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THE IMPACT OF INSTAGRAM TRAVEL INFLUENCERS ON GEN Z'S TOURISM CONSUMPTION

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SANTRAUKA

Tyrimo problema - kaip "Instagram" kelionių nuomonės formuotojai veikia Z kartos atstovų turizmo produktų vartojimą. Darbe keliamos dvi **hipotezės**: "Z kartos atstovų pasitikėjimas Instagram kelionių nuomonės formuotojais kaip patikimu informacijos šaltiniu yra labai svarbus priimant sprendimus dėl kelionių" ir "Instagram kelionių nuomonės formuotojai daro reikšmingą įtaką Z kartos atstovų sprendimų dėl kelionių priėmimo procesui - nuo informuotumo iki galutinio sprendimo pirkti". **Tyrimo tikslas** - įvertinti Instagram kelionių nuomonės formuotojų poveikį Z kartos atstovų turizmo produktų vartojimui. Taikoma **metodika** apima teorinę nuomonės formuotojų marketingo ir Z kartos turizmo suvokimo analizę, kiekybinę apklausą ir kokybinį ekspertų interviu. Tyrime pateikiamos išvalgos apie nuomonės formuotojų marketingo svarbą turizmo įmonėms pritraukiant Z kartos atstovus ir patvirtina abi hipotezes. Tyrimo išvadose pabrėžiama Instagramo kelionių nuomonės formuotojų reikšmė ir jų vaidmuo formuojant Z kartos atstovų turizmo produktų pasirinkimus.

Šis darbas yra empirinio tyrimo baigiamasis magistro darbas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: influenceris, influencerių poveikis Z kartai, influencerių rinkodara, Instagram kelionių influenceriai, turizmas, turizmo rinkodara, Z karta.

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SUMMARY

The **research problem** is how Instagram travel influencers impact Gen Z's tourism consumption. The two **hypotheses** proposed are 'Gen Z's trust in Instagram travel influencers as a reliable source of information is crucial in their travel decision-making process', and 'Instagram travel influencers significantly impact Gen Z's travel decision-making process, from awareness to the final purchase decision'. The **research aims** to evaluate the effects of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. The **methodology** employed includes a theoretical analysis of influencer marketing, Gen Z's perception of influencer marketing and tourism, an online questionnaire for quantitative analysis, and expert interviews for qualitative analysis. The research provides insights into the importance of influencer marketing for tourism enterprises in attracting the Gen Z demographic, supporting both hypotheses. The findings highlight the significance of Instagram travel influencers and their role in shaping Gen Z's travel choices.

This paper is research-oriented final master thesis.

Keywords: Gen Z, influencer effect on Gen Z, influencer marketing, influencer, Instagram travel influencers, tourism marketing, tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Relevance and topicality. In the dynamic and rapidly evolving world of marketing, new trends emerge in response to shifts in consumer behavior and technological advancements. The Web 3.0 revolution has had a profound impact on the field of marketing, leading to a shift away from sales-oriented approaches towards strategies that prioritize the establishment of emotional connections with target audiences. As such, building long-term, emotionally driven relationships with target audiences has become a critical aspect of modern marketing. Influencer marketing serves as a salient example of the effectiveness of this approach.

Brown and Fioerella (2013) posits that consumers are more likely to place trust in the recommendations of third parties as opposed to those of the brand itself. Influencers, particularly those with a large and loyal following, have the potential to drive traffic to a brand's website, increase visibility on social media, and drive sales through product recommendations based on their personal experiences with the brand's offerings (Brown & Fioerella, 2013). Influencer marketing has a long history, with its origins dating back to the 19th century when Nancy Green became the face of Aunt Jemima (Nikolicova, 2018), but its popularity and power have grown dramatically with the rise of social media. One of the key drivers of the efficacy of influencer marketing is the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which refers to the dissemination of opinions or suggestions regarding a brand or product through social media platforms (Akrimi & Khemakhem, 2012). E-WOM enables influencers and brands to gain recognition in the virtual world and spread awareness of the products and services being promoted among the target audience. Through influencer-sponsored content, brands can realize increased sales, heightened brand awareness, and foster a trusted relationship between the influencer and their community.

As indicated by Statista (2023), the global influencer marketing industry has achieved a remarkable value of US\$16.4 billion in 2022, demonstrating a significant increase of over 100% since 2019. Furthermore, it is projected that budgets for influencer marketing will continue to increase in the coming years. The most widely utilized platform for influencer marketing is Instagram (Geysler, 2023). The significance of this platform is highlighted by the fact that it has a user base of 1.07 billion and over 3.8 million brand-sponsored influencer posts in 2021 (Geysler, 2022). The distinct characteristic that sets influencers apart from the general population is their perceived reliability. Consumers have been observed to place greater trust in information and advice obtained from advertisements, as well as those from their immediate circle when making purchasing decisions (Akrimi & Khemakhem, 2012). Hence, social media influencers are viewed as credible sources by their followers due to their authenticity (Arslan & Staub, 2015).

Although influencer marketing initially focused on beauty, fashion, and style, today it is used in almost every field such as travel and tourism. As a service sector, tourism seeks to adapt to changing market conditions due to its dynamic character and develops its distinct marketing approaches. The intangible and complex nature of tourism services makes production and delivery more challenging, leading to an increased demand for information among consumers prior to making a purchase. In recent years, it has been acknowledged that influencer marketing strategies leveraging social media platforms have the potential to shape consumer purchasing decisions (Kunt & Hassan, 2021). This has made influencer marketing a significant tool in the tourism industry. By utilizing influencer marketing, tourism destinations, hospitality industries, events, and festivals aim to attract different types of tourists from diverse markets and shape their perceptions of the destination (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). Because of its significant global size, the online travel business has been quickly developing in recent years. According to Statista Market Forecast (2023), the global online travel market was valued at \$432 billion in 2021. The \$694 billion produced in 2018, which experienced a 10.4% increase over the prior year, indicates a considerable decline from this amount. Despite this, the market for booking travel is still dominated by online travel sales. By 2027, Statista predicts that internet sales will account for 74% of all travel and tourist earnings. In fact, 68% of all sales in the travel and tourism sector were done online in 2022. Overall, these numbers highlight the importance of the online travel market and its growing dominance in the travel industry.

Given the increasing importance of influencer marketing in the tourism industry, it is crucial to understand its impact on different generations. Gen Z is a highly influential and dynamic group that is increasingly shaping the tourism market. Gen Z, which currently makes up 26% of the world's population and comprises almost two billion people globally, has an increasing purchasing power and prefers to use social media as their primary tool for researching shopping options (Cushman & Wakefield, 2020). Due to their unique characteristics, such as their preference for authenticity, personalization, and social responsibility, they are especially receptive to influencer marketing. Gen Z places a significant amount of trust in social media influencers, with 46% of them following over 10 influencers and 52% being highly likely to purchase a product or service recommended by their favorite influencer. Therefore, it is important to explore their perception of influencer marketing and travel and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on them. Additionally, it is worth noting the growing phenomenon of Gen Z's interest in travel, as they represent a new generation of travelers with distinct needs and preferences. Research conducted on Gen Z and their perception of tourism and travel is still in its early stages. As the tourism industry continues to evolve and adapt to changing market conditions, it is important to understand the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's tourism consumption and how it can be leveraged to effectively reach and engage this important demographic.

The research problem addressed in this paper is how Instagram travel influencers impact Gen Z's tourism consumption.

The object of the paper is the influence of Instagram travel influencers on the tourism consumption behavior of Gen Z.

The aim of the paper is after analysing the phenomena of Instagram travel influencer marketing in the case of tourism, to evaluate the effects of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption.

To reach the aim the following **objectives** were set:

1. To analyse concepts of influencer and influencer marketing in the case of the Instagram platform;
2. To examine the theoretical aspects of Gen Z's perception towards travel and tourism, as well as their attitudes towards influencer marketing in the context of tourism;
3. To form a methodology and conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses to determine the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption;
4. To present and discuss the research findings, including the analysis of both secondary data and primary data, and to provide insights into the influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption patterns.

Logic (consistency) of the research: The paper is **structured** into 3 main parts.

The first part, the literature review, focuses on the theoretical analysis of the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. It covers influencer marketing concepts, types, and strategies on Instagram, as well as Gen Z's characteristics, perception of travel and tourism, and the effectiveness of Instagram travel influencer marketing on their consumption.

The second part, the empirical research methodology, outlines the research methodology used to gather and analyse data.

In **the third part**, the research results and discussion present and discuss the findings from the research.

Research methods. To fulfil the objectives of this paper, the author performed analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, questionnaire research, survey data collection, descriptive statistics analysis, and correlation analysis. The study employed a quantitative approach to field research.

Information sources. The sources of information in this research are divided into secondary and primary data. Secondary data analysed includes literature on the influencer, influencer marketing, the perception of Gen Z towards tourism, and the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. Primary data analysed is gathered from collected questionnaire from Gen Zers and expert interviews with tourism and marketing professionals and Instagram travel influencers.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF INSTAGRAM TRAVEL INFLUENCERS ON GEN Z'S TOURISM CONSUMPTION

In recent years, Instagram travel influencers have emerged as a significant force in the tourism industry. With their large social media followings, influencers have the ability to reach a broad audience and influence their followers' travel decisions. Social influence theory provides a useful framework for understanding the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z tourism consumption. According to social influence theory, people's behavior and attitudes are influenced by the social context in which they find themselves (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). In the case of Instagram travel influencers, their social media platforms provide a context in which they can influence their followers' travel decisions.

The theory of planned behavior suggests that an individual's behavior is influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Instagram travel influencers can influence all three of these factors. For example, they can shape their followers' attitudes toward travel destinations by highlighting the unique and attractive aspects of a particular location. They can also create a subjective norm by demonstrating how popular a destination is through the number of likes and comments on their posts. Finally, influencers can increase their followers' perceived behavioral control by providing detailed information on how to plan a trip and what to expect once they arrive at a destination.

Over time, tourism marketers realized the potential provided by travel social media influencers. Instagram travel influencers have emerged as a significant force in the tourism industry, particularly among Gen Z travelers. While positively influencing the target audience is an advantage for companies, the promise of travel and the ability to associate one's personal brand with desired travel and tourism brands make travel and tourism an attractive target industry for influencers (Gretzel, 2018). Today, influencers have a significant presence in the marketing of all tourism sectors such as hotels, events, and destinations (Barbe & Neuburger, 2021). The influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z tourism consumption is undeniable. Through their social media platforms, influencers can influence travelers' decision-making processes by shaping their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. However, it is important to note that the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z tourism consumption is not without its challenges and limitations. Marketers must carefully consider the authenticity and relevance of influencers to their target audience, as well as the potential for oversaturation and the need for diversity in marketing strategies.

1.1. The concept of influencer and influencer marketing in case of Instagram

Influencer marketing is a technique that employs social media and social influencers to achieve an organization’s marketing and business needs (Brown & Fioerella, 2013). Like many concepts used by the marketing industry today, the term influencer was not created by marketing professionals (Vancottem et al., 2021). In every era, people have always been influenced by the people they consider important and their ideas. As can be understood from the origin of the name, influencers are people who have the power to influence people's opinions and whose judgments are trusted. The author defines influencers as individuals who have a wide follower network, have the power to direct their followers to purchase, have knowledge in the field of content production, and are perceived as reliable sources for consumers. Some of the concepts of Influencer Marketing from various scholars are represented in the Table 1 below. Influencer marketing has gained significant attention in recent years, and scholars have attempted to define it from various perspectives. Aslan and Unlu (2016) highlight the importance of providing information to consumers regardless of time and place, which allows for rapid spread and effective communication. In contrast, Chatzigeorgiou (2017) emphasizes the emotional connection that influencer marketing seeks to establish with consumers through the creation of viral content.

Table 1

Definitions of influencer marketing from various scholars

Scholars	Definitions
Aslan & Unlu. (2016)	“Influencer marketing is about providing information regardless of time and place. Therefore, it draws attention with its very rapid spread feature. It is also an element of the process of communicating with the consumer. In a way, it appears in the form of word-of-mouth marketing used in the past, adapted to the virtual world. The difference here is that it is possible to reach thousands of people at once.”
Chatzigeorgiou. (2017)	“Influencer marketing is the creation of viral content in order to create an emotional connection with consumers.”
Canoz et al. (2020)	“Influencer marketing can be expressed as marketing where studies and efforts come together in order to connect and contact and define individuals who have the ability to potentially create an impact.”
Yetimoğlu & Uğurlu. (2020)	“The marketing activities carried out by individuals who are easier to reach the consumer and create an impact are expressed as influencer marketing. Generally, influential people share their own content in influencer marketing on social media such as blogs and YouTube.”

