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From a *click* to a trip:
An experiment
on how to stimulate
users'
visual engagement
and
travel intention
in the era of Instagram



Master's Thesis

Communication Science - Digital Marketing Communication

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the present study focuses on gaining a better understanding of the application of the Elaboration Likelihood Model in relation to travel information retrieved from Instagram, with special regards to the impact that visual stimuli (the source of the post, style, and content of the picture) may have on travel intention and the credibility model.

Background: Tourism marketing strategies on social media platforms have become an important focus for academic studies. The research conducted on this topic have provided numerous and relevant insights about influencer's physical characteristics, or users' travel personality. Overall fewer studies focus on the type of visual content shared on social media platform to attract users.

Method: The present research was designed as an online experiment, and it was distributed among 249 participants. The survey assessed respondents' levels of travel intention after the exposure to one of the 8 Instagram posts manipulated in a 2 (micro-influencer vs. official travel account) x 2 (commercial style vs. domestic style) x 2 (monument vs. local folks) experimental design. Furthermore, participants were asked to evaluate their perception of trustworthiness and expertise with regard to the source of the post, in addition to their perception of authenticity about the advertised travel destination. Also, the survey measured their destination attitude and attitude towards the post as covariates.

Results: Official accounts' posts were considered as higher in expertise than micro-influencers. Additionally, pictures of folks led to a higher travel intention than when featuring monuments. Image style did not impact participants' intention to travel without taking into account attitude towards the post. In addition, no mediation was found between source of the post and travel intention through trustworthiness or expertise. The role played by perceived authenticity with the source credibility model remains unclear.

Discussion: The findings of this study emphasized the relevance of source credibility model theory in relation to the ELM in the context of travel marketing. Furthermore, it may provide strategic advantages for many stakeholders involved in the tourism industry, such as tourism enterprises, travel marketers (Destination Marketing Organizations), and both national and local governments with specific competence in tourism matters.

Keywords: Travel intention, travel influencers, destination marketing, tourism marketing, perceived trustworthiness, perceived expertise

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1. Introduction

The development and subsequent popularity of social media platforms have greatly impacted many aspects of people's everyday lives. They have changed the way people communicate, the way people share their opinions, the way people search for information. Ultimately, they have changed the way people travel (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). Social media have the power to influence people's needs and choices and therefore new scenarios have arisen for both consumers and marketers, as the sparkle of interest generated by a travel post may influence people's future decision-making process. This study focuses on the visual elements that may influence consumers' behavioral intention in the context of travel and tourism marketing.

Most of all, this study aims to uncover the relevance of the role played by the source of the travel information. The key role of digital influencers in social media marketing campaigns has been emphasized in many digital marketing-related studies (Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011; Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Freberg et al., 2011). In the tourism and travel sector, as observed by previous studies, social media influencers can be used for numerous purposes, such as to attract more tourists (Glover, 2009), improve the perception of the destination (Li, Robinson, & Oriade, 2017) and redirect tourism flows to less saturated geographical areas (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). Travel social media influencers (tSMIs) are distinct from other social influencers primarily because, in the eyes of consumers, they do not advertise products or services, they just share experiences (Influencer.com, 2018). The destination image provided by tSMIs is generally perceived as more faithful to reality because tSMIs' posting activity appears to be made without any promotional attempts (Gartner, 1994). The efficiency of this brand marketing strategy has led to a great variety of possible tSMIs, such as solo travel influencers, couple travel influencers, family travel influencers, LGBT travel influencers, food travel influencers, budget travel influencers, medical travel influencers, religious travel influencers, and luxury travel influencers (Afluencer.com, 2020).

The previous literature mainly focused on the analysis of the characteristics of social influencers as sources of information, whose credibility depends on the level of perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness (Hovland et al., 1953; McGuire, 1985; Ohanian, 1990; Willemsen, Neijens, & Bronner, 2011). However, overall less attention has been dedicated to the analysis of travel influencer's visual content as a relevant driver for travel intention among social media users. As proven

by Escalas (2004) in the context of digital visual engagement, images have the power to create a strong narrative transportation effect on viewers, which can stimulate brand-related behaviors (Park et al., 2010) and consequently lead to an increase in purchase intention (Valentini et al., 2018).

Plus, relatively less is known about the effect that official travel social media accounts may produce in users. Therefore, this study is aimed at enriching the existing literature in destination marketing by comparing the effect of a micro-influencer's post with an official source of travel information on Instagram. Furthermore, the present study focuses on investigating the Instagram visual content as determinants of travel intention on prospective tourists, in line with Urry's (1990) concept of "the tourist gaze", by which tourist consumption is primarily a visual experience (p. 135). By doing so, both style and content of the image promoted through an Instagram post is considered. Hence, eight different posts were used to analyze the impact of source of the message (micro-influencer vs. travel agency), image style (commercial and domestic style), image content (image style and content) on travel intention among Instagram users. In addition, the present study takes into account the influence related to sense of trust and competence inspired by the poster. Thus, the present experiment was conducted in order to answer the following research question:

How do source, style and image content of a travel Instagram post influence travel intention, perceived trustworthiness and expertise in users?

2. Literature Framework

In the following section, various aspects of the travel experience are elaborated and supported by the literature. Several elements are discussed; starting from the digitalization of the pre-travel experience, passing through the new communication strategies used on social media in tourism marketing, until the examination of the strict relationship between promotional visual materials and tourism. The final chapters of the literature framework will be dedicated to the introduction to the variables investigated in this study.

2.1 Digitalization of travelers' pre-visit experience

The era of the Internet has gradually revolutionized the way individuals travel (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). The most radical change regards individuals' decision-making process, due to the greater opportunities for searching information and sharing experiences provided by the rise of new interactive technologies (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020; Özdemir & Çelebi, 2015).

The study conducted by Govers, Go, and Kumar (2007) suggests that traditional forms of tourism promotion (e.g., advertising and brochures designed by travel agencies) have a limited impact on customers' travel decisions. Moreover, the authors highlight that external sources of information can generate greater influence on customers' perception. According to their survey, the media represent the primary source of influence in pre-visit destination image formation, while own and others' personal experiences represent the second source of information for relevance.

The primary role played by the media in this sector relies on the perception of media narratives as vicarious experiences reported by autonomous agents (Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007). As early as 2005, the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) reported that 67% of American travelers accessed the Internet to retrieve information about their prospective travel destinations. The subsequent development of Web 2.0 has marked the transition of the Internet "from a push marketing medium to one where peer-to-peer generation and sharing of data are the norm" (O'Connor, 2010:754). In order to fully grasp the scope of the phenomenon, it is sufficient to take into account that already in 2014 TripAdvisor claimed to receive 115 new contributions a minute, for a total of 165,600 per day (The Telegraph, 2014). A more recent investigation revealed that more than 1 million travel-related hashtags are searched each week (Statista, 2019).

As observed by Casaló, Flavián, Guinalú, and Ekinçi (2015), the tourism industry is particularly affected by online word-of-mouth (e-WOM) due to the intangible nature of tourism services. The search for independent sources of travel information helps travelers to reduce perceived risk, uncertainty, and ambiguity associated with the event (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). As Preko and Gyepi-Garbrah (2023) highlighted in their study on tourism information among migrant visitors, safety matters concern most travelers and could have an impact on their travel decisions. This is confirmed by numerous studies (Trogisch & Fletcher, 2020; Zarezadeh et al., 2018) and it is related to the complex nature of the tourism and hospitality sector, which is an 'information-intensive industry' (Gretzel et al., 2000). In other words, travel information available online may have a decisive impact on prospective tourists, to the extent that it might affect their travel intention towards a certain destination.

Travel intention is defined as one's will or desire to visit a destination (Luo & Lam, 2020) and it represents a major antecedent of online travel purchase (Oumayma & Ez-Zohra, 2023). Given its relevance, travel intention has always been an important point of focus for academic research in tourism context. Many researchers observed the close connection between travel intention and destination image (Baloglu, 2000) and how the latter can be influenced by marketers and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) on social media to attract tourists (Kim, Hwang and Fesenmaier, 2015).

Therefore, the Internet represents an essential source of information for travelers and tourists when planning to visit their travel destinations, as seeking information about accommodation, amusement activities, gastronomy, and services provides them with “some form of comfort and calmness” (Preko & Gyepi-Garbrah, 2023:147) in their destination decision-making process (Hu & Jiang, 2014). This need for seeking and exchanging travel information through independent channels of communication is also reflected by the popularity of social network sites (SNSs) in the sector. Social media platforms have increased the ways for users to participate and disseminate travel information within virtual communities (Katsoni, 2014) and, simultaneously, represent a new opportunity for marketers and DMOs.

2.2 New scenarios

The new form of interaction provided by SNSs has been enthusiastically welcomed by destination managers, as testified by the increasing presence of travel accounts on social media platforms for place and destination branding activities (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Indeed, social media provide a neutral space for a direct encounter with both existing and potential tourists (Gretzel, 2018), as they offer an occasion for existing customers to share their experiences and simultaneously a place for new customers to gather information. Moreover, DMOs on social media have the power to create “a sense of proximity and familiarity in the destination so its image becomes more attractive to potential tourists” (Molinillo, Liébana-Cabanillas and Anaya-Sánchez, 2017:5). More specifically, DMOs' online activity can significantly contribute to the formation of a destination image in tourists' mind, overcome cultural barriers and increase travel intention (Moura, Gnoth and Deans, 2014; Chung, Lee, Lee and Koo, 2015).

In this respect, travel marketers have recently explored new strategies of social media marketing, such as partnerships with (travel) social media influencers. These opinion leaders can boost overall destinations' image and consequently increase tourism's flow by sharing their personal experiences with their followers (Xu Xu & Pratt, 2018), as they are perceived as trustworthy and autonomous sources of information (Gretzel, 2018). On this basis, influencers may represent an effective strategy to exert a form of control over the flow of destination information (Gretzel, 2018).

The academic interest for this marketing field has shown that influencers as brand ambassadors may be categorized into three groups, primarily based on the number of followers, such as 'beginners' (number of followers between 1,000 and 10,000), micro-influencers (number of followers between 10,000 and 100,000), and macro-influencers (more than 100,000 followers, De Oliveira & Goussevskaia, 2020). In the tourism and travel sector, researchers have focused on the last two groups, highlighting that the endorsement of micro-influencers can be more effective due to a perceived sense of authenticity and connectedness than those transmitted by macro-influencers (Jerslev, 2016).

Furthermore, several studies have proven that consumers tend to be more skeptical towards the information retrieved from commercial sources compared with independent sources (e.g. user generated content; Senecal & Nantel, 2004), as these are perceived "as an unbiased and relevant input into their decision-making process" (O'Connor, 2010:754; Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2008). In support of this, statistics showed that 74% of consumers trust social media to make purchasing decisions (Bennett, 2014) and 92% of people trust the recommendations of individuals over brands, even though they do not know them in person (Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising Survey, 2012). Significantly, 96% of consumers who discuss brands online do not follow the official social media profiles owned by those brands (Smith, 2016). It is therefore arguable that "diverse sources of online travel information can influence how tourists assess information credibility" (Choi, Hickerson, & Kerstetter, 2018:118). By taking into consideration all these reflections, the first hypothesis of the present study is:

H1. Travel micro-influencers' posts lead to a higher travel intention than those posted by official travel accounts.

2.4 Photography and Tourism: when a picture is worth a thousand words

The relationship between pictures and tourism has been explored by many researchers in the past. Pictures are generally conveyed as “established means for inducing imagery” (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997:540; MacInnis & Price, 1987) and the use of visuals in destination promotions has been found to be “salient in the early stage of destination evaluation” (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997:540-541, Mazanec, 1989). As observed by Sternberg (1997), travel iconography plays an important role in tourism planning, as through pictures marketers can create expectations and consequently generate a “desire for image verification” (Adams, 1984; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997:541; Okoroafo, 1989).

The importance of photographic materials in travel destinations is generally related to the conceptualization of tourism as a form of hedonic consumption (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998), where the aim is the experience itself. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) emphasized the centrality of elements such as multisensoriality and emotions in hedonic or experiential products, which consumers can build through both historic (based on prior experience) or fantasy imagery (based on expectations). As stated by Gretzel and Fesenmaier (2003), sensory tourism information may be strategically communicated through narratives. Individuals tend to retain and interpret information about experiences in the form of stories (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000), whose narrative strength may be enhanced by incorporating photographs as “materialization of tourist image” (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020:5). Visual narrative media have the capacity to transmit holistic and emotional experiences to the viewers (Lim & Child, 2020; Schindler & Holbrook, 2003). As argued by Sontag (2002), photographs are “experience captured” and “give us the sense that we can hold the world in our heads—as an anthology of images” (p. 3) (i.e., “to collect photographs is to collect the world”). Therefore, images can produce a strong narrative transportation in people’s mind (Escalas, 2004) and this sense of immersion stimulates the mental visualization of themselves in the presented story (Helle, 2011).

From this perspective, visual content on social media platforms may strongly influence travelers’ travel intention. In this regard, and among other platforms (such as Twitter, Facebook, or Youtube), Instagram is considered the most popular social media for tourism and travel information (Khlat, 2014) and its persuasive power as a tourism digital marketing tool resides right in its photo-based nature, as suggested by Paül i Agustí (2018). Regarding the impact of user-generated content (UGC) on creating tourism destination brand on Instagram, Fatanti and Suyadnya’s (2015) study pointed out that the communication facilities provided by the platform (e.g. geotagging, hashtags, video

and image postings) amplify the opportunity to influence travelers' decision-making process. Therefore, Instagram posts play an important role in tourism by developing a complex system of "information, suggestions, and inspiration for travelling" (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020:4).

