parallel, users may relate and engage better with content that portrays a happy medium regarding travel finances.

Based on the findings of the elements explored through this research, there is not a conventional method for producing content that yields higher engagement rates. Instagram users who follow travel influencers seek genuine and applicable content that relates to their own individual lifestyle. With users being as diverse as the influencers they follow, there is no clear formula that every travel influencer can use to produce highly engaging posts for their distinctive following. Although applications can be drawn from the lower engagement levels associated with certain elements, perhaps the key finding of this research is that it is perfectly acceptable for influencers to provide content that is unique and different.

Limitations & Future Research

Given the resources and time available to the researcher, the sample of Instagram travel posts included in the research proved to be useful in answering the question of whether the presence of certain elements in travel influencers' posts affected engagement levels. Although great care was taken in selecting a variety of diverse influencers, perhaps an even larger sample could provide more variety in the results. The researcher tried to choose influencers who had varying levels of followers, demographics, and content that differed from one another. Despite this, it seems that the majority of the selected influencers' posts had lower engagement levels after calculating each post's total comments and likes divided by the number of followers for the influencer. This could be resolved in the future by selecting a larger sample of influencers, thus increasing the chance that the engagement level range for the study is more varied.

Altogether, when comparing the posts of the selected influencers, each truly had diverse content. This diversity could also result in an audience completely unique to that influencer, meaning that it is difficult to generalize the interests and habits of an audience of travel influencer followers as each follower has a distinctive taste for what content they regard worthy of engaging with. Each influencer has their own unique qualities and personality traits that are capable of drawing in a distinct following. As found in the research, an influencer does not have to appear professional, down-to-earth, fashion-forward, or sexy to attain a higher engagement level. There are probably deeper reasons why a consumer may engage with a certain post. With that said, this research could benefit from conducting focus groups with followers of various travel influencers to understand their intentions behind engaging with certain posts.

In spite of the varying interests of the followers of travel influencers, future research could involve several other variables to further pinpoint the elements an audience might

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generally be more likely to engage with. Some possible elements to include would be: the writing style of an influencer, the colors present in an image, and the geographic region being covered. Further, it would be interesting to include demographic variables in future research such as the gender, race, and age of the influencer. Although these variables cannot necessarily be adapted by influencers, it could bring about intriguing findings should there be any noticeable patterns concerning engagement and the presence of certain demographics.

Despite the researcher's desire for this research to aid influencers in creating posts that would bring about higher engagement levels, the research still presents useful information for influencers in understanding what elements to avoid when designing travel posts. As they create content that is raw and genuine, refrain from mentioning personal relationships, avoid risky brand endorsements, steer away from posts specifically about nature, and maintain a comfortable price point in their post content, travel influencers can prevent endangering their engagement levels. Although the research indicates that certain elements could negatively interfere with engagement rates, the lack of a clear formula for influencers to follow for producing high engagement rates suggests that influencers have the opportunity to use their individuality and creativity in producing content for their own unique audience.

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Appendices

Table 1

Posts Containing Source Credibility Element of Attractiveness

Engagement Levels	N	%
Low (.01-.04)	132	62.6
Medium (.05-.09)	55	26.1
High (.10 and up)	8	11.4
Total	211	100.0

$X^2= 6.16$; $df=2$; $p<.05$

Table 2

Posts Focused on Group Type of Couples

Engagement Levels	N	%
Low (.01-.04)	33	50.0
Medium (.05-.09)	25	37.9
High (.10 and up)	8	12.1
Total	66	100.0

$X^2= 7.49$; $df=2$; $p<.05$

Table 3

Posts Focused on Group Type of Families

Engagement Levels	N	%
Low (.01-.04)	36	81.8
Medium (.05-.09)	7	15.9
High (.10 and up)	1	2.3
Total	44	100.0

$X^2 = 11.05$; $df = 2$; $p < .05$

Table 4

Posts Containing Brand Endorsement

Engagement Levels	N	%
Low (.01-.04)	69	73.4
Medium (.05-.09)	17	18.1
High (.10 and up)	8	8.5
Total	94	100.0

$X^2 = 10.03$; $df = 2$; $p < .05$

Table 5

Posts Containing Topic of Natural Landscape

Engagement Levels	N	%
Low (.01-.04)	46	50.5
Medium (.05-.09)	31	34.1
High (.10 and up)	14	15.4
Total	91	100.0

$X^2 = 6.41$; $df = 2$; $p < .05$

Table 6

Posts With Budget Price Point

Engagement Levels	N	%
Low (.01-.04)	48	46.2
Medium (.05-.09)	31	29.8
High (.10 and up)	25	24.0
Total	104	100.0

$X^2 = 16.31$; $df = 2$; $p < .05$

Table 7

Posts With Luxury Price Point

Engagement Levels	N	%
Low (.01-.04)	43	78.2
Medium (.05-.09)	7	12.7
High (.10 and up)	5	9.1
Total	55	100.0

$X^2 = 9.04$; $df = 2$; $p < .05$