Source: This table was created by the author based on Aslan and Unlu (2016); Chatzigeorgiou (2017); Canoz et al. (2020); Yetimoğlu and Uğurlu (2020).

Canoz et al. (2020) focuses on the importance of studying and identifying individuals who can create an impact, while Yetimoğlu and Uğurlu (2020) highlights the role of influential individuals in sharing their content on social media platforms such as blogs and YouTube. Overall, these perspectives suggest that influencer marketing involves leveraging influential individuals to communicate brand messages and create emotional connections with consumers. This approach is particularly effective in the digital age, where social media allows for the rapid spread of content and the ability to reach a large number of people simultaneously. Although influencer marketing has become an advantageous marketing technique for brands today, the first use of this marketing technique dates back to 1890, by Nancy Green. In 1890, Nancy Green was hired by R.T. Davis Milling Company to be the face of their pancake mix called Aunt Jemima. She represented a popular character, Aunt Jemima from a local minstrel show (Vancottem et al., 2021). This successful, and unique approach was followed by many companies such as Murad Cigarettes using Fatty Arbuckle in 1905, and Coca-Cola using the image of Santa Claus in 1931 in their advertisements (Schiniotakis & Divini, 2020). In a psychological study of American voters in 1940, it was found that media such as newspaper, radio, and campaign advertisements, which we call traditional marketing today, do not influence individual voting habits, on the contrary, most voters give more importance to interpersonal interactions and word of mouth (Lee, 1949). According to Bughin et al. (2010), WOM can be considered as a buying factor behind between 20% to 50% of purchasing decisions. Therefore, opinion leaders have an important impact on the opinions and behaviors of people. The only difference from the classic influencer marketing method is the fact that advertising or promotions take place not with professional production, but with the expression of a famous person him/herself, in the most natural and familiar form. Influencers can reach a large number of people from their social media profiles. In addition to artists, actors, and athletes, who were the first people who came to mind in the concept of a famous person, there are now also YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter influencers. Thus, it is correct to say that the marketing method, referred to as Influencer Marketing, is a concept that has existed for a longer period with the usage of celebrities or opinion leaders.

In addition to all these, with the start of Human Oriented Marketing 3.0 (Kotler et al., 2019), we are in an era where consumers' experiences are at the forefront. Users care about real experiences and take into account the experiences of influencers they feel close to. According to a study conducted by Twitter and Annalect, 40% of the participants state that they buy the products they see in the influencers they follow on social media channels (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Research shows that when someone they trust recommends the brand's product, it can even change the bad perception of that brand. Therefore, influencer marketing becomes a popular technique used by the marketing industry, day by day. According to Statista, the global influencer marketing market value has more than doubled compared to 2019, reaching \$13.8 billion in 2021, and the worldwide market size of the

influencer marketing platform to \$179 million (Statista, 2021). As a result, brands receive a \$5.78 ROI (return on investment) for every \$1 spent on influencer marketing, and 67% of brands use Instagram for influencer marketing (Geysler, 2022). Searches for the phrase influencer marketing on Google alone have increased by 465% since 2016 (Geysler, 2016). Sabuncuoğlu & Gülay (2014) found that influencers used as advertising tools in their studies regularly interact with their followers and are seen by consumers as sincere and public/accessible people. Therefore, eWOM (*electronic word of mouth*) helps brands become known in the virtual world with the implementation of influencer marketing.

There are many ways to successfully run collaborations between influencers and brands. Brands make their influencer selection by evaluating which type of collaboration will suit their strategies and goals. Influencers also use several *strategies* to promote any product and service on social media through their accounts, to influence target audiences, and to guide their purchasing decisions (Emirza, 2018).

- *Sponsored Content*: Sponsored posts are one of the most common influencer marketing strategies used in social media networks (Acar, 2014). With the increasing popularity of social media platforms, consumers have started to rely on them to fulfill their needs. Many brands now conduct their business with sponsored posts while interacting with their target audience on social media, harnessing the supportive power provided by social media networks as the main source of marketing campaigns with strategies applied at the right place and time (Mert, 2018). This growth of sponsored influencer posts can be attributed to increased brand awareness and tighter regulations on advertising transparency (Geysler, 2023). For instance, according to Statista, the number of brand-sponsored influencer posts on Instagram increased from \$1.2 million to \$6.1 million between 2016 and 2020, with the volume of sponsored content on Instagram reaching 4.95 million posts in 2019 (Statista, 2020).
- *Product Reviews*: Product reviews are a popular form of influencer marketing, where influencers share their first impressions and experiences of a product with their followers. Influencers present products in line with their profiles, to maintain a sincere relationship with their followers (Saglık, 2019). Russell and Belch (2005) explain that product placement combines brand content with entertainment for a specific purpose. Instagram is a convenient channel for brands to showcase products and services naturally, and inform users (Ozturk & Sener, 2018). Instagram influencers frequently place products in their posts, and 87% of people take action, such as visiting a store or purchasing a product, after seeing product information posts on Instagram (Santora, 2021).
- *Giveaways*: Giveaways are a popular way for brands to work with influencers, providing them with free products or services to promote on social media to their followers. This strategy, combined with offering pre-release or discount codes, can be effective in gaining accurate

information about consumer preferences (Mert, 2018; Pankka, 2019). Running giveaway campaigns on social media at regular intervals can attract more user attention, with brands and influencers needing to set goals, choose awards, and secure the campaign (Mert, 2018).

- *Brand Ambassador:* Brand ambassadors are individuals who engage in brand communication to increase brand awareness and influence their followers. Peltekoğlu (2019) categorizes brand ambassadors into two groups: Professional Brand Ambassadors and Volunteer Brand Ambassadors. Professional Brand Ambassadors are social media celebrities who promote the brand through posts or promotions, while Volunteer Brand Ambassadors are consumers who establish emotional bonds with the brand and act as voluntary brand ambassadors. Research by Dewi et al. (2021) shows that brand ambassadors can have a positive impact on brand awareness, brand image, and purchase decisions. Bayuk and Aslan (2018) argue that influencer marketing is effective because consumers place greater importance on recommendations in virtual networks, it allows for direct communication with potential consumers, new content can be quickly created, it can reach untapped audiences, and the campaign's impact can be easily evaluated.

Consumers are increasingly relying on recommendations from others to make purchasing decisions. According to Sammis (2016), consumers trust comments and suggestions from others more than traditional forms of advertising. In fact, most consumers (71%) are more likely to make a purchase when guided by an influencer (Ewing, 2022). Further, 92% of consumers trust the opinion of an influencer when making their purchasing decision (Geysler, 2023). As a result, influencer marketing through social media platforms, such as TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, is becoming a popular way to create brand awareness and positively influence consumers (Avcılar & Acar, 2017). Figure 1 shows the various social media channels that can be used in influencer marketing. According to Influencer Marketing Hub (2022), Instagram is the most popular social media platform for brands despite having fewer monthly active users (1.3 billion) than Facebook, which has the highest monthly active users (2.89 billion).

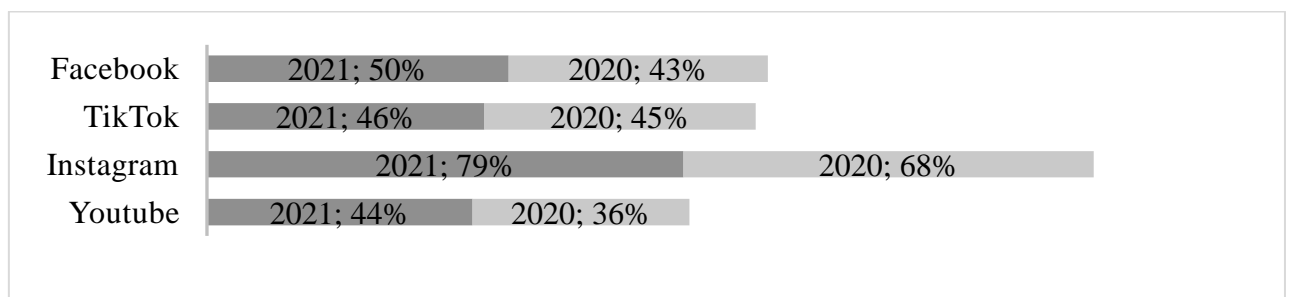


Figure 1. **Channel utilizations of influencer marketing campaigns, the comparison between 2020 and 2021.**

Source: Influencer Marketing Hub (2022)

Integrating influencers into campaigns is now essential for the survival of brand strategies (Sammis, 2016) since influencers can reinforce the online brand strategy by providing information that reduces risk and encourages followers to engage with the brand (Chatterjee, 2011). Social media platforms allow brands to establish relationships with consumers and foster brand loyalty (Booth & Matic, 2011). The influencer marketing industry has shown significant growth in recent years, with the market size increasing from 4.6 billion dollars in 2018 to an expected 84.89 billion dollars by 2028 (Guttmann, 2020). With the rise of social media usage, traditional marketing methods are becoming less effective, leading to the emergence of new digital marketing methods each year, including influencer marketing, which can benefit businesses (Johnson, 2020). The growth of the influencer marketing industry is depicted in Figure 2. In 2020, businesses allocated significant budgets for influencer marketing. While 19% spent \$1,000-10,000 per year, 18% spent \$100,000-\$500,000 per year, and 7% planned to invest over \$1 million (Bailis, 2019). Moreover, 17% of companies dedicated over half of their marketing budgets to influence marketing, indicating the growing importance of this marketing approach, especially for e-commerce, fashion, gaming, and travel brands. Influencer marketing enables brands to target potential customers, persuade them to purchase, and assess the impact of the campaign using digital technologies (Keskin & Kurtuldu, 2018).

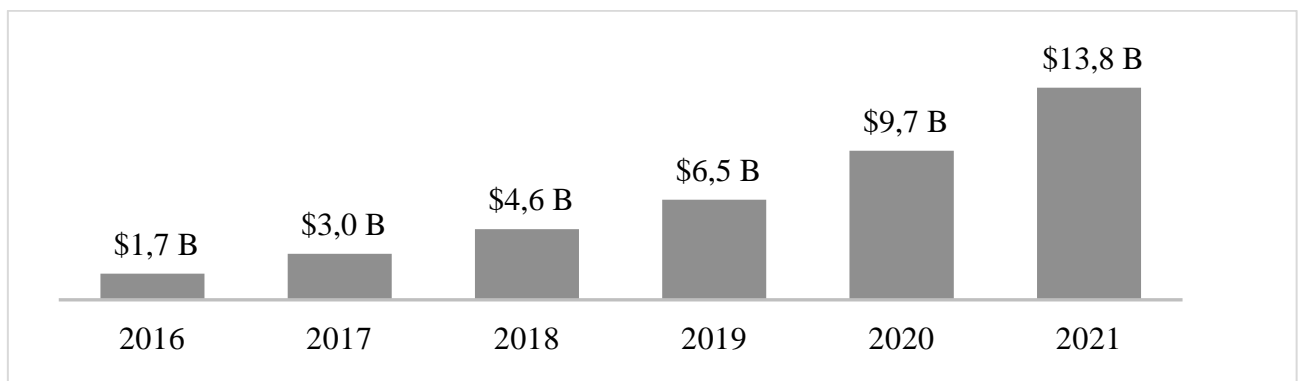


Figure 2. **The growth of influencer marketing over time.**

Source: Influencer Marketing Hub (2022)

Influencers can be categorized according to the content they produce. Different categories enable influencers to reach their target audiences and turn influencers into someone whose ideas and opinions are valued under this topic over time (Avçılar, 2017). Travel influencers produce content such as travel tips, reviews of travel-related brands, places to visit, and itineraries. Businesses and brands cooperate with influencers who appeal to their target audience, have common tastes, and speak the same language, and as a result of these collaborations, influencers positively affect the tendency of visitors to purchase touristic products or services (Akdeniz & Kömürcü, 2021). Studies show that especially young people are influenced by the photo and video sharing of other users' vacation experiences by following travel bloggers (Başarangil, 2019).