According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1981), when the receiver is characterized by a high level of ability or motivation to evaluate the brand's information, (s)he will process the information through the central route (Li & Suh, 2015; Zhou et al.; 2016). Thus, the receiver's judgement will be based on the quality and the argumentative force of the message. On the contrary, when the receiver's ability or motivation is low or insufficient to evaluate the informational cues, his or her evaluation will be based on peripheral cues (e.g. visual stimuli), which require less cognitive efforts (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). The aim of the present study is to reveal the mechanism of the ELM in relation to destination marketing on Instagram, as many aspects may differ according to the elements taken into account.

Moving from the ELM, the focus of interest of the present investigation is on the influence that visual elements of an Instagram post advertising tourism might have on social media users when no substantial amount of information is provided.

2.5 Domestic pictures or commercial pictures.

In order to explore how visual stimuli can affect users' brand credibility (Dwivedi, Nayeem, & Murshed, 2018), the present study focuses on two visual characteristics: the style and the content of the image of the social media post. To test the influence of image style on travel intention, Adegbola, Gearhart, and Skarda-Mitchell's (2018) terminology was adopted, in order to compare the effect of (digital) domestic photographs to commercial photographs.

From a general perspective, the word 'domestic' refers to "informal and spontaneous" photographs (Coe & Gates, 1977:9; Zuromskis, 2009:53) taken by amateurs or non-professionals. The term, as pointed out by Holland (2009), seems to relegate these activities within the household and among family members. Today this concept has been widely extended, thanks to the technological development of modern photography infrastructures, starting from the portable cameras introduced by Kodak in the late nineteenth century, passing through the customer digital cameras advent, until the era of the integration of highly sophisticated cameras into our mobile phones (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011).

Indeed, the practice of capturing and sharing photographs is currently no longer related to the home space (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011), as evidenced by the proliferation of photo sharing services and platforms now available. So, domestic photography has lost its strict connection to a personal and private dimension, and it can be defined as all the “photographic activities of ordinary people taken and used for non-professional purposes” (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011:5). On the other hand, commercial pictures can be defined as photographs deliberately taken for commercial purposes (Adegbola, Gearhart, & Skarda-Mitchell, 2018). DMOs produce commercial images for promoting travel destinations and circulate them through leaflets, television commercials, travel brochures, and blogs (Jenkins, 2003). Commercial images are aimed at creating “place-myths” in prospective tourists’ mind (Jenkins, 2003; Urry & Larsen, 2011) and consequently trigger their desire for consumption. Hall (1997) classified this process of propagating attractive images to inspire destination images in individuals as the ‘circle of representation’ (p. 1). A ‘hermeneutic circle’ of representation occurs when tourists and travelers replicate iconic destination images through their own photographs (Butler & Hall, 1998; Jenkins, 2003; Hall, 1997; Urry, 1990).

Regarding the style of the photographs used for commercial purposes, previous studies on brand credibility have proven that the high-level of the image affects customers’ evaluation of the advertised product and purchase intention (Hagtvedt & Patrick 2008; Zhang et al. 2017). Furthermore, colourfulness significantly attracts people’s attention toward ads (Finn, 1988). Consistently, Li and Xie’s (2020) study has shown that high-quality and professionally shot pictures increase user engagement. Following these considerations, it would be possible to assume that commercial pictures may lead to a greater user engagement because of elements such vividness, colourfulness, resolution, and the presence of visual art (Cyr et al. 2009; Hagtvedt & Patrick 2008; Xiao & Ding 2014; Zhang et al. 2016).

Nevertheless, it is important to consider that the source of the post may be a key variable in determining the viewer’s engagement with the post (Li & Xie, 2020). As previously observed, UGC are perceived as unbiased sources of travel information (O’Connor, 2010) and consequently being perceived as more reliable in tourists-to-be’s eyes (Gartner, 1994). With regard to the style of the picture, this may be explained by the DMOs’ tendency of using commercial pictures that have been edited by professionals, resulting in a distortion or exaggeration of the destination image (Crawshaw & Urry, 1997; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015).

Thus, building on this literature, it may be possible to argue that domestic pictures (characterized as informal and spontaneous snapshots) are seen as more trustworthy when posted by micro-influencers while, on the other hand, commercial pictures (intended as photographs taken by professionals) can generate more user engagement when posted by official travel accounts. Therefore, the second hypothesis of the present study is:

H2. Commercial pictures of travel destinations lead to a higher travel intention in users than domestic pictures when they are posted by official travel accounts compared to when they are posted by travel micro-influencers and domestic pictures of travel destinations lead to a higher travel intention in users than commercial pictures when they are posted by travel micro-influencers compared to when they are posted by travel official accounts.

2.6 Perceived Trustworthiness, Perceived Expertise and Perceived Authenticity

Several early studies in marketing and advertising sector have investigated the key elements to enhance the persuasiveness of the communicator's message (Applbaum & Anatol, 1972; Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969; Bowers & Phillips, 1967; McCroskey, 1966; Whitehead, 1968). According to the literature review conducted by Ohanian (1999), the set of dimensions for the measurement of source credibility are: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. As the current study focused on elements of the posts and not on the appearance of the poster, attractiveness was not considered further.

According to the source-credibility model resulting from the study conducted by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953), expertise (*expertness* in the original text) can be defined as "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions" (p. 55). On the other hand, in the words of the authors, trustworthiness is "the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid." Various studies have focused on demonstrating how the costumers' behavior changes depending on the level of the perceived expertise (Crisci & Kassinove, 1973; Maddux & Rogers, 1980; Ross, 1973), while other researchers (Miller & Baseheart, 1969; McGinnies & Ward, 1980; Friedman & Friedman, 1976) have proven the relevance of trustworthiness in determining attitude change.

Building on this literature, it is possible to assume that a different effect may be predicted according to the features of the source of the message. As previously mentioned, micro-influencers are

more easily trusted as perceived as independent sources of information, with no economic interests (Gretzel, 2018). On the other hand, it is important to consider the effect of the perceived expertise that the communicator inspired in the interlocutor (Maddux & Rogers, 1980). As a result, the following hypotheses will be included in the present study:

H3. Travel micro-influencers' posts lead to greater perceived trustworthiness than those posted by travel official account.

H4. Travel official accounts' posts lead to greater perceived expertise than those posted by travel micro-influencers.

Furthermore, a study conducted on Americans' trust in mainstream media (Clemm von Hohenberg & Guess, 2022) found that pre-existing beliefs about a topic can influence how a person assess the credibility of a source of information. By applying this finding to the current study, it is possible to assume that if a person already has positive opinions or information about a certain travel destination, they might be more likely to perceive an Instagram post promoting that destination as credible. This adds interesting considerations in case of users who, for example, already have the intention to visit the destination promoted in a post. Therefore, in order to check such relationship, the following Research question was added to the model:

RQ1: Is prior users' intention to travel a destination positively related to perceived trustworthiness and perceived expertise with regard to the source of the post?

Moreover, with respect to the tourism sector, many studies have proven that viewer's evaluation of informational indicators of the source of information is crucial in online tourism marketing (Elsantil, Eid, & Bedair, 2022). As previously mentioned, tourists look for accurate information in the pre-visit experience, as this calms their travel anxiety. Therefore, travelers' perceived expertise of the source of information may influence travel intention towards a certain destination. On the other hand, low trust levels in the source of information represent the main obstacles in determining travelers' intentions to purchase (Li, Ong, & Ito, 2020). Consumers' confidence in the source of information is therefore essential, as users are more and more critical towards online reviews (Elsantil, Eid, & Bedair, 2022).

Thus, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the visual predictors of visit intention in users, perceived trustworthiness and perceived expertise were included in this study as potential mediators of travel intention in consideration of the source of the post. Therefore, two additional hypotheses were formulated:

H5a. Perceived trustworthiness mediates the effect of the source of the post on travel intention.

H5b. Perceived expertise mediates the effect of the source of the post on travel intention.

Additionally, it was decided to take into consideration a third element: the perception of content authenticity. Previous studies have investigated authenticity not only at an individual level but also in product and service marketing (Beverland, 2005; Beverland, Lindgreen and Vink, 2008; Alexander, 2009; Molleda, 2009; Kadirov, 2010; Kadirov, Varey and Wooliscroft, 2013). Regarding the tourism sector, the concept of authenticity is connected to the “place branding” as a location marketing strategy (Kotler, Heider, & Rein, 1993). Place branding focuses on those characteristics of the place’s identity to the point that “the mere mention of a city name can bring to light an image stored in an individual’s mind” (Petroski, Baptista and Francisco-Maffezzolli, 2013:5). In order to evaluate the role played by perceived authenticity in the prospective traveler’s decision-making process, the present study takes into analysis the following hypothesis:

H6. Perceived authenticity is positively related to users’ travel intention.

2.7 Visual engagement

With regard to the image content in the tourism sector, the key element of influence among prospective tourists is related to the ‘place authenticity’, which can be articulated in various different ways, as being considered a social construct (Hughes, 1995). From a traditional point of view, Hall (1996) identified five key elements that contribute to form individuals’ destination imagery, such as the “official” narrative of a nation (the national literature, the media, and popular culture), the continuity with tradition and origins, the invention of tradition, the foundational myth, and finally the local folks.

From this perspective, “the images held by any individual are influenced by the images circulating in their culture and place-myths are constructed via images of place promotion” (Butler & Hall 1998:121). This definition emphasizes the relevance of cultural symbols in the travelers’ image destination, which is in line with the ‘circle of representation’ theorized by Hall (1997). The study conducted by MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997) in the context of destination image formation, found that familiarity with the landscapes portrayed in the pictures was a key element to determine travelers’ travel intention. Hence, it might be argued that destination images characterized by cultural symbols and landmarks (e.g. the Eiffel Tower, the Egyptian Pyramids, or the Colosseum) may generate greater user engagement.

On the contrary, other studies conducted in the context of brand engagement on social media emphasized the importance of portraying human faces in images to ensure post engagement (Li & Xie, 2020; Rietveld et al., 2020). This is also supported by Cyr et al.’s (2009) findings, by which the presence of human faces enhances the effectiveness of the ads. Furthermore, as proven by Valentini et al.’s (2018) study, direct gaze in pictures have the power to attract people’s attention and posts with direct eye-contact between the subject and the viewer substantially increase purchase intention in users (see also Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).

Given the lack of accord among researchers and the relevance of the topic in digital marketing, part of this study is also aimed to investigate the influence that the visual content can generate on the user’s behavioral travel intention. Thus, in order to better understand which visual content generates greater user engagement in the travel context, two different kinds of content were selected based on the literature framework, coded as cultural landscapes and local folks, to answer the following Research Question:

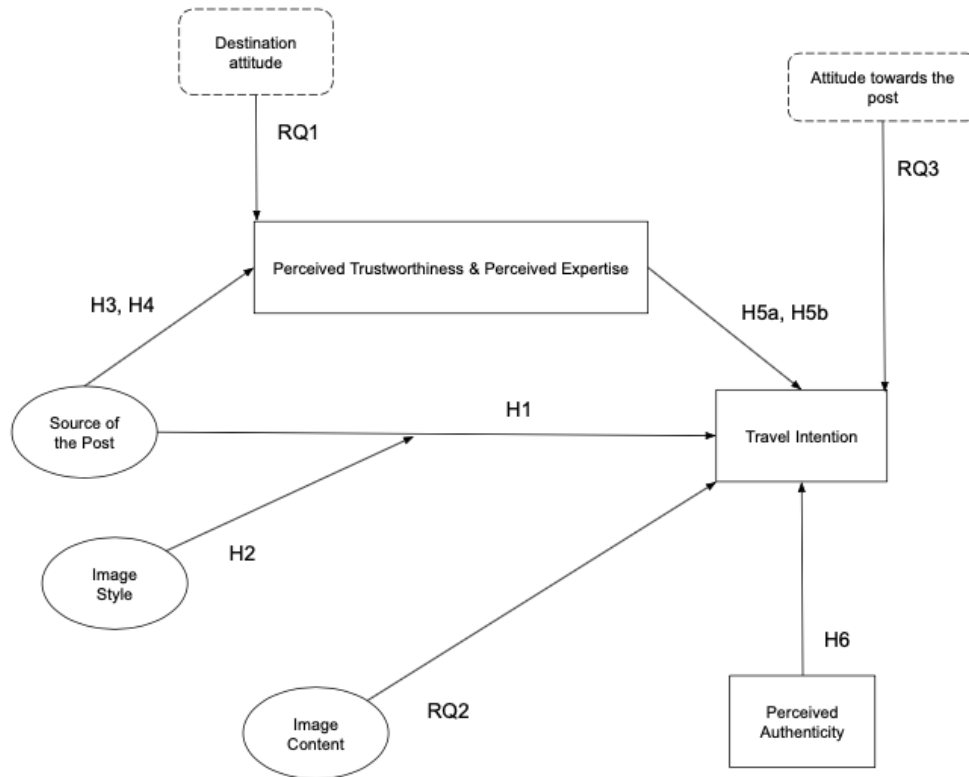
RQ2: Can users’ intention to travel be affected by the image content of a post?

In addition to that, given the subjective appreciation of a picture, attitude towards the post was thought to be positively connected to travel intention, as it is reasonable to assume that the appreciation of an Instagram post might have a positive consequence on users’ reception of the promotional message. In support of this, the study conducted by Deng, Lin and Chen (2021) on the influence of visual appeal of Instagram posts, showed that aesthetic appreciation of a post may generate positive

emotions in the users that could translate to a positive impact on post attitude and behavioral intentions. Another study (Zhu et al., 2023) demonstrated that Instagram posts that evoke strong positive emotions can lead to higher engagement rates and increase the probability of go viral. Next to that, the same study highlighted the significant role played by perceived usefulness in determining travel intention in users. This suggests that if users enjoy an Instagram post and find it interesting and satisfying, they may be more likely to engage with it and consider the travel destination. Therefore, the third and last Research Question included in the tests is:

RQ3: Is attitude towards the post positively related to travel intention?