In the literature, travel influencers are seen as an important source of information in the decision-making processes of tourists and are perceived as safe (Gretzel, 2018). Influencers produce content for niche audiences in the field of travel and tourism, as in many areas (Stoldt et al., 2019). With the effect of social media becoming a priority for tourists to obtain information, tourism service providers are also collaborating with social media influencers as a marketing tool (Kapoor et al., 2021). In this context, influencers are effective in promotion and marketing, and they produce content for the products and services of contracted brands through social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook (Glucksman, 2017). For tourism and travel industry actors, influencer marketing is important in terms of reaching the goal (Gretzel, 2018). Travel influencers are required to manage their accounts by considering the concepts of originality, and naturalness. In this way, it should be noted that it will be an advertising tool that goes beyond a simple recommendation. Since travel is an experience in itself, it has been observed that travel influencers should pay attention to these features more than influencers in other sectors. In addition, studies have been conducted to show that social media influencers affect the travel intentions of their followers, have an impact on the purchasing decision process, influencers have a positive effect on the perceived trust of people, and people prefer being positively influenced by influencers. It is worth mentioning that the most followed influencer content continues to be fashion and beauty (25% of respondents), with gaming being the second most popular sector (12.9%), followed by travel and lifestyle (12.5%) (Geyser, 2023). The hashtag "travel" has received 74.4 billion views on TikTok alone, while 624 million Instagram posts are focused on travel (Ong, 2022). The recommendations from the travel influencers became popular due to their individuality and the trust followers place in them. According to Ramonet (2011), news organizations must establish branding to gain credibility with their audiences. However, the credibility of travel influencers arises from the distinctive, non-commercial, and personal identity that each influencer creates. Unlike traditional travel resources such as books, magazines, and documentaries, travel influencers have the freedom to share travel information in various forms and styles. Because of this freedom, travel influencers can produce content that is more customized (Fürsich & Hanusch, 2014).

Instagram is a popular photo and video-sharing social media platform among the Gen Z. Users are highly motivated to share their pictures instantly using their smartphones, which is why young people spend more time on Instagram than on Facebook (Volo & Irimias, 2020). Exchanging photographs instead of just words has improved communication with friends and broader user groups with shared interests (Ihsanuddin & Anuar, 2016). Moreover, Instagram also links the physical and digital worlds, enhancing one's online identity and presence and enabling more active participation for both professional and personal reasons (Appel et al., 2020). According to Freberg et al. (2011), Instagram travel influencers are a distinct category of objective third-party celebrity endorsement that

shapes viewers' impressions through articles, comments, videos, and other Instagram usage. In recent years, these influencers have been considered to be superior brand endorsers when compared to other marketing tactics such as marketing with well-known celebrities, and using these opinion leaders to show successful customer persuasion results has been proved to be trustworthy and cost-effective (Liu et al., 2015). Young tourists prefer to engage more with Instagram travel influencers (Gretzel, 2018), and using them in marketing strategies allows brands to connect positively with their customers (Glucksman, 2017). The effectiveness of Instagram travel influencers relies on the quality of the content that they produce through their blogs, posts, or videos (Cassia & Magno, 2019). Instagram travel influencers provide relevant and attractive content to create an emotional connection with their followers and increase company loyalty and support (Turri et al., 2013). The Instagram posts of the travel influencers should be visually beautiful and educational, as well as in line with their audience's preferences (Gümüş, 2017). Followers can be influenced by influencer content in a memorable, constructive, or otherwise lasting way. One of the most popular indicators used to measure the accuracy of marketing endorsements is credibility (De Run, 2016). Influencers who are seen as authoritative and trustworthy on Instagram have a greater influence on their followers' perceptions (Pop et al., 2021). Travel influencers on Instagram can continue to connect with their followers by creating unique and authentic content. Credibility and authenticity, defined as being relatable, honest, and sincere with followers (Piskorski, 2016), are factors that influence followers' decisions to follow a particular influencer on YouTube or Instagram (Glucksman, 2017).

In summary, influencer marketing is a type of online word-of-mouth marketing where influential individuals actively promote products, services, and brands to their community. In recent years, the rise of influencer marketing has been significant, especially on Instagram, where influencers with a massive number of followers post content and advertise products. The reason behind the success of influencer marketing lies in the human-oriented marketing era, where consumers are seeking real experiences and recommendations from people they trust. Research shows that consumers are more likely to buy a product recommended by an influencer they follow on social media channels. This behaviour demonstrates the influence of social media on consumer decision-making, and how brands can leverage influencers to promote their products. Influencer marketing has emerged as a crucial element in contemporary marketing strategies, primarily due to the growth of social media and the need to establish a deeper and more engaging relationship with consumers. The objective of influencer marketing is not solely to promote products, but also to build brand awareness, enhance brand image, and foster deeper engagement with consumers. Consequently, it has become an indispensable tool for brands that are seeking to reach out to younger consumers who are more likely to be active on social media. In simple terms, travel influencers are individuals who have built a following on social media by sharing their travel experiences and providing recommendations and

insights to their audience. Their influence ranges from encouraging followers to visit specific destinations, try local cuisine, and stay in certain accommodations, to promoting responsible and sustainable tourism practices. Travel influencers collaborate with tourism boards, travel companies and hospitality brands to develop sponsored content and partnerships, helping to promote products and services to a broader audience. As the travel industry continues to evolve, the role of travel influencers is likely to become more significant, influencing the approach and experience of travel for people in the modern era.

1.2. The phenomenon of tourism consumption

When the literature is analysed, it can be said that the number of studies in the tourism literature started to increase in the early 2000s (Köseoğlu et al. 2016). These studies primarily focused on the general trends of tourism research; some of them analysed the findings of academic articles (Hall, 2011; Karagöz & Kozak, 2014); some of them analysed both papers and articles (Köseoğlu et al. 2016), and some of them aimed to give an idea about the academic trends and orientations of tourism (Tayfun et al. 2016). The tourism sector has started to play a major role in the country's economies in recent years and has become a developing sector. The tourism sector contributes to the country in many areas such as the faster foreign currency inflow to the country, the increase in confidence in the countries that come to tourists, the increase in the flow of money, and the employment of jobs (Tunçalp & İrge, 2018). Tourism contributes to the economy of a country, directly or indirectly, in more than one sector. Tourism consumption refers to the expenditures on goods and services of tourists during their stay in a destination they travel. These expenditures include the costs of transportation, accommodation, food and beverages, leisure activities, shopping, and other tourist goods and services (Köseoğlu et al., 2016). Tourism consumption is a vital component of the tourism industry and can have significant impacts on a destination's economy, including creating jobs and businesses, generating tax revenue for governments, and contributing to infrastructure development. Tourism consumption is heterogeneous as it includes different services and has a complex structure (Barakazi, 2019) since it is intangible, perishable, and indistinguishable (Laws, 2022). The elasticity of the tourism demand is raised by variations in travel motives. Since tourism is not a basic need, it is a consumption dimension that can be easily abandoned in situations affecting the public, such as economic crises and earthquakes (Barakazi, 2019). Therefore, since touristic products have supply characteristics for people, they must follow changing demands and provide flexibility for this change. Tourism consumption, which is sensitive to sudden changes in the short term, can only renew itself and react to change in the long term.

Regardless of the age or era, it is seen that the most basic motivating factor underlying travel is 'curiosity' and the desire to 'discover' (Solmaz, 2019). According to Kozak (2001), the external factors affecting the development of tourism are the proliferation of means of transportation, making

them faster and more comfortable; the development of air, land, sea and railways; the rise in the level of economic welfare; the facilities provided in terms of payments; the increase in people's leisure time; providing people with the right to paid holidays; urbanization and population growth in cities; increase in the quality and quantity of tourism enterprises; freedom of travel; development of tourism awareness; increase in the level of culture and education; tourism ceasing to be a luxury and becoming a physiological need; increase in disposable income; and the establishment of peace in most of the world. These issues can be expressed as external factors that have enabled modern tourism activities to develop and become what they are today. However, it is also possible to talk about intrinsic factors that motivate people to engage in tourism activities, especially the sense of curiosity and discovery. According to Usta (2002) these factors can be curiosity and desire to explore; business; sports; religious reasons; culture, education, and training; rest and recreation; health and treatment and visiting friends and relatives. Essentially, consumer behavior is based on processes of problem-solving and decision-making. According to Odabasi (1988), decision-making in tourism possesses unique characteristics. Firstly, participation in tourism activities is typically a long-term planned endeavor that requires significant financial investment. Secondly, since tourism is a service-oriented activity, it is challenging to quantify its tangible returns. Instead, the consumer derives satisfaction from their investment in travel and vacation experiences. In the field of marketing, the consumer's decision-making process for purchasing is often examined using a framework consisting of five stages: (i) the emergence of a need, (ii) identification of available options, (iii) evaluation of options, (iv) the decision to purchase, and (v) post-purchase behavior (Stankevich, 2017). It is essential to analyze tourists as consumers in these stages to develop effective tourism marketing strategies and comprehend how to impact consumers at each stage of the decision-making process. By highlighting the satisfaction that can result from correctly identifying motivations, it can be emphasized through various promotional and advertising campaigns (Odabasi, 1988). Following the emergence of a need, the next stage involves obtaining the requisite information for recognizing options that will fulfill the need. The ultimate goal is to mitigate the risks that may arise from decision-making by gathering adequate information. The information that travelers gather about their options, sources, and content is of utmost importance to tourism marketers. The success of promotional activities can play a crucial role in enabling tourists to make choices comfortably and in the manner, they desire (Odabasi, 1988). Once the options have been evaluated, the purchase decision is made. Marketers can influence consumers by simplifying the decision-making process. After travel and vacation, expectations are compared with actual experiences. The psychological state that follows the purchase in consumer behavior is valid for tourists as well. The closer the expectations and actual experiences are, the higher the degree of satisfaction achieved (Odabasi, 1988). If expectations are not met at the desired level, the tourist may experience dissatisfaction. When the same types of needs arise again, the tourist will

make different choices, resulting in a loss of market share. Preventing dissatisfaction will positively impact the efficiency of future work. Thus, it is crucial to correctly identify and regulate issues related to dissatisfaction and complaints.

The increasing dominance of online travel sales is an important factor to consider when analysing tourist consumer behavior. As the online travel market expands, travel choices are more influenced by variables such as prices and promotions. Due to the simplicity of organizing travel plan online, customers are more likely to consider elements such as special offers when deciding where to go or how to get there. Although people rely on the experiences and opinions of others when making their own travel choices, the popularity of online reviews and recommendations further highlights the importance of social elements in tourism consumer behaviour. Therefore, understanding the influence of both economic and social factors in tourist consumer behaviour is crucial for businesses that want to succeed in the increasingly competitive online travel market since the market for booking travel is dominated by online travel sales. According to Statista Market Forecast (2023), the global online travel market was valued at \$432 billion in 2021. By 2027, Statista predicts that internet sales will account for 74% of all travel and tourist earnings. In fact, 68% of all sales in the travel and tourism sector were done online in 2022. Overall, these numbers highlight the importance of the online travel market and its growing dominance in the travel industry.

In summary, tourism is an essential contributor to a country's economy, and its consumption can have significant impacts on a destination's economy, such as creating jobs, generating tax revenue, and contributing to infrastructure development. Studies on tourism have focused on general trends, academic articles, and academic orientations. External factors that have enabled modern tourism activities to develop include an increase in the level of economic welfare, development of transportation, urbanization, leisure time, and peace. However, intrinsic factors that motivate people to engage in tourism activities include curiosity, exploration, business, sports, and culture. Various economic, social, and psychological factors impact touristic consumer behavior, including price, income level, occupation, and family structure. The increasing dominance of online travel sales has led to the importance of considering variables such as prices, promotions, and social elements in tourist consumer behavior.

1.3. The characteristics of Gen Z

The categorization of generations has garnered significant attention from diverse research fields. Distinctions in these classifications are contingent on the era and historical occurrences that a given generation has experienced. Etymologically, the term 'generation' derives from the Latin word 'generāre', which signifies "to create" (Oral, 2013). Scholarly inquiry has indicated that the classification of generations can fluctuate according to the cultural and societal contexts (Arslan &

Staub, 2015). Numerous authors have observed that generation classifications encompass distinct time periods (Reeves & Oh, 2008).

The origins of the concept of generation can be traced back to ancient Greece and ancient Egyptian civilization (Adıgüzel et al., 2014). Auguste Comte is widely regarded as the progenitor of generational studies, based on his research conducted in the early 1800s. Comte posited that the changes that affect generations are forces that exert a historical influence, perpetually renewing one another, and that generational development is possible through the intergenerational influence. However, the first person to undertake comprehensive and systematic studies on this topic, using scientific research methods, was Karl Mannheim. Karl Mannheim, a German sociologist, first introduced the concept of generation in 1928. Mannheim (1952) argues that people of similar age groups living in the same society at the same time have similar feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors. Mannheim's classification is important because he used the socio-historical past as a scale for classifying generations and analyzed them in this context.

There are many different year intervals in studies conducted by different researchers and there is no consensus on dates, but generational researchers assess generational periods within a 15–20-year period (Reeves & Oh, 2008). However, age is one of the least important criteria in classifying generations. The generations commonly accepted in the literature are the Silent Generation (also known as Traditionalists, Wisdom Generation, and Builders), the Baby Boomer Generation (also known as the Boomer Generation), Generation X, Generation Y (also known as the Millennium Cohort, Echo Boom, and Next Generation), and Generation Z (also known as M, iGen, and Instant Online). However, there is some disagreement about the period covered by the generations.

There is a lack of agreement among scholars on the starting point of Gen Z, but it is widely accepted that they were born in the late 1990s (Bejtkovský, 2016). Different sources have suggested various starting dates for this generation, with a common view being that those born after 1995 are considered to belong to Gen Z as it can be seen on Table 2 below. The precise time range of this generation, however, has been subject to some debate, with some sources suggesting a span of five years. According to the Oxford Dictionaries, Gen Z comprises individuals born in the late 1990s or early 2000s, who are recognized as having been raised with digital technology, the internet, and social media (2023). Similarly, the Collins Dictionary defines members of Gen Z as those born between the mid-1990s and the mid-2010s, who are considered to be confident users of modern technologies (2023). In this paper, the author accepts the time range of 1995-2010 for Gen Z, considering the widespread acceptance among scholars and various sources suggesting this as the birth period for this generation.

Chronological generational classifications from different sources

Scholars	Silent Generation	Baby Boomer Generation	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
Dimock. (2019)	1928- 1945	1946- 1964	1965- 1980	1981- 1996	1997- 2012
McKinsey & Company. (2018)	-	1940- 1959	1960- 1979	1980- 1994	1995- 2010
Williams & Page. (2011)	1930- 1945	1946- 1964	1965- 1976	1977- 1994	1994-
Baybars & Demirci. (2006)	- 1946	1946- 1964	1965- 1976	1977- 1994	1995-
Oblinger. (2005)	- 1946	1947- 1964	1965- 1980	1981- 1995	1995-
Seçkin. (2000)	- 1945	1946- 1964	1965- 1980	1980- 1995	1995-

Source: This table was created by the author based on Dimock (2019); McKinsey and Company (2018); Williams and Page (2011); Baybars and Demirci (2006); Oblinger (2005); Seçkin (2000).

The field of information technology has undergone significant changes since the mid-1990s, which have radically transformed the characteristics, lifestyles, and consumption habits of generations (Yelkikalan et al., 2010). Horn (2013) identifies the period after 1995, with the widespread use of internet communication, as the start of Gen Z. Additionally, according to Yelkikalan (2010), the year 1995 also corresponds to the beginning of the first internet entrepreneurship in America and Europe. This generation opened their eyes to a new world, especially with the development of the internet, and this thesis accepts the starting date of 1995 and later periods as the beginning for Gen Z. The standards of living, developing, and changing technological possibilities, and the proximity of societies to each other as a result of globalization have led Gen Z to open their eyes to a very different world compared to other generational members (Ayhün, 2013). Members of Gen Z are more successful in using and grasping technological devices because they have grown up in close association with technology (Csobanka, 2016). Gen Z individuals who benefit from the advantages of technology to the fullest and use it intensively prefer to send emojis instead of speaking and spend time on the computer instead of reading books. For members of this generation, spending time in virtual space is more valuable than spending time outside.

Gen Z, the first generation of the 21st century, has witnessed a range of global events, both good and bad, that have shaped their worldview. They grew up during the global economic crisis, which exposed them to unemployment and economic difficulties from a young age, leading to increased social awareness and determination. However, they are predicted to be the most stressed generation compared to previous ones (Coşkun, 2019). During their lifetime, Gen Z has seen the first

African American president of the United States, Barack Obama, and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 30 countries around the world (Ender et al., 2014). They have also witnessed significant advancements in technology, such as Wi-Fi connection to the internet, the widespread use of smartphones, and the creation of social media platforms, which have both brought people closer and resulted in more individualistic and solitary lives. In recent years, Gen Z has seen the discovery of water on Mars in 2018 and the establishment of Tesla by South African engineer Elon Musk in 2003. Unfortunately, Gen Z has also experienced negative events such as the Syrian war, the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident, terrorist attacks, and irregularities in global climate change, which have made them more cautious and pragmatic. These negative events have made Gen Z individuals more cautious and pragmatic, but on the other hand also have inspired these individuals to look at life more realistically and to believe that they can change the world (Sladek & Grabinger, 2013). The last event witnessed by this generation in 2019 was the COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged in December in the Chinese city of Wuhan and affected the whole world. Many changes have occurred during this pandemic, such as border closures between countries, reduced or canceled flights, school closures, postponed or canceled sports events, restrictions on socializing places, and prohibition of going out on pre-determined days and hours. The aim of these restrictions was to prevent the spread of the disease through human contact and to ensure social distancing. The pandemic has caused the Gen Z to stay more at home and reduce their social environments, even though they are heavily involved with technology. Although this situation is seen as an advantage for this generation to socialize through technological means, it has also led to their isolation and alienation from people around them.

The existence of technology, which was a necessity of the age, represented the industrial development initiatives and improvements in living conditions for generations prior to Gen Z. However, for Gen Z, this representation is entirely different. Technology is perceived more as a means of entertainment, leisure, and socialization for individuals in this generation. Moreover, it is also positioned as a response to entrepreneurial spirit. The familiarity of Gen Z individuals with technology enables them to enter the world of consumption more rapidly. This attitude of the generation leads to changes in the marketing understanding, as they do not possess a characteristic of loyalty to a brand. While this attitude may appear as a disadvantage for brands, it turns into an advantage by realizing the level of influence that peers have on individuals (Kartal & Tatlı, 2020). In light of this, it is unsurprising that Instagram is the most popular social media platform for Gen Z, with over 64% using it daily (Green, 2019). Notably, Instagram is the most preferred social media platform for 73% of Gen Z adults (Lashbrook, 2019). It is noteworthy that Gen Z demands personalized interactions across various channels (Chang, 2019). These trends are reflected in the fact that 46% of Gen Z follow over 10 social media influencers, which plays a vital role in their purchasing decisions (Chang, 2019). Additionally, 52% of Gen Z are highly likely to buy a product or service if

recommended by their favorite influencer (Chang, 2019). These statistics highlight the importance of influencers and social media in Gen Z's purchasing behavior and underscore the need for businesses to adapt to their preferences in order to attract these key consumers.

In summary, Generation Z, also known as the Digital Natives, constitutes a population of 83 million people in the US alone, with a total annual purchasing power of 200 billion dollars. As of the current period, they also stand out as the most populous group of the labor force in terms of the world economy (Bağcı & İçöz, 2019). Gen Z individuals who were born between 1995 and 2010 tend to rely heavily on influencers' emotions, thoughts, and experiences regarding a product or service before exhibiting a purchasing attitude. It can be observed that Gen Z individuals exhibit a different attitude towards shopping from traditional methods, conducting online research for the product or service they intend to purchase and benefiting from the experiences and statements of trusted individuals. According to research, YouTube and Instagram influencers can have an impact on Gen Z's purchasing decisions. Brands no longer need to spend thousands of dollars to promote a product, instead they can easily reach Gen Z through social media influencers (Lesonsky, 2017). Gen Z can quickly access information about the influencers they follow on social media channels. Social media influencers are considered as the favorite of today's brands because they establish one-on-one communication with their target audiences, gain their trust, and have the ability to provide instant information to them. Consistently showing products on social media platforms such as Instagram by these influencers can have a positive impact on Gen Z consumers. Companies must capture these consumers at a young age and focus their marketing efforts on the social sphere, given that young people spend most of their time there. Furthermore, companies should create interactive and online marketing and sales channels, adapt their marketing systems to the virtual media environment, provide in-depth product information, and facilitate online purchasing.

1.4. The relation between Gen Z and tourism consumption

The tourism industry has long faced the challenge of intangibility because of its service-based nature, making it difficult for customers to evaluate trips, flights, hotels, and other offerings in advance (Peštek & Čičić, 2010). In the late 19th century, travel decisions were based on information published in magazines and journals, as well as recommendations from friends and family members (Little et al., 2011). However, with the advent of radio and television in the early 20th century and the development of Information Communication Technologies, the way consumers plan and choose travel-related products changed significantly (Chung & Koo, 2015). Nowadays, social media has become the most common source of information when making travel plans, allowing travelers to share their experiences with others (Ayeh et al., 2013). As Pennington-Gray et al. (2003) suggest, it is important for tourism professionals to target specific groups of tourists, rather than regarding the entire market as homogenous. The theory of generation cohorts has been widely applied to the tourism

industry, with studies showing differences in destination preferences and vacation activities preferred among certain generation cohorts (Lehto et al., 2008). For example, older tourists are less interested in national parks and prefer first-class accommodations, while younger generations enjoy shopping as a tourism activity. As such, tourism professionals must examine the unique traits of each generation cohort they wish to target to design and implement more efficient strategies. Gen Z has become an attractive tourist market due to its growing consumption, and it plays a key role in family decision-making processes (Gaumer & Arnone, 2010). With the rise of Gen Z and its substantial spending power, marketing organizations have generated reports explaining the best way to reach this market. Moreover, Gen Z suffers from FOMO, or the fear of missing out, which has made digital influencers an essential marketing tool (Bradley et al., 2019).

The tourism industry recognizes the importance of Gen Z, as they possess a strong inclination to travel and will soon become the leading consumer group in the industry (Robinson & Schänzel). It is noteworthy that Gen Z's travel motives are diverse and may vary from those of previous generations. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence this cohort's travel decisions and preferences will be critical for tourism stakeholders seeking to attract and retain this market segment. Youth tourism can be classified into six types as suggested by Demeter and Bratucu (2014), which are educational tourism, volunteering, work and travel, cultural exchange, sports and adventure tourism, and leisure tourism. Educational tourism involves youngsters participating in a learning experience, while volunteering allows them to combine holidays with working for a worthy cause. Work and travel give young individuals the opportunity to work for a foreign company abroad and blend in with the locals, learn a foreign language, and gain work experience. Cultural exchange involves the exchange of young individuals among different countries, while sports and adventure tourism allow them to participate in a sports event while traveling. Leisure tourism involves traveling mainly for entertainment purposes. Eusébio and Carneiro (2015) segmented the student travel market into four groups based on their motivations and interactions: culture lovers, fun lovers (the largest cluster), sun and beach lovers, and nature lovers. Additionally, Niemczyk (2019) identified characteristics of the Gen Z profile as tourists. This generation is born in an era of technological advancement, which blurs the line between real life and the virtual world. As such, tourism presents an opportunity for them to break away from the online reality and experience social values that are only present in real life. Gen Z is also one of the most open generations in terms of tourist travel, as geographical barriers disappear with the use of the internet. They usually know foreign languages and are comfortable in a multicultural environment, making it easy for them to establish global relations. Furthermore, their motto is YOLO, *You Only Live Once*, which means they enjoy traveling and are not deterred by leaving their home. Finally, Gen Z are not afraid of distance and often choose to pursue journeys abroad to learn about the world (Niemczyk, 2019).

The travel industry has been greatly influenced by the purposes of traveling among the Gen Z population (Schiopu et al. 2016). This generation is known for traveling to gain new experiences, to learn new cultures, to work, to study, to visit family and friends, to learn a new language, and to participate in events, among other reasons. To cater to this generation, it is crucial for the tourism industry to identify their characteristics and understand their preferences (Schiopu et al. 2016; Kusmayadi et al. 2017). Gen Z tourists are generally budget-conscious, seeking promotions, cheap flights, and last-minute peer-to-peer accommodations. They prefer unique experiences that are not traditional, rather than exploring tourist hotspots. This generation prefers city breaks and weekend getaways to longer, more luxurious travel options. They enjoy visiting authentic locations and socializing with locals and other tourists. Gen Z mostly travels with friends or family and relies on online information sources and recommendations from various social groups to plan their travels (Schiopu et al. 2016; Kusmayadi et al. 2017). Additionally, they are highly engaged in social media and use it as a primary source of inspiration for travel planning. Overall, understanding the travel characteristics of Gen Z is essential for the tourism industry to effectively market and cater to this generation of travelers.