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



The conceptual model of the present study is here presented. The manipulated independent variables of source of the post, image style and image content are at the bottom right side of the model. As shown, two arrows connect source of the post to two different dependent variables. The first one represents the influence that the poster of an Instagram post may have on respondents' intention to travel (H1). The other one refers to the effect that different travel accounts (official travel account and micro-influencer) may have on respondents' evaluation of the poster in terms of perceived trustworthiness and expertise (H3, H4). Moreover, the model shows the hypothesis about the interaction effect between posters and style of the pictures (commercial and domestic style) on travel intention (H2). H5a and H5b represents the mediating effect that trustworthiness and expertise may have on the relationship between account type and travel intention, while H6 represents the positive relationship between perceived authenticity and travel intention. RQ2 refers to the different effect that

image content (local folks and monuments) may have on viewers’ travel intention. Lastly, destination attitude is linked to perceived trustworthiness as potentially positively related to perceived trustworthiness and expertise (R1), and attitude towards the post is connected to travel intention, indicating the potential positive relationship existing between these variables (RQ3). The three research questions are presented with different shapes as image content was manipulated, while the others were just measured.

Table 1. Hypotheses Overview

Hypotheses	
H1:	Travel micro-influencers’ posts lead to a higher travel intention than those posted by official travel accounts.
H2:	Commercial pictures of travel destinations lead to a higher travel intention in users than domestic pictures when they are posted by official travel accounts compared to when they are posted by travel micro-influencers and domestic pictures of travel destinations lead to a higher travel intention in users than commercial pictures when they are posted by travel micro-influencers compared to when they are posted by official travel accounts
H3:	Travel micro-influencers’ posts lead to greater perceived trustworthiness than those posted by travel accounts.
H4:	Travel official accounts’ posts lead to a greater perceived expertise than those posted by travel micro-influencers.
H5a.	Perceived trustworthiness mediates the effect of the source of the post on travel intention.
H5b:	Perceived expertise mediates the effect of the source of the post on travel intention.
H6:	Perceived authenticity is positively related to users’ travel intention.

3. Method

In the following chapter, the development of the test will be presented. It includes information about the research design, the sample, the stimuli design, the pre-test, the procedure, and the measurements used in the study.

3.1 Research Design

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the visual elements that can prompt travel intention among Instagram users. In order to do that, three elements were manipulated: source, image style and image content of the post. As a result, a 2 (micro-travel influencers and official travel accounts) x 2 (domestic pictures and commercial pictures) x 2 (cultural landscapes and local folks) between-subjects experimental design was performed, to assess a total of eight conditions (Table 2). Each participant was randomly presented one of the conditions and after the stimulus presentation, statements were used to assess the impact of the posts on the viewers.

Table 2. *Distribution of participants stimulus across conditions.*

	Commercial Picture		Domestic Picture		Total
	Cultural Landscape	Local Folks	Cultural Landscape	Local Folks	
Micro-Travel Influencer	29	26	32	35	122
Official Travel Account	35	29	29	34	127
Total	64	55	61	69	249

3.2 Participants

The target population for this study was composed of Dutch and international students enrolled at the University of Twente. The actual distribution of the survey occurred through popular applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram using the snowball sampling method.

A total of 401 respondents took part in the experiment, of which 46 were removed from the final dataset as considered potential bots (identified by inappropriate comments and poor anti-fraud detection scores) or because of a suspicious overall duration (45 surveys completed in less than 2 min and 30 seconds were removed). Plus, 23 participants withdrew from the experiment before the exposure to the manipulations, therefore they were discarded from the study. After filtering out Italian participants (38) to ensure the impartiality of the answers, 249 respondents remained (N=249).

The final sample consisted of 158 respondents who identified as females, 86 as males, 1 as Other and 4 preferred not to say. As expected, the largest group of participants was Dutch (24.5%), followed by German (7.6%) and Chinese (6%) participants. Regarding the age distribution, the majority of the participants were between 25 and 34 years old (56.5%), followed by participants between 18 and 24 years old (27.4%). Substantially fewer participants declared an age between 35 and 44 years old (9.3%) and between 45 and 54 years old (4.8%). Only 1.6% of participants belonged to the 55-64 years old age-group, and only 1 participant was 65 or older. 105 participants defined themselves as students. However, the majority of the sample claimed some sort of occupation (either full-time, part-time or self-employment) and only 3 participants indicated to be currently unemployed. Furthermore, the educational level of the present sample resulted to be quite high, as 44.2% said to have completed a Bachelor's Degree (e.g. BA, BSc, BAS), while 34.5% a Master's Degree (e.g. MA, MSc, Med), and 2.4% assert to have a Doctorate (e.g. PhD, EdD).

Moreover, with reference to their travel habits, the largest group of participants (44.6%) stated to travel abroad 2-3 times throughout the year, while the second largest group (36.9%) does it once per year. Fewer respondents affirmed to travel abroad more often (8%), 4-6 times per year, or considerably more often (3.6%), 7 or more times per year. Lastly, 6.8% stated to never travel abroad.

In addition, the information related to their Instagram usage were summarized as follows: 88.8% of the participants declared to have an Instagram account, and of these, the largest group said to use it very often (46.2%) or often (29.4%), while 19% stated to use it sometimes and 5.4% rarely. Correspondingly, the largest group of respondents affirmed that they would be somewhat likely (36.1%) or likely (22.5%) to use Instagram as a source of travel information. On the other hand, 15.3% of respondents expressed neutrality, while the rest stated that it would be unlikely (14.9%) or somewhat unlikely (11.2%).

3.3 Stimuli Design

The stimuli design required a careful selection of pictures portraying a particular touristic destination. Because of the Italian nationality of the author, Italy was selected as the travel destination to promote in the posts, to ensure control over the cultural elements shown in the pictures and reducing the chance of misinterpretation.

The sets of pictures used in the experiment and in the pre-tests were retrieved from various websites and blogs (e.g., unsplash.com, Pinterest, and top-travel.com) which allow free license and use of the images. The selection of pictures focused on elements such as composition, subjects, and overall clarity. The selection process is below reported.

Besides the overall quality of the pictures, it was essential to select pictures which would not mislead participants; the photographs needed to be not only credible regarding the aspect of the style, but also easily recognizable by foreigners. Furthermore, it was important to choose pictures that did not include elements that could represent potential triggers (e.g., alcohol) or misdirect viewers' attention (e.g., nudity).

Special attention was given to the content of the photographs, due to the specific design of the experiment. Indeed, part of the present study focuses on two specific categories of image content: local folks and cultural landscapes. With regards to the category of local folks, pictures about anonymous groups of people were discarded, because of the absence of cultural elements that could lead to identify them as "local". Thus, photographs of people wearing particular clothes or uniforms were preferred. In the final batch of pictures used in the experiment, this category was represented by images of gondoliers (i.e., the sailors who propel the Venetian boats) recognizable by their typical black-and-white striped t-shirts and straw hats. Regarding the other image content, called cultural landscapes, pictures of the basilica of Santa Maria della Salute were chosen.

Image style was a particular point of interest in the search of visual materials, as commercial pictures needed to be credible as such. For instance, the image of the cathedral selected for the domestic style category was taken from the opposite quay across the Grand Canal, a public place that tourists can easily access and take pictures from. In the case of the commercial style, instead, the chosen picture was taken from above, from an angle that only helicopters or drones could use to take pictures from. In addition, also colors differed significantly. The commercial picture presented the cathedral and the water of the canal in vivid colors, while the domestic picture showed dull, plain colors.

3.3.1. Pre-test

Prior to the performance of the actual test, a preliminary test was conducted among a total of 6 students enrolled at University of Twente, through interviews both in person and on Skype. During the interviews, participants were asked to indicate the first Italian monument they think about in relation to Italy, resulting in a clear preference for the Colosseum in Rome as architectural attraction.

In the second part of the pre-test, students were briefly informed about the differences between domestic and commercial pictures and afterwards were asked to sort out 6 pictures as commercial or domestic pictures and to justify their choices based on elements such as brightness, composition, saturation, etc.

After replacing the first batch of images used for the local folks' category, which were mistakenly identified as commercial pictures by 2 participants, all participants demonstrated being able to successfully distinguish commercial pictures from domestic pictures among the ones shown them. In addition, it was decided to use pictures taken in Venice for the new set of local folks' pictures, in order to have an easily recognizable background without the inclusion of any particular architectural monuments in the frame. The participants involved in the pre-test were not included in the actual test.

3.4 Stimulus Materials

The final images were then converted into eight different Instagram posts by using [zeroob.com](https://www.zeroob.com), as shown in figure 2. The resulting images were shown randomly to the participants during the test, after that the quality of the images was enhanced through an online image upscaler software (<https://www.upscale.media>). With regard to the source of the visual content, four posts were related to a fictitious travel influencer (@lindaroberts), while the rest was published by a fictitious travel Instagram account (@discoveritaly) both dedicated to promoting Italy as a travel destination. Furthermore, the visual content was manipulated by both the style (domestic picture vs. commercial picture) and the subject of the image (categorized as cultural landscapes and local folks) in order to evaluate whether this could influence travel intention levels in users.

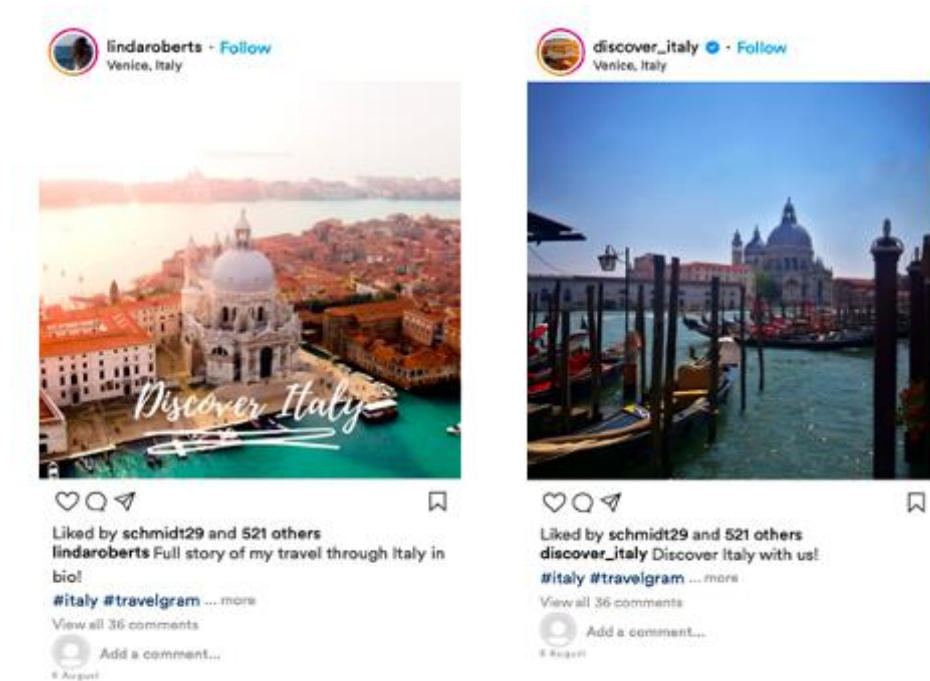
The posts were manipulated only with regards to the image, the caption, and the account name; the number of likes, comments, and the geo tags were the same for each post. To test to what extent the features of the post (source, visual content, and image style) can influence users' judgement, in the

experiment were used also posts with mixed elements; in this way, part of the participants was asked to evaluate domestic pictures (pictures taken by non-professionals) posted by the travel account and commercial pictures (pictures deliberately taken with commercial purposes) posted by the travel influencers (Figure 3). The full list of the images used in this experiment can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 2. A micro-influencer-posted picture of a cultural landscape in a domestic style (left), and a post by an official travel account of a cultural landscape in a commercial style (right).



Figure 3. A micro-influencer-posted picture of a cultural landscape in a commercial style (left), and a post by an official travel account of a cultural landscape in a domestic style (right).



3.5 Procedure

Data were collected through an online experiment over a period of approximately four weeks, that occurred between the end of April and the end of May 2023. The posts and the survey were provided via Qualtrics, an online survey program, and the analysis of the data was performed through the IBM SPSS® software platform.

After the formal request for informed consent, participants were introduced to a briefing section where they were asked to forget about any possible travel restriction due to the SARS Covid-19 pandemic for the length of the test and to imagine being able to travel freely. The first part of the survey focused on collecting the demographic data of each participant, such as age, gender, nationality, occupation, employment status, and highest completed level of education. Subsequently, the travel behaviors of each participant were assessed through items as “Regardless of the recent pandemic, how often do you usually go abroad for leisure throughout a year?” and “In case you have to plan a trip, where do you usually collect the travel information from?”. Later, participants were asked to evaluate their willingness to visit a set of 6 destinations (Croatia, Italy, Morocco, Ireland, Spain, and Denmark)

in the next two years on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Unlikely) to 5 (Likely). This variable was named “destination attitude”

Afterwards, three items were dedicated to measure the participant’s usage of Instagram: “Do you have an Instagram account?”, “How often do you use Instagram?”, and “How likely are you to use travel information you retrieved from platforms like Instagram?”

Subsequently, participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions under examination in this study. The image was presented with the invitation to look carefully at the Instagram post and with indication that the rest of the survey would be unblocked after a 10-second timer to ensure they spent a fair amount of time on the stimulus. Afterwards, participants were provided with the statements aimed to measure the effect that the visual content had on them.

In the final section of the survey, participants were asked to answer “yes”, “no”, or “I don’t know” to the manipulation checks added to the survey to ensure that the three conditions have been perceived as intended. After the data collection, therefore, a chi-square test was run on each item to verify the relationship between the manipulation seen during the experiment and participation’s interpretation, based on the last three questions of the survey.