According to Kusmayadi et al. (2017), Gen Z tourists are primarily smartphone users, with the majority preferring Instagram as their preferred social media application, followed by Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc. They spend a significant amount of time on social media, with 45.3% planning holiday trips. They acquire information pre-travel and plan their trips accordingly, with budget being an important element in their travel decisions. They also make their reservations through online channels and provide feedback after the trip (Kusmayadi et al., 2017). YouGov, an international research, data, and analytics group, conducted a study of 25,918 Gen Zers (18–24 year olds) in 25 countries in April 2022. Based on this data, the company published a travel and tourism report that reveals what Gen Z expects from travel and provides guidance for marketers and tourism businesses to engage with this generation. According to the report, traveling (26%) is the third activity that Gen Z plans to spend more on in the coming year, after dining out (27%) and clothing (32%). This rises to four in ten Brits (44%) and a third of Gen Z in Spain and Italy (34% each). After two years of restrictions due to COVID-19, four in ten of those surveyed plans to take a domestic vacation between April 2022 and 2023, compared to 16% of those planning an international vacation. However, travel and accommodation prices are a bigger barrier for Gen Z, indicating increased price sensitivity among this younger age group. Compared to the global average of 32%, more than a third of Gen Zers (37%) say that the expense of accommodation prevents them from traveling. Budget as an influence on travel decisions appears to decrease with increasing age, which could be due to greater financial stability with career progression. YouGov data shows that Airbnb is the travel brand that Gen Z considers the most important, and they prefer unique experiences such as glamping instead of

traditional hotels. They are also more likely than other generations to be interested in traveling with a sustainability purpose, such as volunteering and eco-tourism, driven by a desire to do something meaningful and give back to society. Gen Z is more interested in connecting with local people, their traditions, and local food during their vacations. Finally, YouGov research reveals that 88% of Gen Z consumers are currently following a social media influencer, compared to less than half (47%) of adults over 25. Nearly one in five Gen Zers (19%) follow a travel influencer, and while other influencer types such as food, music, lifestyle, and gaming are more popular among Gen Zers, they are twice as likely to follow travel influencers than those aged 25 and over. According to research by Booking.com (2019), 40% of Gen Zers use social media sites as their main source of travel inspiration. This reliance on Instagram is higher than the global average (25%) and millennials (30%). Moreover, more than a third of Gen Z (35%) often rely on social media influencers for travel recommendations. However, this is partly due to the fact that 45% of Gen Z trust recommendations from influencers and celebrities and therefore it is not unique for the travel industry. Inspiration for Gen Z is not limited to social media, 35% of respondents are inspired by destinations they see in movies and TV shows and want to see them in person; 42% of respondents say they are interested in traveling to destinations that look good in photos. Interestingly, despite their interest in social media half of Gen Zers surveyed feel that too much emphasis is placed on social media when traveling. Gen Z is a demographic cohort that seeks unique and memorable experiences while travelling, which they can share with their peers on social media. Kamenidou (2021) suggests that hotels and tourist destinations should train their personnel to cater to the needs of young tourists. Additionally, hotels can create youth clubs, sports events, and tourist agents should promote the recreational potential of each destination. This is particularly important as the sports and adventure tourism industry is growing fast due to the importance of physical activities among young tourists (Schlegelmilch & Ollenburg, 2013). Adventure tourism, which includes activities that evoke extreme emotions such as fear, danger, and adrenaline rush, is becoming increasingly popular among Gen Z tourists (Kamenidou et al., 2021). Information sources for this group are primarily friends and the internet (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019), which suggests that tourism practitioners should invest in web advertisement and e-WOM control to promote positive reviews and respond to negative ones. Gen Z tourists prefer short trip durations, usually less than five days, and engage in various activities such as sunbathing, sightseeing, shopping, and cultural events (Kamenidou et al., 2021). The tourism experience for this group is a means of escaping their daily routine, seeking empowerment, and socialisation. They often look for low-cost opportunities, participate in last-minute travel decisions, and are influenced by reviews and word-of-mouth recommendations (Haddouche & Salomone, 2018).

In summary, due to its service-based model, the tourist industry faces the difficulty of intangibility, making it challenging for clients to assess offerings in advance. Due to the development of technology, consumers' planning and selection of travel-related goods have changed substantially over time, with social media becoming as the most popular information source. Instead of treating the entire market as homogeneous, it is crucial for tourism professionals to focus on certain tourist demographics. The theory of generation cohorts has been widely applied to the tourism industry, with studies showing differences in destination preferences and vacation activities preferred among certain generation cohorts. Gen Z has become an attractive tourist market due to its growing consumption and substantial spending power, with FOMO making digital influencers an essential marketing tool. Gen Z seeks unique and memorable experiences while traveling and prefers city breaks and weekend getaways to longer, more luxurious travel options. Understanding the travel characteristics of Gen Z is essential for the tourism industry to effectively market and cater to this generation of travelers. Gen Z tourists are technologically savvy and have grown up with digital technology, making it important for the tourism industry to adapt to their preferences and behaviors. The industry must offer unique and authentic experiences, sustainable and socially responsible tourism practices, and engage with Gen Z through social media platforms to remain relevant and appealing. By catering to the travel preferences and behaviors of Gen Z, the tourism industry can capitalize on this generation's significant spending power and secure its future success.

II. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE IMPACT OF INSTAGRAM TRAVEL INFLUENCERS ON GEN Z'S TOURISM CONSUMPTION

The primary objective of this section is to explicate the methodology employed in the research, with the intention of enhancing the credibility and validity of the study's findings. To achieve this objective, the section includes an overview of the research object or situation analysis, a justification for the specific research, the formulation and grounding of research statements, and a summary of previous research. The research approach comprises synthesizing prior studies related to the topic, formulating two hypotheses for quantitative research and two research assumptions for qualitative research based on the literature review, designing an instrument, comprising questionnaire design and evaluation methods, and presenting data collection and analysis methods, including distribution and collection methods, sampling methods, and analysis techniques.

2.1. Overview of the research object

The influence of social media platforms on consumer behavior has become increasingly significant in recent years. Instagram, in particular, has gained immense popularity, with travel influencers attracting a large following, especially among Gen Z. This research aims to investigate the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. By combining qualitative research, including expert interviews, with quantitative research through an online questionnaire, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Instagram travel influencers influence Gen Z's travel choices. The findings of this research will contribute to the tourism industry's understanding of influencer marketing strategies and help marketers tailor their approaches to effectively engage with the Gen Z audience.

Research problem addressed in this paper is how Instagram travel influencers impact Gen Z's tourism consumption.

The object of the paper is the influence of Instagram travel influencers on the tourism consumption behavior of Gen Z.

To reach the aim the following **objectives** were set:

1. To analyse concepts of influencer and influencer marketing in the case of the Instagram platform;
2. To examine the theoretical aspects of Gen Z's perception towards travel and tourism, as well as their attitudes towards influencer marketing in the context of tourism;

3. To form a methodology and conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses to determine the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption;
4. To present and discuss the research findings, including the analysis of both secondary data and primary data, and to provide insights into the influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption patterns.

To achieve the research objectives, a research strategy combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative research involves online expert interviews with Instagram travel influencers and tourism and marketing professionals to receive the insights of the industries, while the quantitative research consists of an online questionnaire targeted towards the Generation Z demographic. This research methods have been selected with the aim of providing a comprehensive understanding of the research subject using both qualitative and quantitative data. The online questionnaire and expert interviews are expected to provide informative results and suggestions that the tourism sector may use to with the Gen Z audience through Instagram travel influencers.

The research logic of this study involves conducting both qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. By combining these two approaches, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research subject and generate valuable insights for the tourism sector. Qualitative research methods are essential in understanding the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals. In this study, qualitative research involves conducting expert interviews Instagram travel influencers, and tourism and marketing professionals. These interviews will explore their motivations, attitudes, and decision-making processes regarding the tourism consumption of Gen Z influenced by these influencers. On the other hand, quantitative research methods will provide a more objective and statistical analysis of the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. This approach involves designing and administering surveys to a larger sample of Gen Z individuals. By collecting quantitative data, it is possible to measure the extent to which Instagram travel influencers shape Gen Z's tourism behaviors. By combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study aims to triangulate the findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the results. The qualitative data will provide rich insights into the underlying motivations and subjective experiences of Instagram travel influencers and tourism and marketing professionals, while the quantitative data will allow for generalizations and statistical analysis of the influence of Instagram travel influencers on tourism consumption patterns of Gen Z. The integration of these two approaches will enable a comprehensive understanding of the research subject, generating valuable insights that can inform the tourism sector. Furthermore, the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods allows for a more nuanced examination of the research subject.

While qualitative research provides detailed insights into individual experiences and perceptions of one side, quantitative research offers a broader perspective by analyzing patterns and trends across a larger sample of Gen Z individuals. The combination of these two approaches will enable a comprehensive exploration of the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption, ensuring a more robust and well-rounded research study.

Aim of the research and justification for its need and relevance: The aim of this research is to analyze the influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. This study is important and relevant for several reasons. Firstly, Instagram has emerged as a popular platform for travel influencers, and Gen Z, as a key demographic, heavily engages with this platform. Understanding the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption is crucial for the tourism industry to effectively target and engage this audience. Secondly, influencer marketing has become an increasingly significant aspect of the tourism industry. By investigating the specific context of Instagram travel influencers and their impact on Gen Z's tourism consumption, this research fills a gap in the existing literature and contributes to the understanding of influencer marketing strategies. Thirdly, Gen Z represents a unique generation with distinct characteristics and preferences. Studying their relation to tourism consumption will provide valuable insights into their behaviors, motivations, and decision-making processes. This knowledge can help tourism marketers tailor their strategies to effectively engage Gen Z and meet their evolving needs.

The justification for conducting both qualitative and quantitative research methods lie in the complementary nature of these approaches. Qualitative research, through expert interviews, allows for an in-depth exploration of the perspectives and insights of Instagram travel influencers and industry professionals. This qualitative data will provide rich context and nuanced understandings. On the other hand, the quantitative research component, carried out through an online questionnaire targeted at Gen Z, enables the collection of numerical data on their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors related to Instagram travel influencers and tourism consumption. This data will allow for statistical analysis and generalizability to a larger population of Gen Z. By employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research topic, offer practical implications for the tourism industry, and contribute to the existing body of knowledge on influencer marketing and Gen Z's tourism consumption patterns.

2.2. Formulation and substantiation of research statements

The formulation and substantiation of research statements, including hypotheses and research assumptions, play a crucial role in guiding the research process and providing a framework for investigation. The following research statements have been formulated based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature on the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Generation Z's travel

decision-making process. These statements aim to investigate the role of Instagram travel influencers in Generation Z's tourism consumption.

Hypotheses for quantitative research:

H₁: Gen Z's trust in Instagram travel influencers as a source of reliable information plays a crucial role in their travel decision-making process.

This hypothesis is substantiated by the recognition that Instagram travel influencers have become prominent sources of travel-related information for Gen Z. As active social media users, Gen Z relies heavily on influencers for guidance and recommendations in various aspects of their lives, including travel. The hypothesis assumes that the extent to which Gen Z trusts Instagram travel influencers will significantly influence their travel decision-making process. Mchavu et al. (2022) found that Instagram influencers have a direct impact on Gen Z's intentions to visit local tourism destinations in Zanzibar. Therefore, considering the influence Instagram influencers have on Gen Z's intention to visit destinations, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the extent to which Gen Z trusts Instagram travel influencers will significantly influence their travel decision-making process. To examine the hypothesis, it is crucial to consider various factors that contribute to the perceived trustworthiness of Instagram travel influencers. Previous research conducted by ELTayeb in 2021 has identified these factors as significant determinants for Generation Y. ELTayeb's study indicated that individuals' travel experiences and recommendations on Instagram greatly influence their travel plans, with over half of the sample (305 participants) expressing belief in the authenticity of travel information shared on Instagram. Building upon ELTayeb's research, this study aims to investigate how Gen Z's trust in Instagram travel influencers impacts their travel choices. While ELTayeb focused on Generation Y, it is essential to examine whether similar patterns of trust and influence exist within Gen Z, the subsequent cohort. By assessing the trustworthiness of Instagram travel influencers among Gen Z, valuable insights can be gained regarding their decision-making processes when it comes to travel.

H₂: Instagram travel influencers have a significant impact on Gen Z's travel decision-making process, from the awareness stage to the final purchase decision.

This hypothesis is grounded in the acknowledgment that Instagram travel influencers possess the ability to shape and influence Gen Z's travel decisions throughout the entire consumer journey. From creating awareness about destinations and travel experiences to providing recommendations and influencing the final purchase decision, Instagram travel influencers hold considerable sway over Gen Z's travel choices. To substantiate this hypothesis, it is important to analyze the engagement levels, reach, and impact of influencers on Gen Z's travel-related behavior. Tolibjonov et al. (2021) found that Gen Zers in Uzbekistan use Instagram daily for account searches and direct messaging. While the author's research did not focus on usage frequency, it supports the idea that Instagram

influencers influence Gen Z's decision-making in booking a trip. This suggests that Instagram plays a crucial role in shaping Gen Z's travel-related behavior, and influencers on this platform have the potential to impact their decision-making process throughout the entire consumer journey. Additionally, Kazanci (2022) examined the influence of social media influencers' content on university students' intention to browse and purchase products. Although not specific to travel, the study's findings align with the idea that the content shared by influencers on social networks significantly affects consumer intentions. Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize that Instagram travel influencers can have a similar impact on Gen Z's travel decision-making, influencing them from the awareness stage to the final purchase decision. Analyzing the engagement levels, reach, and impact of influencers on Gen Z's travel-related behavior can provide further support for this hypothesis. By examining how Instagram travel influencers shape Gen Z's awareness of destinations, influence their considerations during the decision-making process, and impact their final purchase decisions, it is possible to gain valuable insights into the overall influence of influencers on Gen Z's travel choices.

The formulated hypotheses regarding the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Generation Z's travel decision-making process can be evaluated through several key criteria: the decision-making process, trust in Instagram influencers, and purchase intention. Firstly, the decision-making process criterion encompasses understanding how Instagram travel influencers influence different stages of Gen Z's travel decisions, including awareness, consideration, and final purchase. This criterion helps assess the overall impact and effectiveness of influencers in shaping Gen Z's travel choices. Secondly, the trust of Instagram influencers criterion focuses on examining the extent to which Generation Z perceives these influencers as reliable sources of information. It entails evaluating the perceived authenticity, credibility, and expertise of influencers, as they play a crucial role in building trust among their followers. Lastly, the purchase intention criterion involves analyzing the influencers' ability to influence Gen Z's intention to purchase travel-related products or services. By assessing these criteria, the research can provide valuable insights into the role and effectiveness of Instagram travel influencers on Generation Z's travel decision-making process.

Research assumptions for qualitative research:

RA₁: The power of Instagram influencers in promoting tourism is significant for tourism companies targeting Gen Z.

This research assumption is based on the understanding that Instagram influencers wield substantial influence over Gen Z's travel preferences and choices. Tourism companies recognize the potential of leveraging Instagram influencers as effective marketing tools to reach and engage with Generation Z. This assumption suggests that tourism companies targeting Gen Z consider Instagram influencers as valuable partners in their promotional efforts. The qualitative research should explore

the perceptions, experiences, and strategies employed by tourism companies in utilizing Instagram influencers to promote their offerings to Gen Z. Akdeniz and Kömürcü (2021) have provided theoretical support for the influence of social media influencers, such as Instagram influencers, in the tourism sector. Their study specifically investigated the relationship between travel agencies in Izmir and social media influencers. Through face-to-face interviews with 17 travel agencies, they explored the utilization of social media accounts and the influence of influencers on these agencies. The findings revealed that travel agencies actively use social media accounts and have recognized the advantages of collaborating with influencers. Furthermore, they have recently been influenced by the presence and impact of influencers. Drawing on this theoretical background, it is reasonable to assume that Instagram influencers hold significant power in promoting tourism, especially for tourism companies targeting Gen Z. The study can further explore how tourism companies perceive and utilize Instagram influencers as valuable partners in their promotional efforts to effectively reach and engage with the Gen Z demographic.

RA₂: The age of travel influencers affects the preference of tourism businesses and marketers for advertising to Gen Z

This research assumption recognizes that the age of travel influencers may impact the preferences of tourism businesses and marketers when selecting influencers for advertising campaigns targeting Gen Z. It posits that the age of influencers may influence how well they resonate with Gen Z's interests, values, and aspirations. The assumption suggests that tourism businesses and marketers may have specific criteria for partnering with influencers of a particular age group to effectively connect with and engage Gen Z. To evaluate this assumption, qualitative research can investigate the decision-making processes of tourism businesses and marketers when selecting influencers and their rationale behind age preferences. Furthermore, previous research has highlighted that online purchasing behavior varies according to age and educational status (Simavoğlu, 2019). This indicates that different age groups within Gen Z may exhibit distinct preferences and behaviors when it comes to making purchasing decisions online. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the age of travel influencers plays a role in determining their effectiveness in appealing to and resonating with specific segments of Gen Z. By considering this theoretical point, it is possible to assume that tourism businesses and marketers are likely to consider the age of travel influencers as a critical factor when selecting influencers for advertising campaigns targeting Gen Z. They may believe that influencers of a similar age to Gen Z are more likely to understand their interests, values, and aspirations, thus increasing the effectiveness of their marketing efforts.

In conclusion, the formulated hypotheses and research assumptions provide a robust framework for investigating the role of Instagram travel influencers in Gen Z's tourism consumption. The hypotheses for quantitative research emphasize the crucial role of trust in Instagram travel

influencers as reliable sources of information, and their significant impact on Gen Z's travel decisions, from the awareness stage to the final purchase decision. These hypotheses are supported by previous studies that highlight the influence of Instagram influencers on Gen Z's travel intentions and their perception of the authenticity of travel information shared on the platform. By exploring the trustworthiness of Instagram travel influencers among Gen Z, this research can yield valuable insights into the factors that shape their decision-making processes when it comes to travel.

The research assumptions for qualitative research further contribute to understanding the power of Instagram influencers in promoting tourism for businesses targeting Gen Z. These assumptions acknowledge the potential for tourism companies to leverage Instagram influencers as effective marketing tools and delve into the perceptions and strategies employed by these companies when utilizing influencers. Additionally, the assumptions consider the influence of influencer age on the preferences of tourism businesses and marketers in advertising campaigns targeting Gen Z. It is posited that influencers of a similar age to Gen Z are more likely to resonate with their interests, values, and aspirations, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

In summary, the formulated research statements provide a comprehensive framework for investigating how Instagram travel influencers impact Gen Z's travel decision-making process. By evaluating the decision-making process, trust in Instagram influencers, and purchase intention, this research aims to gain valuable insights into the role and effectiveness of these influencers in shaping Gen Z's travel choices. Furthermore, the qualitative research assumptions explore the power of Instagram influencers in promoting tourism and examine the potential influence of influencer age on marketing preferences. Together, these research statements and assumptions contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics between Instagram travel influencers, Gen Z, and the tourism industry, facilitating informed decision-making and strategic planning in the field.

2.3. Justification and description of the research methods chosen to test the research hypotheses and research assumptions

To effectively gather data on the views of Generation Z and tourism and marketing professionals in Europe, it is crucial to employ research methods that can accommodate a larger sample. This section provides a justification and description of the research methods chosen to test the research hypotheses and research assumptions. Online questionnaires and expert interviews have been selected as the primary data collection methods due to their widespread use, ability to reach large audiences quickly and economically, and various advantages such as ease of design, cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, and reduced effort (Dursun et al., 2020; Couper, 2000). These methods offer several benefits that make it well-suited for the study at hand.

Online Questionnaire Method: The chosen research method involves the distribution of an online survey form to respondents, who will complete the questionnaire by marking, sorting, or

typing appropriate answers. Once completed, respondents will submit the form for automatic recording of the data. Online questionnaires have gained popularity across different fields, including the social sciences, due to their flexibility and ease of use (Dursun et al., 2020).

The use of online surveys in this study is justified for several reasons. Firstly, online questionnaires provide the opportunity to reach a larger and more diverse sample, which is crucial for obtaining representative and generalizable results (Dursun et al., 2020). The online platform allows for the inclusion of participants from various locations, backgrounds, and demographics, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the target population. Secondly, online surveys offer cost-effectiveness by eliminating the need for printing, distribution, and manual data entry (Dursun et al., 2020). Traditional survey methods can incur significant expenses associated with printing questionnaires, postage, and manual data transcription. In contrast, online surveys streamline the data collection process and reduce overall research expenses, making them a practical choice for studies with limited resources. Moreover, online questionnaires are time-efficient and require less effort from both researchers and respondents. Traditional survey methods often involve time-consuming processes such as mailing, data entry, and manual data cleaning (Couper, 2000). These processes can introduce delays and errors. In contrast, online surveys facilitate quick data collection, automatic recording, and the ability to implement skip patterns and validation checks, saving valuable time and effort for both researchers and participants. Additionally, online surveys offer the advantage of anonymity and reduced social desirability bias. Participants may feel more comfortable expressing their true opinions and experiences when responding to online questionnaires as opposed to face-to-face or telephone interviews (Dursun et al., 2020). This can lead to more accurate and honest responses, enhancing the validity of the data collected.

In conclusion, the decision to utilize online questionnaires as one of the primary research methods in this study is well-founded, as it offers a multitude of benefits that align perfectly with the study's objectives. Online questionnaires have emerged as a powerful tool for data collection due to their ability to reach a larger and more diverse sample compared to traditional methods. One of the significant advantages of online questionnaires is their cost-effectiveness. Conducting surveys online eliminates the need for printing, postage, and manual data entry, resulting in substantial savings for researchers. This cost-effectiveness allows for a larger sample size, which can enhance the statistical power of the study and increase the generalizability of the findings. Time efficiency is another compelling reason for selecting online questionnaires. Traditional methods, such as face-to-face interviews or paper surveys, require significant logistical planning, scheduling, and coordination. On the other hand, online surveys can be conveniently administered at any time and from anywhere, allowing respondents to participate at their own convenience. This flexibility not only saves time for both researchers and participants but also enables the study to collect data from

a geographically dispersed population. Furthermore, online questionnaires reduce the effort required from both researchers and respondents. Researchers can design and distribute surveys electronically with ease, eliminating the need for manual data entry and minimizing the potential for human error. Respondents, on the other hand, can complete the survey in their own time and pace, without the pressure of face-to-face interaction or time constraints. This convenience encourages higher response rates and reduces the likelihood of response bias, resulting in more accurate and reliable data. The potential for obtaining more accurate and honest responses is another noteworthy advantage of online questionnaires. Due to the anonymity and privacy offered by online surveys, respondents may feel more comfortable expressing their true opinions and providing candid feedback. This increased sense of anonymity can lead to more authentic responses, allowing researchers to gain deeper insights into the views and perceptions of the target population. By leveraging online questionnaires, this study aims to collect a substantial amount of data that can contribute significantly to the understanding of Generation Z's perspectives on Instagram travel influencers. The large sample size made possible by online surveys can provide robust statistical analyses, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of research hypotheses and assumptions. The insights generated from the data collected can help identify trends, patterns, and correlations, providing valuable information for academics, marketers, and policymakers in the field of social media and influencer marketing.