3.6 Manipulation checks

The test performed over the manipulation related to the source of the post item (“The Instagram user who posted the image previously shown is a Travel Influencer”), revealed a significance level less than 5% ($\chi^2=24.76$, $df=2$, $p < .001$), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables. Moreover, in order to assess the strength of this association, Cramer’s V was checked as well, resulting in a medium-to-large effect ($V=.31$). Nevertheless, as shown in table 3, the largest portion of participants did give a neutral answer to this question. This suggests that a high number of respondents who was shown a micro-influencer’s post (75 out of 122 respondents) struggled with the correct identification of the stimulus seeing during the experiment as such. Therefore, participants struggled in correctly identifying the stimuli based on this question.

Table 3. Manipulation checks crosstabulation of Source of the post

		The Instagram user who posted the image previously shown is a Travel Influencer			Total
		Yes	No	I don't know	
Source of the post	Micro-influencer	37	10	75	122
	Official account	34	42	50	126
Total		71	52	125	248

Note: ($\chi^2=24.76$, $df=2$, $p < .001^{***}$, $V=.31$)

The same analysis was conducted on the other 2 items. The chi-square test on the item related to the Image Style manipulation (“The post previously shown is related to commercial interests”) did not lead to a significant p value ($\chi^2=3.74$, $df=2$, $p = .153$, $V = .12$). By taking a look at the distribution of answers among participants (table 4), it is possible to confirm that a large portion of respondents was not able to correctly identify the style of the picture shown based on the questions.

Table 4. Manipulation checks crosstabulation of Image Style

		The post previously shown is related to commercial interests			Total
		Yes	No	I don't know	
Image Style	Commercial picture	53	29	49	129
	Domestic picture	62	18	38	118
Total		115	47	85	247

Note: ($\chi^2=3.74$, $df=2$, $p = .153$, $V = .12$)

On the other hand, the test performed on the item that represented the image content manipulation (“The post previously shown portrays the picture of an historical monument”) showed a significant relationship between the actual stimulus and participant’s interpretation of the stimulus ($\chi^2=78.55$, $df=2$, $p < .001$). Cramer’s V was checked, resulting in a large effect for image content ($V = .56$). Therefore, there is a strong association between the stimulus shown in the experiment and the manipulation check about the image content category included in the survey. Participants were then

able to easily recognize the content category presented in the post. This is also corroborated by the distribution analysis reported in table 5.

The interpretation of the outcome of the manipulation checks was based on the criteria reported in Pallant (2010:220). The full summary of the manipulation checks used in the present experiment can be found in Appendix B, table B6.

Table 5. Manipulation checks crosstabulation of Image Content

		The post previously shown portrays the picture of an historical monument			Total
		Yes	No	I don't know	
Image Content	Local Folks	23	63	37	123
	Cultural Landscape	85	8	32	125
Total		108	71	69	248

Note: ($\chi^2=78.55$, $df=2$, $p < .001$, $V=.56$)

3.7 Measures

In the following section, the measurements used in the experiment are listed according to the chronological order of presentation to participants. To see the entire scales, consult Appendix B.

Firstly, travel intention was assessed through a scale based on Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal's (1991). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale, with a total of 5 items, such as: "I would spend money to visit this destination" and "If I had the opportunity to travel, the chance of visiting this destination would be high".

Perceived authenticity was measured by using and adapting 2 items ("The post shows the past" and "The post shows a reproduction of the original location") from Ramkissoon & Uysal's scale (2010) and 3 items ("The post shows an original Italian location", "The place portrayed in the post is authentic", and "The post shows a traditional Italian symbol") from the scale proposed by Botelho Maciel, Francisco-Maffezzolli, & Martins (2018).

Regarding perceived trustworthiness and perceived expertise, both variables were evaluated on a scale elaborated by Ohanian (1990). The participants were asked to assess their level of agreement based on a Likert scale scoring from 1 (Disagree) to 5 (Agree) regarding both perceived trustworthiness ("The person who posted this is... dependable, honest, reliable, sincere, and trustworthy") and

perceived expertise (“The person who posted this is... expert, experienced, knowledgeable, qualified, and skilled”).

Afterwards, attitude towards the post was measured through a 5-point Likert scale adapted from the one used by Chen, Shang, and Li (2014). In total, 6 items were used, and an example of the statements used to assess participants’ attitudes towards the post is: “I appreciate the content of this post”, and “I would like to see more posts like this”.

Finally, in order to assess participants’ familiarity with the destination promoted in the post, they were asked to indicate approximately how many times they have visited Italy, based on a range of four options: never, once, more than once, and regularly.

3.7.1 Factor Analysis and Reliability Tests

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed on travel intention, perceived trustworthiness, perceived expertise, perceived authenticity, and attitude towards the post to assess the validity of the scales measured in the present study. Both the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (.91) and the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity’s ($\chi^2 325 df = 4487.71, p < .00$) results were considered tenable. The analysis of the principal components showed the presence of 5 components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, each one explaining 37%, 10.4%, 7.7%, 5.5% and 4.6% of the total variance. Therefore, 5 factors were extracted with Varimax rotation. As shown in table 6, trustworthiness 1 loaded high on both Component 2 and Component 4. However, it was decided to keep it in the scale. Also perceived authenticity 2, which showed a negative value (-.45), was kept in the scale. Conversely, perceived authenticity 5 was excluded from the subsequent reliability test as its value was below .4. Besides trustworthiness 1 and perceived authenticity 5, the rest of the items loaded high on 1 component without overlapping between the scales. Afterwards, a reliability test was performed on each scale.

The reliability tests performed on travel intention, perceived trustworthiness, perceived expertise, and attitude towards the post scales showed Chronbach’s alpha values ranged between .90 and .91, therefore the scales were considered internally consistent and retained for further analysis. However, the test ran on the perceived authenticity scale showed a quite low alpha value (.46). A second reliability test was executed, by removing the item “The post shows the past” as suggested by the computation of the Item-Total Statistics test, resulting in a Chronbach’s alpha of .62. Ideally, Chronbach’s alpha coefficients should score .70 or above, while the reliability of a scale of .60 is questionable, according to DeVellis (2003). This might occur for a number of reasons, such as the presence of a low number of items in the scale or a poor relationship between the items of the scale

(Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Nevertheless, no further items were removed from the scale, as the reliability of the scale could not be improved by removing other items. To check the summary of final scales and relative alphas, please refer to the table below reported.

Table 6. Rotated Component Matrix of the Factor Analysis performed.

Scales	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Travel Intention ($\alpha = .90$)					
1. I would consider this destination for my next trip.			.84		
2. I would like to get more information about this destination.			.74		
3. I would spend money to visit this destination.			.83		
4. If I had the opportunity to travel, the chance of visiting this destination would be high.			.79		
5. I would prefer to visit this destination as opposed to other similar destinations.			.66		
Perceived Authenticity ($\alpha = .62$)					
1. The post shows an original Italian location.					.68
2. The post shows the past*.					-.45
3. The place portrayed in the post is authentic.					.63
4. The post shows a traditional Italian symbol.					.64
5. The post shows a reproduction of the original Italian location*.					
P. Trustworthiness ($\alpha = .90$)					
<i>"The person who posted this is..."</i>					
1. Dependable		.42		.48	
2. Honest				.79	
3. Reliable				.76	
4. Sincere				.78	
5. Trustworthy				.76	
P. Expertise ($\alpha = .90$)					
<i>"The person who posted this is (an)..."</i>					
1. Expert		.78			
2. Experienced		.76			
3. Knowledgeable		.79			
4. Qualified		.83			
5. Skilled		.77			
Attitude towards the post ($\alpha = .91$)					
1. I think that the content of this post is interesting.		.78			
2. I would like to see more posts like this.		.76			
3. I think that the content of this post is enjoyable.		.77			
4. I appreciate the content of this post.		.75			
5. Through this Instagram page, I can get interesting travel information.		.69			
6. Through this Instagram page, I can learn about the destination's culture and way of life.		.65			

*Note(s): Principal component analyses with varimax rotation, absolute value set at .4. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure is .91 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant (χ^2 325 df = 4487.71, $p < .00$). Chronbach's alpha values are reported in bold next to the name of scale. The items marked with an * were not included in the following data analysis.*

3.8 Data analysis plan

The present data analysis was conducted by using the IBM SPSS® software platform. Firstly, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed, in order to explore the strength and direction of the existing relationship among all the variables investigated in the present study, thus source of the post, image style, image content and travel intention, perceived trustworthiness, perceived expertise, perceived authenticity, destination attitude and attitude towards the post. A Pearson correlation ranges between -1 and 1 (Pallant, 2010). The interpretation of the outcome was based on Cohen's convention (1988), according to which a correlation value between .10 and .29 is small, and from .30 to .49 is considered moderate. Strong correlation values score between .50 and 1. Any correlation between .00 to .09 is instead considered negligible. In particular, this analysis was used to test the relationship between perceived authenticity and travel intention, as formulated in H6. The analysis provided answers to RQ1 and RQ3 as well.

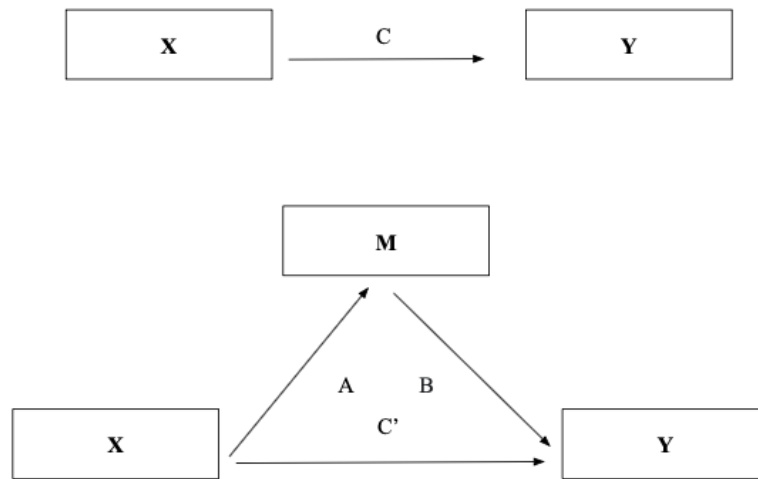
Second of all, a two-way between-groups Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed to test the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4, in addition to RQ2. More specifically, the MANOVA was run with the aim of investigating the effect of three independent variables (source of the post, image style, image content) on participants' travel intention, perceived trustworthiness, and perceived expertise.

In consideration of the results of the Pearson correlation analysis regards RQ1 and RQ3, extra analyses were run, whose results were then compared with the outcome of the main MANOVA. Therefore, two additional MANCOVAs were performed to account for potential influences of post and destination attitudes on the current study's result. As explained in Pallant (2010:297), MANCOVAs allow to determine differences between groups while statistically controlling for one additional variable (called covariate), which is thought to be a potential element of influence in participants' responses. The first MANCOVA was conducted by taking attitude towards the post as covariate. Afterwards, the same analysis was run by using destination attitude as covariate.

Finally, to provide an answer to the hypotheses formulated about a potential mediation between source of the post and travel intention through perceived trustworthiness (H5a) and perceived expertise (H5b), Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach was followed. This method consists of 4 steps, and it analyzes the potential relationship existing between an independent variable (X), a dependent variable (Y), and a mediator (M). The first step is performed through a simple bivariate regression, aimed to test the total effect, here assumed in the model as path C. The result of the subsequent bivariate regression

analysis tests the effect of X on M (path A). Afterwards, a multiple regression analysis identifies the relationship of M with Y (path B) and the direct effect of X on Y through the mediation of M. In order to facilitate the comprehension of the model, the figure reported below can be used as a reference.

Figure 4. *Baron and Kenny's model for Mediation Analysis (1986)*



5. Results

In this section, the results of the experiment are reported. Firstly, the outcome of the correlation analysis will be summarized. Afterwards, the results of MANOVA will be enunciated, followed by the insights provided by the additional MANCOVAs ran. Lastly, the results of the mediation analyses performed will be reported.

5.1 Correlation analysis of variables

In order to explore the existing relationships between variables, a correlation analysis was performed. The test did reveal the presence of correlations, some of which reached statistical significance. The results of the analysis are summarized in table 7.

Table 7. *Pearson correlations of the variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Travel Intention									
2. P. Trustworthiness	.33**								
3. P. Expertise	.32**	.45**							
4. P. Authenticity	.11	.46**	.31**						
5. Source of the post	.06	.02	.16*	.07					
6. Image Style	.13*	-.04	.02	-.08	.05				
7. Image Content	.16*	-.05	.05	-.14*	<.01	.07			
8. Attitude towards the post	.58**	.56**	.50**	.40**	.01	-.04	.12*		
9. Destination attitude	.33**	.00	-.04	-.01	<.01	.09	.08	.16**	

Note: N=249, **p < .01, *p < .05

In the case of travel intention, the analysis showed moderate correlation with respect to perceived trustworthiness ($r = .33$), expertise ($r = .32$), and destination attitude ($r = .33$), while smaller significant correlation values were detected regarding image style ($r = .13$) and image content ($r = .16$). Interestingly, perceived expertise showed to be moderately correlated with perceived trustworthiness ($r = .45$). Plus, a small correlation was detected between participants' perception of expertise and the type of account saw during the experiment ($r = .16$).

Moreover, perceived authenticity showed moderate positive correlations regarding both perceived trustworthiness ($r = .46$) and perceived expertise ($r = .31$). A negative, small correlation value, instead, was shown between perceived authenticity and image content ($r = -.14$). This indicates that the two variables moved in opposite directions, as posts portraying local folks were associated with a lower perception of authenticity in respondents. Finally, no significant correlation was shown between perceived authenticity and travel intention ($r = .11$). The results of the Pearson correlation analysis, therefore, failed to provide enough evidence to reject H_0 , as people's intention to visit the destination promoted was not related to their perception of authenticity. Therefore, H_6 must be rejected.