Expert Interview Method: Interviews serve as a valuable means of creating meaning, actively involving both the researcher and the participant in the process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2016). This method entails asking individuals questions about their lives and analyzing their responses. In the realm of research, e-interviews have emerged as an alternative approach, relying on computer-mediated communication instead of face-to-face meetings in a shared physical location (Linabary & Hamel, 2017). E-interviews offer cost-effectiveness for researchers compared to other formats such as in-person or phone interviews (Salman, 2020). Additionally, conducting interviews with multiple participants simultaneously presents opportunities for efficient time management (Meho, 2006). The chosen research methods for testing research assumptions are essential to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings. In this study, the interview method was adopted to gain valuable insights from participants, thereby addressing the research assumptions. The decision to employ interviews as one of the primary research methods was based on several factors. First, interviews provide an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives, experiences, and opinions (Holstein & Gubrium, 2016). By engaging in direct dialogue, the researcher can gather rich and nuanced data that might not be fully captured through other data collection methods. Furthermore, the utilization of e-interviews allows for flexibility in terms of geographical location and time constraints (Linabary & Hamel, 2017). Conducting interviews electronically enables participants and researchers to

communicate conveniently, regardless of their physical distance. This approach not only increases accessibility but also provides a cost-effective alternative, reducing expenses associated with travel and accommodation for face-to-face interviews (Salman, 2020). In terms of addressing multiple participants simultaneously, conducting group interviews or focus groups offers advantages in terms of time efficiency (Meho, 2006). By gathering a group of participants together, the researcher can extract valuable information from multiple sources in a single session, optimizing time management and resource allocation. In conclusion, the interview method, specifically e-interviews and group interviews, have been selected as the research methods for testing the research hypotheses and assumptions. This choice is justified by the ability to obtain in-depth insights, the cost-effectiveness of e-interviews, and the time efficiency provided by group interviews. By employing these research methods, this study aims to collect comprehensive data to support the research objectives and contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

In summary, this research paper aims to examine the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. To achieve this, the study uses a research strategy that combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods, such as online expert interviews with Instagram travel influencers and tourism and marketing professionals, and online questionnaires targeted at Gen Z. Qualitative research forms an integral part of this study and involves conducting online expert interviews with renowned Instagram travel influencers, as well as industry professionals specializing in tourism and marketing. These interviews serve as a means to gather first-hand experiences, expert opinions, and in-depth perspectives from individuals who possess extensive knowledge and expertise in the field. By engaging with these influential figures, the research aims to uncover the underlying motivations, strategies, and tactics utilized by Instagram travel influencers in shaping the tourism preferences and behaviors of Gen Z. In conjunction with qualitative research, quantitative research methods are employed to further enhance the study's comprehensiveness. Specifically, online questionnaires are designed and distributed to the target audience, Generation Z. These questionnaires are carefully crafted to elicit relevant information regarding their travel habits, preferences, and decision-making processes when it comes to tourism consumption. By collecting and analyzing quantitative data from a diverse range of Gen Z respondents, the study seeks to identify common patterns, trends, and preferences within this specific demographic, shedding light on the significant impact of Instagram travel influencers on their tourism choices. By adopting this multifaceted research approach, this paper aims to provide a holistic and nuanced understanding of the relationship between Instagram travel influencers and Gen Z's tourism consumption. The findings and insights derived from this research are intended to offer valuable guidance to the tourism industry, enabling them to tailor their strategies and marketing efforts in a way that resonates authentically with Gen Z. Ultimately, this research paper strives to contribute to

the body of knowledge in the field of tourism and serve as a valuable resource for industry professionals seeking to engage with the influential Gen Z demographic in the ever-evolving landscape of social media.

2.4. Substantiation and description of the data, their collection and processing methods, sample, and data sources

This section provides a substantiation and description of the data, as well as an overview of the methods used for data collection, processing, and sampling in the research study. The data were collected through both quantitative and qualitative research approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The quantitative data were gathered through an online survey targeting Gen Z individuals from Europe and Asia who use Instagram. The data collection period for the survey lasted from March 25 to April 25. The survey employed a stratified sampling technique, and a total of 420 respondents participated. On the other hand, qualitative data were obtained through two types of expert interviews: one with Instagram travel influencers and another with tourism and marketing professionals. The participants for the interviews were selected using purposive sampling techniques, ensuring a diverse and knowledgeable set of perspectives. The interviews were conducted using Google Forms and included open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses. Overall, the data collection methods and samples employed in this study aimed to provide a comprehensive and insightful understanding of the research topic, drawing from the perspectives of Generation Z individuals, travel influencers, and industry professionals.

2.4.1. Quantitative research data collection

For the quantitative research, an online survey was conducted to collect data. The survey targeted individuals from Gen Z (born between 1995 and 2010) in Europe and Asia who use Instagram. The online questionnaire (See Table 3) was designed to gather insights about participants' decision-making process, trust in Instagram influencers, and purchase intention related to travel. The Likert scale was utilized to measure participants' agreement or disagreement with the statements. The adapted questions focused on various aspects of Instagram travel influencers' influence, including their impact on travel decisions, trustworthiness of their information, and the extent to which participants use their content for travel planning. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements such as "Instagram travel influencers' reviews have an influence on my final travel decision" and "I usually choose my trips from the posts provided by Instagram travel influencers." The Likert scale provided a structured format for participants to express their opinions, enabling the researchers to quantify and analyze their responses effectively. The selected questions were adapted from previous research studies such as ELTayeb (2021) and Tolibjonov et al. (2021), ensuring relevance and reliability in capturing participants' perceptions and behaviors regarding Instagram travel influencers.

Online questionnaire design

Subject	Adapted Questions	Adapted from
<i>Decision-making Process</i>	Instagram travel influencers' reviews have an influence on my final travel decision.	ELTayeb. (2021)
	The content provided by travel influencers on Instagram has a great impact on my travel.	
	I will definitely visit or try the travel destinations recommended by Instagram travel influencers.	
	Instagram travel influencers influence my decision-making in booking a trip.	
	After seeing pictures/videos uploaded by Instagram travel influencers, I determined to travel to that destination.	
<i>Trust of Instagram Influencer</i>	After seeing pictures/videos uploaded by Instagram travel influencers, I am inspired to find more information about the destinations.	Tolibjonov et al. (2021)
	For various ways to collect information about travel destinations, I prefer to follow Instagram travel influencers.	
	I hesitate to travel to a destination or visit a place if it has negative posts from Instagram travel influencers.	ELTayeb. (2021)
	Information by Instagram travel influencers regarding tourism seems reliable to me.	
	I can make changes to all or parts of my travel plan after checking what is posted by travel influencers on Instagram.	
	I usually choose my trips from the posts provided by Instagram travel influencers.	
<i>Purchase Intention</i>	Instagram travel influencers answer my inquiries on Instagram.	
	I use Instagram travel influencers contents when I search for ideas on where to travel.	
	I usually choose my trips from the posts provided by Instagram travel influencers.	
	I use Instagram after my trip to share my experiences	
	I will continue to use Instagram travel influencers and recommend it to friends in search of tourist destinations	

Source: This table was created by the author based on ELTayeb (2021); Tolibjonov et al. (2021).

To reach the target audience, the survey was published through various online channels that specifically targeted Gen Z. The survey was available for respondents to complete from March 25 to April 25. To ensure a representative sample, a stratified sampling technique was employed. This approach involves dividing the population into relevant subgroups (strata) and then selecting participants from each subgroup in proportion to their representation of the population. The aim was to include a diverse range of participants from different regions and backgrounds. In the following section (Table 4), descriptive analysis is done for demographics of respondents.

Demographic analysis of Gen Z respondents

	Categories	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>	Male	175	41.7
	Female	227	54
	Non-binary	9	2.1
	Prefer not to say	9	2.1
<i>Education level</i>	High School	69	16.4
	Associate degree or some college	92	21.9
	Bachelor's Degree	138	32.9
	Master's Degree	64	15.2
	Ph.D. or higher	18	4.3
	Prefer not to say	39	9.3
<i>Birthplace</i>	North America	36	8.5
	Europe	197	46.9
	Asia	187	44.5
<i>Marital status</i>	Yes	89	21.2
	No	309	73.6
	Prefer not to say	22	5.2
<i>Employment status</i>	Employed Full-Time	93	22.1
	Employed Part-Time	73	17.4
	Student	128	30.5
	Seeking opportunities	73	17.4
	Prefer not to say	53	12.6
<i>Income level</i>	Less than €400	75	17.9
	400€ - 800€	64	15.2
	800€- 1200€	62	14.8
	1200€ - 1600€	67	16
	1600€ - 2000€	36	8.6
	More than 2000€	30	7.1
	Prefer not to say	86	20.5

According to the data, it can be observed that the majority of surveyed Gen Z people were born in the years 1995 to 1999, with the highest number of respondents being born in 1998 with 22.9% (See Annex 4). When it comes to their education level, most individuals have completed a bachelor's degree (32.9%) with those who have an associate's or college degree (21.9%) following closely behind. In terms of birthplace, the respondents mainly come from Europe (46.9%) and Asia (44.5%), while North America (8.5%) are relatively underrepresented, and there are no respondents from Africa, Australia, South or Central America. The majority of those surveyed are unmarried (73.6%), and many work full-time (22.1%) or are students (30.5%). There is a wide range of income levels, with most respondents earning less than €400 per month (17.9%) and the smallest proportion earning more than €2000 per month (7.1%).

2.4.2. Qualitative research data collection

The qualitative research involved two types of interviews: one with Instagram travel influencers and another with tourism and marketing professionals.

For the interviews with travel influencers, a purposive sampling technique was utilized to select participants who met specific criteria. The criteria included having a presence on Instagram, prior experience collaborating with tourism businesses, and having at least 15,000 followers on the platform. The researcher identified potential participants by observing their activities on social media platforms. Afterwards, 35 travel influencers were reached out to via Instagram Direct Messages, and a summary of the research was provided to them. Ultimately, five influencers and one travel nomad, who did not consider herself an influencer, volunteered to participate in the study. Two influencers initially accepted but later did not respond to the interview request. These interviews aimed to explore the perspectives of influencers on transmedia storytelling in the context of travel. The table below (Table 5) presents essential information about the Instagram travel influencers involved, including their usernames, sex, age, location, number of followers, and number of followings.

Table 5

Information of Instagram travel influencers participating in the expert interview

Expert Code	Instagram Username	Sex	Age	Location	Number of Followers	Number of Following
I1	travelerschild	M	31	Lithuania	15K	1604
I2	laurewanders	F	34	Belgium	20,9K	878
I3	renaosman	F	X	Azerbaijan	21,4K	169
I4	helincegozdeyerler	F	30	Turkey	102K	162
I5	emmasroadmap	F	24	Belgium	109K	1016
I6	call_me_mumasy	F	39	England	166K	163

In the expert interview conducted through a Google form, ten questions were asked to six Instagram travel influencers, requesting information about their demographics and experiences as Instagram influencers (See Annex 2). Regarding the motivation to share experiences through Instagram, the interview aimed to explore both the initial motivations that led individuals to start sharing their experiences on the platform and the factors that continue to drive their engagement. Startup motivations often include the desire to express oneself, build a personal brand, connect with others, or pursue a passion. Continuation motivations, on the other hand, could involve the joy of sharing experiences, inspiring others, receiving positive feedback, or establishing oneself as an expert in a particular field. Another area of exploration was brand partnerships with tourism businesses. Participants were asked if they had ever collaborated with such businesses and were invited to provide information about the projects and processes involved. Additionally, the interview sought to

understand the reaction of their followers to these partnerships, the budgeting aspects, as well as the positive and negative aspects experienced. This information helps to shed light on the dynamics and outcomes of influencer-brand collaborations within the tourism industry. Lastly, the interview aimed to measure the preferred collaboration strategies employed by Instagram influencers when working with brands. A wide range of options was provided, including sponsored posts, guest blog posts, product and content collaborations, themed campaigns, shoutout content, brand ambassadors, reviews, pre-release campaigns, competitions and giveaways, event activations, hosting brand experience events, takeovers, discount codes, affiliate campaigns, integrated content, and branded hashtags. By understanding which strategies influencers prefer, brands can tailor their collaborations to align with the influencers' preferences and maximize the effectiveness of their partnerships. By analyzing the responses provided by the six participants, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the influencer landscape and how these individuals engage with brands and their followers on social media platforms like Instagram.

The second set of interviews was conducted with professionals in the tourism and marketing industries. The purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who met specific criteria, including experience in the tourism or marketing industry and experience with influencer marketing. The expert interview was conducted using a Google form to gather information and perspectives from 19 professionals on influencer marketing and its impact on Gen Z. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions (See Annex 3), including demographic information, which provided a comprehensive understanding of the participants' backgrounds and experiences. Through this expert interview, valuable insights were obtained regarding the professionals' views on influencer marketing, its effectiveness, advantages, disadvantages, selection criteria, and barriers to collaboration. The data collected through the Google form served as a foundation for analyzing and summarizing the perspectives of these professionals on influencer marketing in the tourism industry. The researcher identified potential participants through networking and online research. A total of 19 professionals agreed to be interviewed, with 9 having experience in influencer marketing and 10 having no previous experience. Overall, these interviews aimed to gather insights into the perspectives of professionals on influencer marketing and its impact on Gen Z.

The data obtained from these interviews, as presented in Table 6, includes information such as the gender, company name, country, and company size of the participants. This information provides a contextual background for the professionals involved in the study. The sample of professionals included in the study represents a diverse range of backgrounds and expertise within the tourism and marketing industries. Their experiences and insights offer valuable perspectives on the subject matter.