Regarding attitude towards the post, strong correlations were showed about perceived trustworthiness ($r = .56$) and perceived expertise ($r = .50$). The test revealed a moderate correlation between attitude towards the post and perceived authenticity ($r = .40$) as well. Additionally, the attitude towards the post was positively correlated with destination attitude ($r = .16$) and with the image content they were exposed to ($r = .12$). Overall, participants' general appreciation of a post promoting Italy is positively associated with their initial desire to visit Italy, and with the perception of authenticity transmitted by the content of the post. Their positive attitude towards the post is reflected in their

evaluation of the source of the post in terms of trustworthiness and expertise. Above all, the test revealed that participants' attitude towards the post was strongly, positively related to their intention to visit the destination promoted ($r = .58$). The test did therefore provide a positive answer to the RQ3 of the present study.

Besides the small correlation with attitude towards the post previously reported, destination attitude was found to be positively and moderately related to travel intention ($r = .33$). The correlation analysis did not highlight any significant correlation between destination attitude and perceived trustworthiness, nor perceived expertise. This provides an answer to the RQ1 of the present study, as participants' evaluation of the source the post in terms of trustworthiness or expertise seems to not be related at all to their initial will to travel to Italy. In order to further explore the role of destination attitude and attitude towards the post in this study, extra analyses were run along the main analysis, which results are reported in the next subchapters.

5.2 Results of MANOVA and MANCOVA, with Attitude towards the post as Covariate

In order to test the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 of the present study, the effect of source of the post, image style, and image content on participants' travel intention, perceived trustworthiness, and perceived expertise were analyzed through a two-way between-groups Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). Results were subsequently compared with the MANCOVA outcome, to check the effect that attitude towards the post had on the main analysis. A summary of the resulting comparison between tests can be found in Appendix C, table C2.

The Box's test of equality of variance showed a significance value of .409, therefore no violation of the assumptions occurred ($M = 45.35$, $F(42, 88005.88) = 1.03$) and the Levene's test of equality of error variances showed p-values greater than .05 for each dependent variables, so it was possible to assume equal variances across groups (Pallant, 2010:294).

As the preliminary tests did not show any violation of the requirements, Wilk's Lambda test was performed. Image content showed a significant value ($\Lambda = .96$, $F(3,237) = 2.96$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.03$, $p = .033$). In addition, the interaction effect between image content and image style reached significant levels as well ($\Lambda = .96$, $F(3,237) = 2.75$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.03$, $p = .043$). Source of the post did not lead to significant differences in travel intention, perceived trustworthiness, or perceived expertise ($\Lambda = .97$, $F(3,237) = 2.410$, $p = .068$). The test did not show significant differences on image style either ($\Lambda = .98$,

$F(3,237) = 1.62, p = .184$). On the other hand, while controlling for attitude towards the post, significant differences were found in source of the post ($\Lambda = .96, F(3,236) = 2.73, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.03, p = .045$). Furthermore, the MANCOVA showed an interaction effect between source of the post and image style ($\Lambda = .96, F(3,236) = 2.80, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.03, p = .041$). Attitude towards the post showed statistical significance as well ($\Lambda = .46, F(3,236) = 90.44, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.53, p < .001$), with an effect size of .53 according to the partial eta squared value, which is considered a large effect. Afterwards, the following ANOVAs were conducted. Descriptive statistics of MANOVA and outcome of both MANOVA and MANCOVA can be consulted in Appendix C, table C1 and C2.

The results of the ANOVAs indicated no significant differences between groups for source of the post in travel intention ($F(1, 246) = 0.56, p = .454$). According to this analysis, participants' intention to travel did not depend on the type of account they were shown during the experiment. Thus, the test did not provide enough evidence to support hypothesis H1.

Source of the post did not lead to a significant main effect on perceived trustworthiness either ($F(1, 246) = 0.05, p = .821$). The test showed that the source of the travel post did not impact participants' perception of trustworthiness in a significant way and therefore H3 must be rejected.

However, the type of account that posted the travel post did significantly affect participants' perception of expertise ($F(1, 246) = 6.25, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.02, p = .013$). According to the comparison of means, official travel account's post prompted more perceived expertise in participants ($M=3.26, SD=0.83$) than micro-travel influencer's post did ($M=3.01, SD=0.77$). Therefore, the MANOVA did provide enough evidence in support of H4.

With the inclusion of attitude towards the post in the model, the analysis did show again significant difference in groups in relation to source of the post on perceived expertise ($F(1,246) = 7.54, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.03, p = .006$) and the comparison of means showed that participants' perception of expertise was higher when an official travel account's post was shown than when they saw a micro-influencer's post. A summary of the results can be found in table 8.

Table 8. *Tests in Between-Subjects effects for Source of the post*

		MANOVA			MANCOVA		
Dependent Variable		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Source of the post	Travel Intention	0.56	.454	<0.01	0.58	.446	<0.01
	Trustworthiness	0.05	.821	0.00	0.01	.902	0.00
	Expertise	6.26	.013	0.02	7.54	.006	0.03

Notes: df1(1), df2(246) in both analyses.

Regarding the independent variable of image style, no significant main effect was revealed on the dependent variables investigated. Thus, when compared to pictures with a domestic style, commercial image styles did not lead to greater perceptions of expertise or trustworthiness or to an increased intention to travel to the destination pictured.

By taking into account the impact of participants' attitude towards the post, instead, style of the picture revealed to affect participants' travel intention, as shown in table 9. In particular, the analysis of means showed that participants were more prompted to travel after seeing domestic pictures ($M= 3.40$, $SD= 1.00$) than after seeing commercial pictures ($M= 3.14$, $SD= 1.09$).

Table 9. *Tests in Between-Subjects effects for Image Style*

		MANOVA			MANCOVA		
Dependent Variable		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Image Style	Travel Intention	2.87	.091	0.01	7.31	.007	0.03
	Trustworthiness	0.55	.457	<0.01	0.07	.785	0.00
	Expertise	<0.01	.979	0.00	0.29	.590	<0.01

Notes: df1(1), df2(246) in both analyses.

The ANOVAs performed did not show a significant effect of image content on perceived trustworthiness ($F(1, 246) = 0.43$, $p = .512$), nor on perceived expertise ($F(1, 246) = 0.62$, $p = .430$). A significant main effect was detected in travel intention ($F(1, 246) = 5.88$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$, $p = .016$).

This means that participants' intention to travel varied based on the content of the post they were shown.

In this case, descriptive statistics showed that when the participants saw the content categorized as local folks, the measurement of their travel intention was higher ($M=3.43$, $SD=0.98$) than when the post presented was about monuments ($M=3.09$, $SD=1.09$). Therefore, the tests conducted provided an answer to the second RQ of the present study, as the experiment demonstrated a substantial difference on participants' post engagement based on the content viewed during the experiment. More specifically, respondents were more inclined to visit the destination pictured after the exposure to the category of local folks than after seeing posts portraying the cultural landscapes category.

When attitude towards the post was included in the model, the test showed a significant impact of image content as well, this time in relation to respondents' perceived trustworthiness ($F(1,246) = 5.13$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$, $p = .024$). In comparison to when the pictures shown portrayed folks ($M= 3.18$, $SD= 0.83$), higher levels of trust were found among the participants who saw pictures of monuments ($M= 3.25$, $SD= 0.80$). A summary of the results of the tests are reported in table 10.

Table 10. *Tests in Between-Subjects effects for Image Content*

		MANOVA			MANCOVA		
	Dependent Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Image Content	Travel Intention	5.88	.016	0.02	2.13	.145	<0.01
	Trustworthiness	0.43	.512	<0.01	5.24	.023	0.02
	Expertise	0.62	.430	<0.01	0.08	.775	0.00

Notes: $df1(1)$, $df2(246)$ in both analyses.

Most of all, the MANCOVA showed that attitude towards the post did reach statistical significance not only about travel intention ($F(1,246) = 111.03$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.33$, $p <.001$), but also with regard to perceived trustworthiness ($F(1,246) = 124.83$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.34$, $p <.001$) and perceived expertise ($F(1,246) = 72.88$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.24$, $p <.001$), with an overall large effect size across all dependent variables (figure 11). This suggests that participants' travel intention towards the destination and perception of trustworthiness and expertise were strongly related to their appreciation of the whole post.

Table 11. *Tests in Between-Subjects effects for Attitude towards the post (MANCOVA)*

	Dependent Variable	<i>df1, df2</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Attitude towards the post	Travel Intention	1, 246	111.03	<.001	0.33
	Trustworthiness	1, 246	124.83	<.001	0.34
	Expertise	1, 246	72.88	<.001	0.24

Contrary to H2, the interaction effect of source of the post and image style on travel intention was not significant ($F(1, 246) = 0.56, p = .454$). Viewers' travel intention towards the destination was not influenced by the type of account and the style of the picture in a significant way. Therefore, H2 must be rejected, as the experiment did not provide enough evidence to confirm the expected outcome. The summary of the findings regarding the interaction effect between source of the post and image style can be found in table 12.

Despite the lack of evidence in support of H2, the experiment did reveal the presence of significant interaction effects across source of the post and image style on perceived trustworthiness ($F(1, 246) = 6.37, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.02, p = .012$).

Table 12. *Tests in Between-Subjects effects for Source of the post and Image Style*

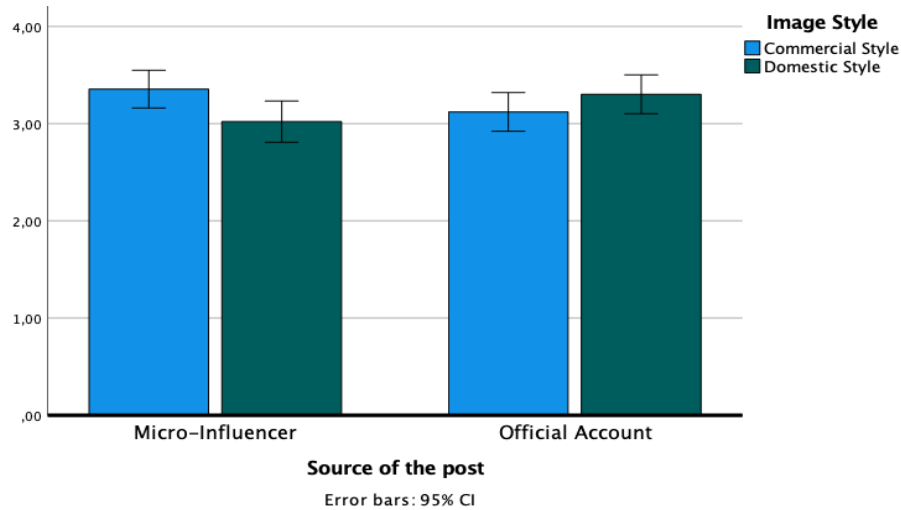
		MANOVA			MANCOVA		
	Dependent Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Source*Style	Travel Intention	0.03	.858	0.00	<0.01	.972	0.00
	Trustworthiness	6.37	.012	0.02	8.06	.005	0.03
	Expertise	1.59	.209	<0.01	1.54	.215	<0.01

Notes: $df1(1), df2(246)$ in both analyses.

In order to further investigate such interaction, the means comparison outcome is reported in figure 5. Micro-influencer's post in commercial style had a significant higher effect on participants' perception of trustworthiness ($M = 3.35, SD = 0.65$) than when the same micro-influencer posted a picture in domestic style. Interestingly, micro-influencer's post in domestic style led to the lowest overall level of perceived trustworthiness in participants ($M = 3.02, SD = 0.78$). On the other hand, pictures in domestic style posted by official travel account led to more perceived trustworthiness ($M =$

3.31, $SD= 0.82$) than when a picture with commercial style was posted by official accounts ($M= 3.15$, $SD= 0.96$).

Figure 5. Average levels of Trustworthiness dependent on Source of the post and Image Style



The interaction effect between type of the account and style of the picture on trustworthiness reached statistical significance also in the MANCOVA test ($F (1,246) = 9.80$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.04$, $p = .002$). Besides a slightly higher effect of a micro-influencer’s post on trustworthiness ($M= 3.03$, $SD= 0.78$) when attitude towards the post was included in the model, the mean comparison did not highlight any difference with the previous graph.

Additionally, a significant interaction effect was shown between image style and image content in participants’ perceived trustworthiness ($F (1, 246) = 7.10$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.03$, $p = .008$). Moreover, the combination of style and content of the post had a significant effect with regard to perceived expertise as well ($F (1, 246) = 4.10$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$, $p = .030$). Such interactions did not reach statistical significance in the MANCOVA. A summary of the outcome of the tests can be found in table 13.

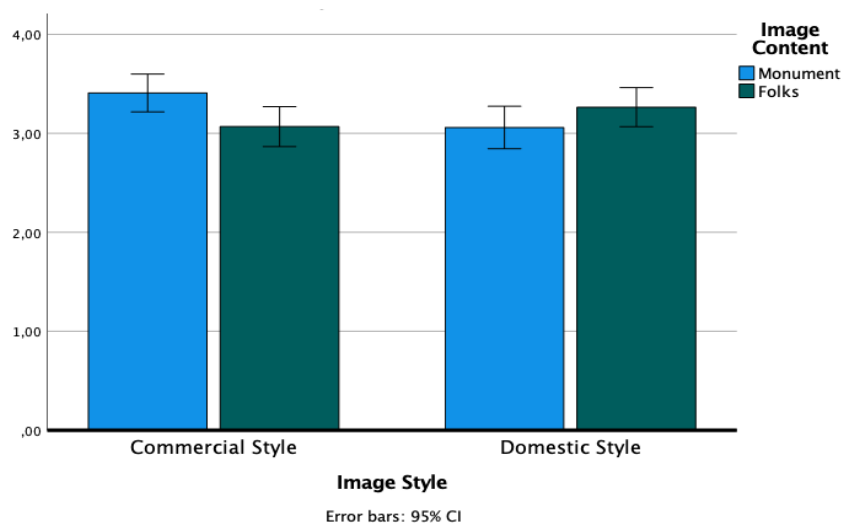
Table 13. Tests in Between-Subjects effects for Image Style and Image Content

		MANOVA			MANCOVA		
Dependent Variable		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Style*Content	Travel	1.46	.228	<0.01	0.01	.909	0.00
	Intention						
	Trustworthiness	7.10	.008	0.03	3.53	.061	0.01
	Expertise	4.76	.030	0.02	1.96	.163	<0.01

Notes: df1(1), df2(246) in both analyses.

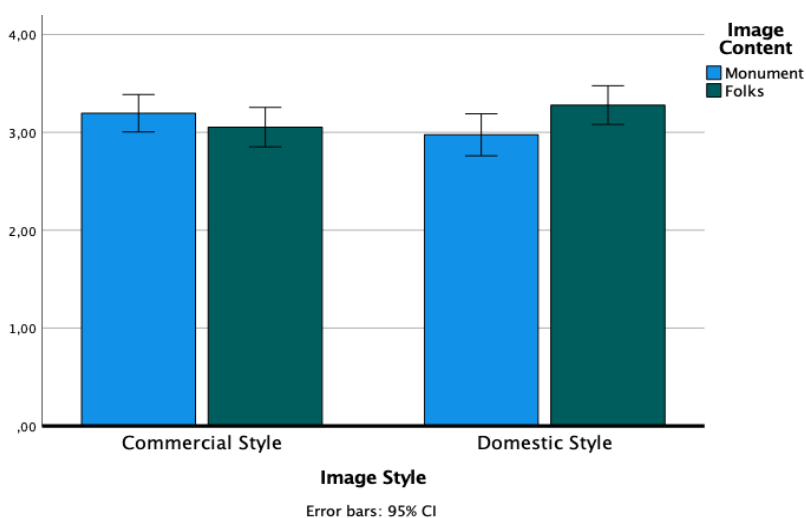
As shown in table 13, two of the three dependent variables were significantly influenced by the style and the content of the post seen during the experiment. Through the analysis of the means on trustworthiness, it is possible to see in detail the differences among conditions (figure 6). Overall, posts portraying pictures of a monument in commercial style inspired the highest levels of trustworthiness in participants ($M= 3.41, SD= 0.84$). Surprisingly, posts of folks in domestic style followed very closely ($M= 3.27, SD= 0.89$). Thereafter, posts of folks in commercial style ($M= 3.08, SD= 0.78$) differed very little from the posts of monuments in domestic style, whose effect on participants' perceived trustworthiness was the lowest ($M= 3.06, SD= 0.72$). Based on these mean values, commercial style pictures were perceived as more trustworthy when they showed monuments. Domestic style pictures, instead, were more trustworthy when they showed folks.

Figure 6. Average levels of Trustworthiness dependent on Image Style and Image Content



Regarding the interaction effect detected between image style and image content on expertise, the analysis of means (figure 7) showed that, overall, posts of folks produced the highest effect ($M= 3.30, SD= 0.77$) on participants when posted in domestic style. Interestingly, posts of monuments in the same style generated the lowest effect ($M= 2.98, SD= 0.75$). Looking at the commercial style posts, instead, the graph showed the opposite situation. Posts of monuments generated a slightly higher impact on participants' perceived expertise ($M= 3.19, SD= 0.86$) than the ones portraying folks ($M= 3.05, SD= 0.82$).

Figure 7. Average levels of Expertise dependent on Image Style and Image Content



While no interaction effect between image style and image content was shown while controlling for attitude towards the post, the test highlighted a significant interaction effect between source and image content of the post on perceived trustworthiness ($F(1,246) = 6.56$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.03, p = .011$) that was missing in the previous analysis (table 14).

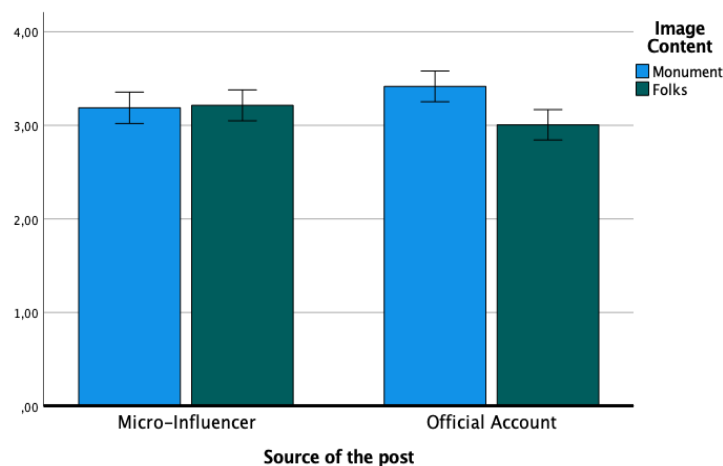
Table 14. Tests in Between-Subjects effects for Source of the post and Image Content

		MANOVA			MANCOVA		
Source*Content	Dependent Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
	Travel	0.25	.619	<0.01	<0.01	.962	0.00
	Intention						
	Trustworthiness	2.55	.112	0.02	6.84	.009	0.03
	Expertise	0.16	.690	<0.01	<0.01	.964	0.00

Notes: df1(1), df2(246) in both analyses.

As shown in the bar graph (figure 8), there was a substantial difference between image content categories when posted by an official travel account when the attitude towards the post was relatively high. More specifically, pictures of monuments ($M= 3.34, SD= 0.85$) were more trustworthy than pictures of folks ($M= 3.12, SD= 0.93$), which showed the lowest mean score in the comparison. Almost no difference was detected, instead, between the two content categories when the source of the post was a micro-influencer, as pictures of folks ($M= 3.24, SD= 0.72$) and pictures of monuments ($M= 3.17, SD= 0.74$) showed to differ very little in means.

Figure 8. Average levels of trustworthiness dependent on Source of the post and Image Content (Mancova)



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Attitude towards the post = 3.22
Error bars: 95% CI

5.3.1 Destination Attitude as Covariate

Before reporting the final hypothesis testings, the results of an extra Multivariate Analysis of Covariance with destination attitude as covariate are here summarized. The additional test aimed at further investigate the existing relationship between participants' intention to travel to Italy prior to the exposure to the travel post in relation to their following perception of trustworthiness and expertise about the poster.

Before running the test, 38 participants who stated to frequently visit the destination promoted in the post were removed from the sample. These participants were ruled out from the analysis based on the assumption that a person who often travels to a certain country has most likely a strong pre-formed opinion about that destination or on how that destination should be promoted. Such opinion, which is built through his or her personal experience and relationship with the travel destination, was thought to have a strong influence on participants' answers in the survey, therefore they were excluded from the following analysis as it focused right on the viewers' attitude towards the destination promoted in the experiment. With the aim to ensure a reliable comparison between tests, an extra MANOVA was performed, without the same participants who stated to often travel to Italy. The two results can be compared in Appendix C, table C4.

Sample size and Levene's test ensured that no violation of the assumptions of equal sample and equal variance occurred. Box's test showed no violation regarding the assumption of equal variance either ($M = 47.53$, $F(42, 55177.53) = 1.07$, $p = .344$). Afterwards, Wilk's Lambda test was performed, and it revealed that destination attitude was significant ($\Lambda = .84$, $F(3,200) = 12.20$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.15$, $p < .001$). The subsequent ANOVAs showed that destination attitude was significantly related to travel intention only ($F(1, 206) = 30.27$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.13$, $p < .001$), while no significant relation was found about perceived trustworthiness or perceived expertise, as shown in table 15. Therefore, the outcome of the experiment was not affected by participants' previous intention to visit Italy.

Table 14. *Tests in Between-Subjects effects for Image Style and Image Content*

	Dependent Variable	<i>df1, df2</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Destination attitude	Travel Intention	1, 206	30.27	<.001	0.13
	Trustworthiness	1, 206	0.09	.77	0.00
	Expertise	1, 206	0.02	.88	0.00

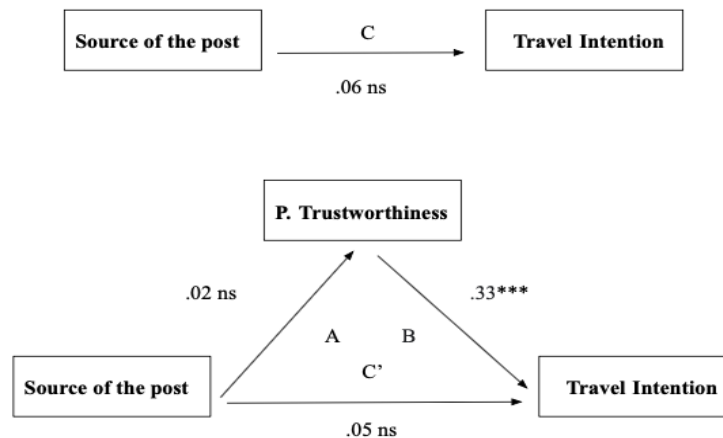
5.4. Perceived Trustworthiness as Mediator.

To test H5a and H5b, multiple linear regression analyses were conducted. In order to perform such mediation analyses, Baron and Kenny's approach was followed. The first linear regression analysis focused on perceived trustworthiness, as stated in H5a. Thus, the test was conducted by considering source of the post as the independent variable (X), travel intention as the dependent (Y), and trustworthiness as the mediator (M).

The test did not show a significant total effect between source of the post and participants' intention to travel ($\beta = .06, p = .330$). No significant causal relationship was revealed between source of the post and perceived trustworthiness either ($\beta = .02, p = .735$). However, trustworthiness was positively, moderately, significantly related to travel intention ($\beta = .33, p < .001$) but no significant value was found regarding the direct effect between source and travel intention through the mediation of trustworthiness ($\beta = .05, p = .405$). As a result, no mediation occurred, as the source of the post did not affect participants' will to travel without taking trustworthiness into account. The relationship that trustworthiness had on intention to travel is not related to the source of the post. A summary of the findings can be found at figure 9.

Finally, Sobel's test (1982) was performed as final step based on the also known delta method, through the standard error of A (S_a) and the standard error of B (S_b). In this case, the test showed no significant value ($z = .342, p = .732$). The analyses conducted failed to provide enough evidence to support H5a, therefore it is possible to conclude that perceived trustworthiness did not mediate the effect of source of the post on participants' travel intention.

Figure 9. *Paths overview*



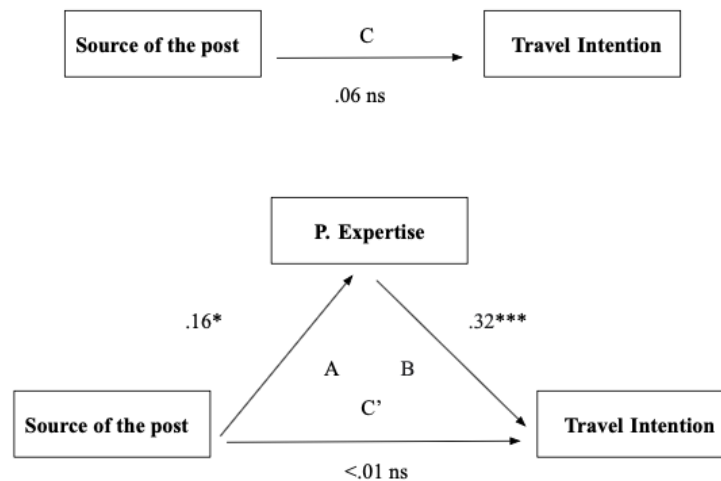
Note: Standardized regression coefficients, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, ns not significant.

5.4.1 Perceived Expertise as Mediator.

The second linear regression analysis investigated the mediating effect of perceived expertise (M) on the relationship between source of the post (X) and travel intention (Y), in order to test H5b. Results demonstrated that while the total effect was not significant ($\beta=.06, p = .330$), the effect of source of the post on expertise ($\beta=.16, p = .012$) and the relationship between expertise and intention to travel ($\beta=.32, p < .001$) were significant. The direct effect of perceived expertise as mediator was not significant ($\beta < .01, p = .949$).

In conclusion, A and B were met in the model and the calculation of Sobel's value did show the presence of a significant indirect effect on the relationship between expertise and travel intention ($z=2.28, p = .022$), whose significant unstandardized point was estimated at .108 (A*B). However, such indirect effect cannot be explained by a mediational relationship among the variables. Even though source of the post did have an influence on determining participants' perception of expertise and despite the existence of a positive relationship between expertise and travel intention, no mediation occurred among these elements. Therefore, H5b must be rejected.

Figure 10. Paths overview



Note: Standardized regression coefficients, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, ns not significant

Table 13. Hypotheses Overview and Results

Hypotheses	Results
H1: Travel micro-influencers' posts lead to a higher travel intention than those posted by official travel accounts.	Rejected.
H2: Commercial pictures of travel destinations lead to a higher travel intention in users than domestic pictures when they are posted by official travel accounts compared to when they are posted by travel micro-influencers and Domestic pictures of travel destinations lead to a higher travel intention in users than commercial pictures when they are posted by travel micro-influencers compared to when they are posted by official travel accounts.	Rejected
H3: Travel micro-influencers' posts lead to greater perceived trustworthiness than those posted by travel accounts.	Rejected.
H4: Travel official accounts' posts lead to a greater perceived expertise than those posted by travel micro-influencers.	Supported.
H5a. Perceived trustworthiness mediates the effect of the source of the post on travel intention.	Rejected.
H5b: Perceived expertise mediates the effect of the source of the post on travel intention.	Rejected.
H6: Perceived authenticity is positively related to users' travel intention.	Rejected

6. Discussion

As shown in the hypotheses overview, the general outcome of the experiment did not provide enough evidence, with the only exception of H4, to support the hypotheses initially formulated. Nevertheless, the results offer an interesting opportunity for general considerations, whose details will be extensively discussed in this section.

6.1 Discussion of the findings

The objective of the present study was to provide an assessment of the influence that an Instagram post had on prospective customers' visit intentions, specifically about the source, the image style, and the image content showed in the post. The experiment was carried out through the evaluation of 8 fictitious posts advertising Italy as a travel destination randomly distributed among participants.

Despite of the absence of a substantial difference between micro-travel influencers and official travel accounts in stimulating participants' intention to visit, suggesting a reduction of the direct influence that the source of travel information may have on user's behavioral intention, official source of travel information (@discoveritaly) inspired the most sense of expertise on participants than when the post was associated to a micro-influencer (@lindaroberts). This is in line with the assumption formulated in the literature framework, according to which users may find official travel accounts more knowledgeable compared to micro-influencers because of the sense of authority that these accounts transmit. On the other hand, and in contrast with the prior assumption, travel information posted by a micro-influencer or a DMO did not affect respondents' levels of trust. This leads to interesting considerations with regard to the factors that may contribute on determining people's desire to travel a destination promoted on Instagram.

As seen, perceived expertise and trustworthiness do influence travel intention. However, besides a small indirect effect on expertise, neither trustworthiness nor expertise did mediate the impact of source of the post on respondents' travel intention. It is safe to claim that the type of account does have an indirect effect on how people assess such account in terms of expertise and that, therefore, it does indirectly influence travel intention. However, it is important to highlight that such influence cannot be exclusively linked back to the source of the post. Consequently, other variables mediate or moderate the relationship between the degrees of expertise or trustworthiness that people attribute to the source of the post and their intention to visit the destination promoted by such source.

In order to gain a better overview of the phenomenon, it is important to take into account the rest of the results provided by the present research. For example, RQ3 was based on the assumption that people's perception of the poster as a skilled and trustworthy source of information might be positively related to their prior will to travel the destination, here categorized as "destination attitude". No evidence was provided in support of such assumption or about any relation among these variables, so this excludes destination attitude as a possible mediator or moderator for both trustworthiness and expertise. Despite participants' perception of authenticity of the advertised travel destination was moderately connected to the trust and competence inspired by the poster, perceived authenticity as conceptualized in this study was not positively related to intention to travel. In other words, users' intention to visit Italy was not related to their evaluation of the post in terms of authenticity.

Regarding the categories of content used in the experiment, some relevant differences arise. On a general level, image content played a significant role in influencing both respondents' travel intention and perceived trustworthiness. Focusing on the latter, when the official travel account's posts were about the content categorizes as "monument", they were perceived as more trustworthy. This seems to suggest a slightly different mechanism about the so called "circle of representation" conceptualized by Hall (1997). In Hall's essay, tourists' travel behavior is greatly impacted by the circulation of pictures of travel landmarks, which create "place-myths" in people's mind. According to earlier research, the use of "place-myths" in destination marketing campaigns increases intention to visit (Hall, 1997; Butler & Hall, 1998; Urry & Larsen, 2011), as the familiarity with the landscape greatly influences prospective travelers' desire to visit such destination (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). Instead, the present study showed that the use of cultural landscapes may positively affect viewers' trust in the source of travel information, especially when the source is characterized by some degrees of expertise, as in the case of official travel accounts.

This finding suggests a different conceptualization of the mechanisms that operate on perceived trustworthiness and expertise in destination marketing compared to what initially theorized in this study. In consideration of the different effects that official travel accounts and micro-influencers was thought to generate on users, the initial assumption was that the account type produced different effects with regard to trustworthiness and expertise. Although, the experiment indicates that these two factors move towards the same direction, in line with the model elaborated by Ohanian (1999). In other words, an Instagram travel account promoting a destination marketing campaign, whether this an official source of information or a micro-influencer, should aimed at being perceived both trustworthy and competent in order to result credible and therefore potentially influence users' intention to visit. This

means that people's perception of a travel source of information as trustworthy influences sense of expertise and vice versa. Thus, a low perception of trust may negatively influence the perception of expertise, and, high levels of trust in the source of the information may enhance sense of authority.

Nevertheless, this does not entirely explain the relationship between travel intention and the credibility model. A possible explanation may reside in the role played by perceived authenticity as moderator or mediator of travel intention. As explained in the literature framework, the perception of authenticity may positively impact users' attitude and behavioral intentions (Kadirov, 2010; Kadirov, Varey & Wooliscroft, 2013). Plus, a more recent study by Shang and Luo (2021) identifies a potential connection between destination source credibility and endorser credibility, meaning that, through the Trust Transfer Theory (Strub & Priest, 1976), the endorser credibility perceived by users might be transferred to the destination itself, positively influencing what the authors call place attachment. Place attachment is conceptualized as the bond between the tourist and the travel destination. A positive impact on place attachment might then enhance travel intention. More recently, studies in the destination marketing highlight that authenticity can increase the effectiveness of destination marketing campaigns, resulting in forming a positive attitude toward the image formed of the destination advertised (Ong, Sun, Ito, 2022). Regarding the influence of attitude towards the destination and travel photographs, Stepchenkova and Kim's study (2015) revealed the relevance in destination choice what the authors called manifest and latent content attached to the destination image in viewer's mind, where manifest content was described as the group of tangible signs in the picture (e.g. natural landscapes or buildings), while latent content, on the other hand, alluded to the group of attributes that is not depicted in the picture (e.g. impression of an unsafe destination). Therefore, recent studies in the tourism sector suggest that also the tourist' destination image might influence the credibility of the source. Such influence was not measured in the current study. However, the destination image and attitude might realistically moderate or mediate the effect of perceived trustworthiness and perceived expertise on travel intention, and therefore needs to be further investigated in the future.

Continuing with the discussion of the findings, as mentioned before, image content may positively influence users' travel intention. More specifically, content categorized as "local folks" prompted a higher intention to visit than those featuring monuments. A possible explanation might be provided, once again, by Hall's study (1996) on the factors that attracts tourists towards a certain destination. In his research, as mentioned in the literature framework, the author identified five key elements that might contribute to form the destination image held by tourists when deciding where to travel, among which there are the images of the local folks, suggesting a fascination for authentic

experiences of the travel destination. Although, as shown by the results of the experiment, participants' assessment of authenticity significantly decreased when they were presented with a post portraying folks. Therefore, this indicates that the effect of the local folks category on users' intention to travel does not relate to the sense of authenticity inspired by the image, as it might be linked to the presence of human faces. Indeed, several studies in digital marketing have indeed proven presence of human faces in ads generate greater emotional appeal on viewers, stimulating more positive reactions, reception, and therefore higher intention to purchase (Cyr et al., 2009, Li & Xie, 2020). Furthermore, according to Valentini et al. (2018), the presence of people in advertisement increases trust in customers. This is in line with the findings of this study, as trust in the source of travel information may contribute positively to enhance perception expertise and consequently travel intention.

In consideration of the style of the image, no significant impact was produced on respondents' desire to visit Italy unless considering their attitude towards the post. In that case, domestic images increased travel intention compared to commercial images. Nevertheless, this study showed that the style of the picture in relation to the type of account or content may produce different effects on users in terms of trustworthiness and expertise. Micro-influencer's posts in commercial style were perceived as considerably more trustworthy than when in domestic style. This confirms the assumption that style of the pictures may increase users' perceived trustworthiness in the source of the post. Also, commercial style appeared to increase trustworthiness in users when associated with a picture of monuments. Vice versa, domestic style pictures showed higher levels of perceived expertise in users when portraying people. This seems in line with Shang and Luo's (2021) findings, according to which the credibility of the visual content, such as pictures in commercial or domestic style, can influence the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of viewers toward the endorsed objects. This suggests that if a destination is perceived as authentic and coherent with the source of travel information, it could enhance the credibility of the destination in the eyes of potential tourists.

6.2 Practical and theoretical implications

The experiment designed for this study did provide additional knowledge to the application of ELM to travel visual communication on Instagram. The Elaboration Likelihood Model proposes two

routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route¹. The central route involves thoughtful consideration of the arguments presented in a post, while the peripheral route involves other cues outside the message itself, as the credibility of the source (Ohanian, 1996). The two elements of the source credibility here examined were perceived trustworthiness and perceived expertise and both showed to significantly affect people's intention to travel, as expected. Nevertheless, the initial assumption by which the poster might produce different effect on trustworthiness and expertise were not supported by the findings. Instead, the two elements mutually affect each other and their interplay influences user attitudes and behaviors.

Furthermore, other variables might be involved, as perceived authenticity. The role played by perceived authenticity in the study remains unclear. Although, the insights provided by the previous literature suggest a positive relationship between perception of authentic content and sense of trust and competence inspired by the source of the information. As the conceptualization of the authenticity scale raises doubts about its correct formulation, further research is recommended.

Additionally, image content significantly influences travel intention in users. This leads to remarkable considerations for destination marketing studies, as different content categories may increase travel intention and trust in the source of the information. For example, posts portraying human faces enhance users' will to visit the destination promoted because it generates positive emotions in the viewers through an emotional appeal, which is generally associated with the peripheral route.

Nevertheless, the relevance of both routes is clear in the context of tourism marketing, probably due to the intrinsic characteristics of uncertainty of salient information (e.g. budget, time, comfort) retrieved through a digital platform, and the need for accurate and reliable information that travelers experience in the pre-visit phase of travel planning.

6.3 Limitations and future research suggestions

By considering the design of the study and the results of the tests performed, a number of limitations were identified as points of improvement for future research.

The first observation refers to the reliability of the scale used regarding perceived authenticity. As already mentioned, the reliability of a scale with a Chronbach's alpha less than .70 is questionable. This might happen because of a small number of items scale or because of unclear formulation of the statements included in the scale. In this specific case, two different scales were adapted to fit the investigation of the present study. More specifically, 2 items ("The post shows the past" and "The post shows a reproduction of the original location") were inspired by Ramkissoon & Uysal's scale (2010) and 3 items ("The post shows an original Italian location", "The place portrayed in the post is authentic", and "The post shows a traditional Italian symbol") by the scale elaborated by Botelho Maciel, Francisco-Maffezzolli, & Martins (2018). When validity of the scale was tested, only 3 items were then included in the main analysis ("The post shows an original Italian location", "The place portrayed in the post is authentic", and "The post shows a traditional Italian symbol"). Therefore, two out of three items referred to the *post*, instead of the *place* promoted. This formulation might have produced a confusing effect on the interpretation of the results. To avoid this limitation in the future, it is recommended to limit the number of scales adopted for the formulation of perceived authenticity scale, as the adoption of multiple scales might affect the precision of the final conceptualization, and to be sure that the questions in the survey refer to one specific element only.

The second limitation regards the negative results of the manipulation check about source of the post and image style. As shown in table 3 and 4 (p. 25-26), large portions of participants struggled in successfully associating the stimuli shown with the relative manipulation check included in the survey. This limitation might be related to an unclear or inaccurate formulation of the manipulation checks. For example, the manipulation check regarding image style referred to "commercial interests", while future researchers should provide a clear definition of commercial pictures in order to facilitate participants' interpretation of the style analysed. The same limitation might be true for source of the post, as the relative manipulation check referred to a "travel influencer". The omission of the word "micro" might have generated confusion in participants.

As said, a possible point of expansion for academic research in the future concerns the role interplayed by perceived trustworthiness, expertise and authenticity in shaping users' desire to travel. Specifically, perceived authenticity should be tested as a potential mediator or moderator of effect of the source credibility model on travel intention, as the findings of this study were in contrast with the influence attributed to perceived authenticity by previous studies, and this might be connected to limitation of the scale previously mentioned. Moreover, future researchers might considerate to include an extra scale dedicated to assess participants' attitude towards the destination and destination image,

as these factors may considerably affect the impact of the visual content, as suggested by recent studies on the credibility model.

The country where this study was carried out may be an important aspect in consideration of the topic of the study. This study took place in the Netherlands and a large number of respondents were Dutch. Given that visual communication may differ from culture to culture, doing this research in another country might lead to different outcomes.

Next to that, it would be interesting to use a different travel destination. Italy is a Southern European country, relatively easy to reach from the Netherlands, and among the most common destinations for medium-short stays. New considerations may arise when promoting a less advertised or more distant country, such as the budget or time to travel.

Also, it might be interesting to amplify the set of categories used to investigate the effect of image content on travel intention. The present study provided interesting insights regarding the categories of “local folks” and “monuments”. Nevertheless, new content categories might generate different outcomes, such as the category of food. Indeed, gastronomy plays a vital role in advertising tourist destinations (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Therefore, promoting local food products may be a powerful strategy to communicate both authenticity and uniqueness (Hage, 1997) and it might be provide new information regarding the effect on travel destination.

Furthermore, relatively little is known about the impact generated by different types of visual content in the context of social media and destination marketing. For instance, Instagram offer various forms of visual communication (e.g. reels, stories), and the comparison of a travel post with reels or stories promoting a travel destination might lead to new findings in the field.

7. Conclusions

The present study contributed to enrich the theoretical knowledge of travel destination branding and influencer marketing by investigating the relevance of visual communication on Instagram, with regard to the effect of source of the post, image style, and image content generate on travel intention.

The findings emphasized the impact that source of the post might have on prospective tourists who navigate Instagram in stimulating perceived expertise, which consequently might affect perceived

trustworthiness and therefore travel intention. The style of an image doesn't impact travel intention. Nevertheless, when associated with other factors such as image content or source of the post, may influence viewer's perception of trustworthiness or expertise. Moreover, the image content showed by an Instagram post significantly influences travel intention or perceived trustworthiness depending on the category of image posted. As seen, viewer's perception of trustworthiness or expertise do not mediate the relationship between the source of the post and travel intention but do impact viewers' intention to visit the advertised country. This indicates that while trustworthiness and expertise are important factors in influencing travel intention, they do not necessarily link back to the source of the post, and therefore further research needs to be conducted in order to identify the other elements of influence of the credibility model when is about to travel marketing, as tourism is an 'information-intensive industry' (Gretzel et al., 2000) and various variables here omitted might substantially contribute to determine travel intention through trustworthiness and expertise.

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Appendix A.



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Appendix B.

Table B1. Travel intention scale based on Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal's (1991).

Travel intention. In relation to the **destination** previously shown, please indicate your level of agreement on each of the following statements:

	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
I would consider this destination for my next trip.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
I would like to get more information about this destination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
I would spend money to visit this destination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
If I had the opportunity to travel, the chance of visiting this destination would be high.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
I would prefer this destination as opposed to other similar destinations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

Table B2. Place authenticity scale based on Ramkissoon & Uysal's (2010) and Botelho Maciel, Francisco-Maffezzoli, & Martins' (2018) scale.

Perceived authenticity. In relation to the **place** previously shown, please indicate your level of agreement on each of the following statements:

	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
The post shows an original Italian location.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The post shows the past.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The place portrayed in the post is authentic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The post shows a traditional Italian symbol.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The post shows a reproduction of the original Italian location.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Table B3. Ohanian's (1990) trustworthiness and expertise scales.

Perceived Trustworthiness. Please indicate your evaluation of the **poster** previously shown as a source of travel information.

“The person who posted this is...”

	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
Dependable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Honest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Perceived Expertise. Please indicate your evaluation of the **post** previously shown as a source of travel information.

“The person who posted this is...”

	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
Expert	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Experienced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowledgeable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Qualified	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skilled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Table B4. Post attitudes assessment based on Chen, Shang, and Li's (2014) scale.

Attitudes toward the post. Regarding the **post** previously shown, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
Interest I. I think that the content of this post is interesting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Interest II. I would like to see more posts like this.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Enjoyment. I think that the content of this post is enjoyable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Appreciation. I appreciate the content of this post.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Satisfaction I. Through this Instagram page, I can get interesting travel information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Satisfaction II. Through this Instagram page, I can learn about the destination's culture and way of life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

Table B5. Manipulation checks.

	Yes	No	I don't know
The Instagram user who posted the image previously shown is a travel influencer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The post previously shown is related to commercial interests.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The post previously shown portrays the picture of a historical monument.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix C.

Table C1. *Dependent variables' descriptive statistics split by the independent variable (N=249)*

	Source of the post	Image Style	Image Content	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Travel Intention	Micro-influencer	Commercial	Monument	3.0515	1.10141	34
			Folks	3.1625	1.09831	32
			Total	3.1053	1.09285	66
		Domestic	Monument	3.1077	1.07663	26
			Folks	3.5103	0.97187	29
			Total	3.3200	1.03323	55
		Total	Monument	3.0758	1.08188	60
			Folks	3.3279	1.04628	61
			Total	3.2029	1.06717	121
	Travel account	Commercial	Monument	3.0765	1.15681	34
			Folks	3.2897	0.98935	29
			Total	3.1746	1.07972	63
		Domestic	Monument	3.1500	1.08815	28
			Folks	3.7157	0.81896	35
			Total	3.4643	0.98170	63
		Total	Monument	3.1097	1.11777	62
			Folks	3.5227	0.91798	64
			Total	3.3194	1.03798	126
	Total	Commercial	Monument	3.0640	1.12106	68
			Folks	3.2230	1.04122	61
			Total	3.1391	1.08277	129
Domestic		Monument	3.1296	1.07258	54	
		Folks	3.6227	0.89015	64	
		Total	3.3970	1.00431	118	
Total		Monument	3.0930	1.09585	122	
		Folks	3.4276	0.98356	125	
		Total	3.2623	1.05186	247	
Trustworthiness	Micro-influencer	Commercial	Monument	3.3676	0.68045	34
			Folks	3.3438	0.64053	32
			Total	3.3561	0.65642	66
		Domestic	Monument	2.9135	0.76466	26
			Folks	3.1293	0.80073	29
			Total	3.0273	0.78421	55
		Total	Monument	3.1708	0.74716	60
			Folks	3.2418	0.72308	61
			Total	3.2066	0.73291	121
	Travel account	Commercial	Monument	3.4485	0.98045	34
			Folks	2.7931	0.82123	29
			Total	3.1468	0.96160	63
		Domestic	Monument	3.2054	0.65987	28
			Folks	3.4000	0.93581	35
			Total	3.3135	0.82424	63
		Total	Monument	3.3387	0.85303	62
			Folks	3.1250	0.93010	64
			Total	3.2302	0.89588	126
	Total	Commercial	Monument	3.4081	0.83856	68
			Folks	3.0820	0.77691	61
			Total	3.2539	0.82324	129
Domestic		Monument	3.0648	0.72063	54	

			Folks	3.2773	0.88092	64
			Total	3.1801	0.81511	118
		Total	Monument	3.2561	0.80383	122
			Folks	3.1820	0.83423	125
			Total	3.2186	0.81853	247
Expertise	Micro-influencer	Commercial	Monument	3.1412	0.76043	34
			Folks	2.9812	0.78922	32
			Total	3.0636	0.77273	66
		Domestic	Monument	2.8154	0.82156	26
			Folks	3.0552	0.70284	29
			Total	2.9418	0.76369	55
		Total	Monument	3.0000	0.79745	60
			Folks	3.0164	0.74413	61
			Total	3.0083	0.76785	121
	Travel account	Commercial	Monument	3.2500	0.95608	34
			Folks	3.1259	0.87143	29
			Total	3.1929	0.91289	63
		Domestic	Monument	3.1357	0.65332	28
			Folks	3.5029	0.77059	35
			Total	3.3397	0.73847	63
		Total	Monument	3.1984	0.82868	62
			Folks	3.3320	0.83292	64
			Total	3.2663	0.83022	126
	Total	Commercial	Monument	3.1956	0.85909	68
			Folks	3.0500	0.82553	61
			Total	3.1267	0.84326	129
		Domestic	Monument	2.9815	0.74961	54
			Folks	3.3000	0.76842	64
			Total	3.1542	0.77323	118
		Total	Monument	3.1008	0.81621	122
			Folks	3.1780	0.80343	125
			Total	3.1399	0.80904	247

Table C2. Comparison of the Tests in Between-Subjects effects of the MANOVA (left) and the MANCOVA (right) with Attitude towards the post as Covariate.

	Dependent Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared		Dependent Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial Eta Squared
Source of the post	Travel Intention	0.56	.454	0.05	Source of the post	Travel Intention	0.58	.446	<0.01
	Trustworthiness	0.05	.821	0.94		Trustworthiness	0.01	.902	0.00
	Expertise	6.26	.013	<0.01		Expertise	7.54	.006	0.03
Image Style	Travel Intention	2.87	.091	0.00	Image Style	Travel Intention	7.31	.007	0.03
	Trustworthiness	0.55	.457	0.02		Trustworthiness	0.07	.785	0.00
	Expertise	<0.01	.979	0.01		Expertise	0.29	.590	<0.01
Image Content	Travel Intention	5.88	.016	<0.01	Image Content	Travel Intention	2.13	.145	<0.01
	Trustworthiness	0.43	.512	0.00		Trustworthiness	5.24	.023	0.02
	Expertise	0.62	.430	0.02		Expertise	0.08	.775	0.00
Source*Image Style	Travel Intention	0.03	.858	<0.01	Source*Image Style	Travel Intention	<0.01	.972	0.00
	Trustworthiness	6.37	.012	<0.01		Trustworthiness	8.06	.005	0.03
	Expertise	1.59	.209	0.00		Expertise	1.54	.215	<0.01
Image Style*Image Content	Travel Intention	1.46	.228	0.02	Image Style*Image Content	Travel Intention	0.01	.909	0.00
	Trustworthiness	7.10	.008	<0.01		Trustworthiness	3.53	.061	0.01
	Expertise	4.76	.030	<0.01		Expertise	1.96	.163	<0.01
Source*Image Content	Travel Intention	0.25	.619	<0.03	Source*Image Content	Travel Intention	<0.01	.962	0.00
	Trustworthiness	2.55	.112	0.02		Trustworthiness	6.84	.009	0.03
	Expertise	0.16	.690	<0.01		Expertise	<0.01	.964	0.00

Note: (df1=1, df2=246) in both cases.

Table C3. *Dependent variables descriptive statistics' table split by independent variable (N=196) - Destination attitude as Covariate*

	Source of the post	Image Style	Image Content	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Travel Intention	Micro-influencer	Commercial	Monument	3.3261	1.14812	24
			Folks	2.8229	1.02164	26
			Total	3.0691	1.07738	50
		Domestic	Monument	3.1848	1.00930	18
			Folks	3.5357	1.00850	19
			Total	3.3775	0.99802	37
		Total	Monument	3.2554	1.07899	42
			Folks	3.2067	1.00504	45
			Total	3.2296	1.03914	87
	Travel account	Commercial	Monument	3.3245	1.07982	23
			Folks	3.1250	1.08053	24
			Total	3.2216	1.07307	47
		Domestic	Monument	3.1463	1.15953	23
			Folks	3.3404	0.78047	28
			Total	3.2500	1.03285	51
		Total	Monument	3.2415	1.10808	46
			Folks	3.2294	0.97060	52
			Total	3.2351	1.06236	98
Total	Commercial	Monument	3.2083	1.10344	47	
		Folks	3.0231	1.03982	50	
		Total	3.1120	1.07005	97	
	Domestic	Monument	2.9556	1.08421	41	
		Folks	2.9789	0.90281	47	
		Total	2.9676	1.01873	88	
	Total	Monument	3.1000	1.08869	88	
		Folks	3.0044	0.98942	97	
		Total	3.0506	1.04980	185	
Trustworthiness	Micro-influencer	Commercial	Monument	3.0391	0.59654	24
			Folks	3.2104	0.67482	26
			Total	3.1266	0.63328	50
		Domestic	Monument	3.1913	0.60718	18
			Folks	3.5714	0.77986	19
			Total	3.4000	0.69188	37

		Total	Monument	3.1152	0.60438	42
			Folks	3.4048	0.73370	45
			Total	3.2689	0.67066	87
	Travel account	Commercial	Monument	3.1255	0.83064	23
			Folks	3.1130	0.89223	24
			Total	3.1191	0.89032	47
		Domestic	Monument	3.0878	0.60873	23
			Folks	3.3319	0.83808	28
			Total	3.2182	0.75725	51
		Total	Monument	3.1080	0.72359	46
			Folks	3.2191	0.92715	52
			Total	3.1662	0.83394	98
	Total	Commercial	Monument	3.3261	0.71269	47
			Folks	2.8229	0.83184	50
			Total	3.0691	0.77885	97
		Domestic	Monument	3.1848	0.60202	41
			Folks	3.5357	0.84124	47
			Total	3.3775	0.74181	88
		Total	Monument	3.2554	0.66571	88
			Folks	3.2067	0.83905	97
			Total	3.2296	0.75953	185
Expertise	Micro-influencer	Commercial	Monument	3.3245	0.85766	24
			Folks	3.1250	0.85478	26
			Total	3.2216	0.85252	50
		Domestic	Monument	3,1463	0.76560	18
			Folks	3.3404	0.58839	19
			Total	3.2500	0.67084	37
		Total	Monument	3.2415	0.81958	42
			Folks	3.2294	0.74649	45
			Total	3.2351	0.77952	87
	Travel account	Commercial	Monument	3.2083	0.97828	23
			Folks	3.0231	0.92077	24
			Total	3.1120	0.94293	47
		Domestic	Monument	2.9556	0.62807	23
			Folks	2,9789	0.76732	28
			Total	2.9676	0.72664	51
		Total	Monument	3.1000	0.81649	46
			Folks	3.0044	0.85269	52

		Total	3.0506	0.84419	98
Total	Commercial	Monument	3.0391	0.91259	47
		Folks	3.2104	0.88299	50
		Total	3.1266	0.89278	97
	Domestic	Monument	3.1913	0.69289	41
		Folks	3.5714	0.75328	47
		Total	3.4000	0.73195	88
Total	Total	Monument	3.1152	0.81328	88
		Folks	3.4048	0.82580	97
		Total	3.2689	0.81954	185

Table C4. Comparison of the Tests in Between-Subjects effects of the MANOVA (left) and the MANCOVA (right) with Destination attitude as Covariate.

Source	Dependent Variable	F	p	Partial Eta Squared	Source	Dependent Variable	F	p	Partial Eta Squared
Source of the post	Travel Intention	0.78	.377	<0.01	Source of the post	Travel Intention	0.22	.637	<0.01
	Trustworthiness	0.54	.460	<0.01		Trustworthiness	0.13	.719	<0.01
	Expertise	6.09	.014	0.03		Expertise	4.83	.029	0.02
Image Style	Travel Intention	0.89	.347	<0.01	Image Style	Travel Intention	0.55	.459	<0.01
	Trustworthiness	0.39	.531	<0.01		Trustworthiness	0.08	.777	0.00
	Expertise	0.04	.833	0.00		Expertise	0.26	.608	<0.01
Image Content	Travel Intention	4.24	.041	0.02	Image Content	Travel Intention	2.41	.122	0.01
	Trustworthiness	0.36	.549	<0.01		Trustworthiness	0.49	.483	<0.01
	Expertise	1.19	.277	<0.01		Expertise	1.00	.317	<0.01
					Destination Attitude	Travel Intention	30.27	<.001	0,13
						Trustworthiness	0.09	.767	0.00
						Expertise	0.02	.887	0.00

Note: df1=1, df2=206 (left), df1=1, df=208 (right)