Information of tourism and marketing professionals participating in the expert interview

Expert Code	Gender	Company Name	Country	Company Size
P1	F	Casa Sur Hotel	Turkey	11-50
P2	M	BM Digital	Lithuania	51-100
P3	F	Falcon Hotel	Turkey	101-500
P4	F	MEV	Spain	11-50
P5	M	XXX Dent	Turkey	51-100
P6	M	Iberostar Hotel	Spain	501 or more
P7	M	Corendon Airlines	Turkey	501 or more
P8	M	Sherwood Hotels	Turkey	501 or more
P9	F	Ibis Brussels City Centre	Belgium	51-100

The researcher employed qualitative analysis techniques to identify common themes, patterns, and viewpoints expressed by the participants. In conclusion, the data collected through expert interviews with professionals in the tourism and marketing industries provides valuable substantiation and description for understanding the perspectives on influencer marketing and its impact on Gen Z. The collection and processing methods employed in this study allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the topic, drawing insights from a diverse range of professionals in different countries and company sizes. The findings from this study can contribute to a deeper understanding of influencer marketing and its implications for targeting Gen Z in the tourism and marketing sectors.

In summary, the interviews with both travel influencers and professionals were conducted using Google Forms, with open-ended questions that allowed participants to provide detailed responses. For professionals without prior experience in influencer marketing, additional questions were included to understand their reasons for not collaborating with influencers. Overall, the qualitative research involved interviews with a total of 6 travel influencers and 19 tourism and marketing professionals, providing rich qualitative data for analysis.

2.5. Limitations of the study and evaluation of the reliability of the results

In recent years, the role of travel influencers in promoting tourism has become increasingly significant. With the rise of platforms like Instagram, influencers have become a popular source of information and inspiration for potential Gen Z travelers. While previous research has explored the general impact of influencer marketing on tourism, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Instagram travel influencers on tourism consumption among Gen Z, by incorporating perspectives from Instagram travel influencers themselves, as well as tourism and marketing professionals, and Gen Z individuals. It is important to note that there are certain limitations to this study.

Limitations of the quantitative research:

- The sample size of the online questionnaire may be limited to specific regions, such as Europe and Asia, and therefore may not be representative of the broader population.
- The study may not be able to account for other external factors that may influence the impact of influencer marketing on tourism consumption of Gen Z, such as changes in the political or economic climate.

Limitations of the qualitative research:

- The use of expert interview data from Instagram travel influencers may introduce biases into the analysis, as influencers may provide biased or incomplete information.
- The limited number of expert interviews with Instagram travel influencers, who come from different countries such as Belgium, Lithuania, Turkey, and Azerbaijan, may affect their opinions due to differences in cultural, social, and economic factors.
- The limited number of expert interviews with tourism and marketing professionals may limit the generalizability of the findings to a wider population.

Evaluation of the reliability of the results: The results of the questionnaire are analyzed on SPSS. Cronbach Alpha is used to evaluate the reliability of variables. The reliability of a questionnaire is crucial as it guarantees that the information gathered is dependable and precise. One of the ways to measure reliability is through Cronbach's Alpha, which evaluates the internal consistency of a group of survey questions. An acceptable Cronbach's Alpha value is typically 0.70 or higher, which signifies that the survey questions are dependable and coherent (Lance et al., 2006). Looking at the table provided (Table 7), it can be seen that the answers have a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.829, which exceeds the acceptable threshold. This suggests that the responses were reliable and can be considered a valid measure of the responses.

Table 7

Reliability Analysis		
Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.829	0.828	15

In conclusion, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Instagram travel influencers on tourism consumption among Gen Z by incorporating perspectives from various stakeholders. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The quantitative research had a limited sample size, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Additionally, the study may not have accounted for external factors that could influence the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's tourism consumption. Qualitative

research, which included expert interviews, may have introduced biases due to influencers potentially providing biased or incomplete information. Furthermore, the limited number of interviews with influencers and tourism professionals may impact the diversity of opinions expressed. Despite these limitations, the study utilized Cronbach's Alpha to assess the reliability of the online questionnaire responses, and the obtained value of 0.829 indicated consistency. Therefore, the findings can be considered reliable and provide valuable insights into the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. Future research could address the limitations by expanding the sample size, considering a wider range of external factors, and conducting more comprehensive interviews with diverse stakeholders.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS OF THE IMPACT OF INSTAGRAM TRAVEL INFLUENCERS ON GEN Z'S TOURISM CONSUMPTION AND DISCUSSION

This empirical study aims to investigate the impact of Instagram travel influencers on the tourism consumption of Gen Z. The study employs quantitative and qualitative analyses to determine the influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. The analysis and synthesis of various literature and the acquisition of information from scientific sources and databases were carried out by the author. The theory on the impact of influencer marketing on tourism has been summarized and relevant research has been considered while expert interviews with tourism and marketing professionals, and Instagram travel influencers, and online questionnaire with Gen Z.

3.1. Systemized results of empirical research: organizing and analyzing the findings of the empirical study

3.1.1. Quantitative research data collection and analysis findings

The questionnaire was sent to people who were born between 1995 and 2010 (Gen Z) and use Instagram via online channels. Stratified sampling is used. In total, 420 people answered the survey. The results of the survey are analyzed on SPSS. Since the sample size is more than 50, Kolmogorov-Smirnov analysis was checked (See Annex 5), and the critical probability level answers have a **normal distribution** (+2.58). Therefore, the dependent variable is normally distributed, and normality is assumed. The survey employed a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" to measure all items. The Figure 3 presents the mean, median, and mode of responses for the 15 questions. The results show that the mode and median responses predominantly indicate a tendency towards "somewhat agree," while the mean value reflects a general tendency towards "strongly agree."

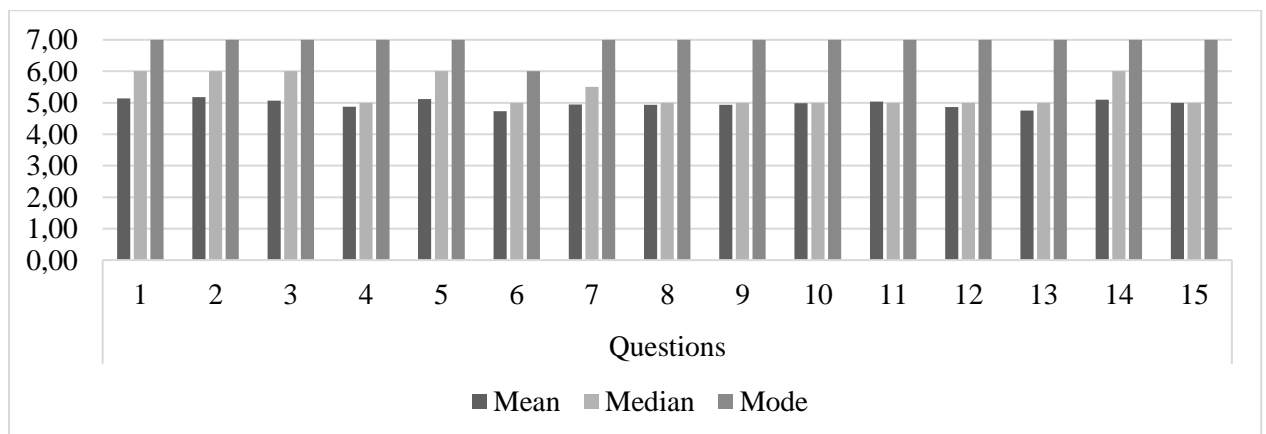


Figure 3. Mean, Median, and Mode of the Answers

Cronbach's Alpha measures internal consistency of survey questions. A value of 0.70 or higher is acceptable (Lance et al., 2006). In Table 7, responses achieved an Alpha of 0.829, exceeding the threshold. This implies reliable and valid participant views. The Spearman analysis was used to check whether there is a correlation between various statements related to trust towards Instagram travel influencers and their impact on travel decisions of Gen Z (Table 8). The data suggests that there is a statistically significant positive correlation between all statements, $p > 0.01$, meaning that there is a relationship between trust towards Instagram travel influencers and their impact on travel decisions of Gen Z. In particular, the data shows that the statements "Instagram travel influencers influence my decision-making in booking a trip" (Correlation Coefficient is ,356) and "I usually choose my trips from the posts provided by Instagram travel influencers" (Correlation Coefficient is ,277) have the strongest positive correlation with other statements considering that these two statements had the highest positive correlation coefficients with the other statements in the table. This suggests that Instagram travel influencers have a significant impact on travel decisions of Gen Z, and that their opinions and recommendations are highly valued by their Gen Z followers. However, it is important to note that correlation does not imply causation. While these results suggest a relationship between the trust towards Instagram travel influencers and travel decisions, it is possible that other factors may be contributing to these decisions. Additionally, correlation does not indicate the strength of the relationship or whether the relationship is meaningful in practice. Therefore, while these results are interesting and suggestive, they should be interpreted with caution.

Table 8

The correlation between trust towards Instagram travel influencers and Gen Zers travel decision-making (Bivariate correlation analysis, spearman)

Correlations			
		<i>8) Information by Instagram travel influencers regarding tourism seems reliable to me.</i>	<i>15) I will continue to use Instagram travel influencers and recommend it to friends in search of tourist destinations.</i>
<i>1) After seeing pictures/videos uploaded by Instagram travel influencers, I am determined to travel to that destination.</i>	Correlation Coefficient	,273**	,297**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000

Table 8 continuation

3) <i>The content provided by travel influencers on Instagram has a great impact on my travel.</i>	Correlation Coefficient	,196**	,240**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,000
5) <i>I hesitate to travel to a destination or visit a place if it has negative posts from Instagram travel influencers.</i>	Correlation Coefficient	,183**	,182**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,000
11) <i>Instagram travel influencers influence my decision-making in booking a trip.</i>	Correlation Coefficient	,356**	,313**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,000
12) <i>Instagram travel influencers' reviews have an influence on my final travel decision.</i>	Correlation Coefficient	,247**	,242**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,000
13) <i>I usually choose my trips from the posts provided by Instagram travel influencers.</i>	Correlation Coefficient	,277**	,270**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,000
N		420	420

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The table below (Table 9) shows the results of an ANOVA analysis on the relationship between various independent variables statements related to Instagram travel influencers and their impact on the perceived reliability of their information about tourism. The dependent variable is "Information by Instagram travel influencers regarding tourism seems reliable to me." The regression model had a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable, $F(7, 412) = 11.130$, $p < .001$. This indicates that the independent variables in the model (Predictors; I usually choose my trips from the posts provided by Instagram travel influencers; After seeing pictures/videos uploaded by Instagram travel influencers, I am inspired to find more information about the destinations; I hesitate to travel to a destination or visit a place if it has negative posts from Instagram travel influencers; The content provided by travel influencers on Instagram has a great impact on my travel; Instagram travel influencers' reviews have an influence on my final travel decision; Instagram travel influencers influence my decision-making in booking a trip) were collectively able to predict the perceived reliability of information by Instagram travel influencers.

Multiple regression analysis between trust towards Instagram travel influencers and Gen Zers travel decision-making (Anova)

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	218,846	7	31,264	11,130	,000^b
	Residual	1157,288	412	2,809		
	Total	1376,133	419			
<p>a. Dependent Variable: 8) Information by Instagram travel influencers regarding tourism seems reliable to me.</p> <p>b. Predictors: (Constant), 13) I usually choose my trips from the posts provided by Instagram travel influencers., 2) After seeing pictures/videos uploaded by Instagram travel influencers, I am inspired to find more information about the destinations., 5) I hesitate to travel to a destination or visit a place if it has negative posts from Instagram travel influencers., 3) The content provided by travel influencers on Instagram has a great impact on my travel., 1) After seeing pictures/videos uploaded by Instagram travel influencers, I determined to travel to that destination., 12) Instagram travel influencers' reviews have an influence on my final travel decision., 11) Instagram travel influencers influence my decision-making in booking a trip.</p>						

To further understand the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, the author examines the specific regression coefficients for each independent variable in order to give a sense of the relative importance of each variable in predicting perceived reliability. Table 10 shows the coefficients for a multiple regression model where the dependent variable is "Information by Instagram travel influencers regarding tourism seems reliable to me" and the independent variables are various independent variable statements related to the influence of Instagram travel influencers on travel decisions. The results indicate that the model as a whole is statistically significant ($F = 11.130$, $p < .001$), meaning that at least one of the independent variables has a significant relationship with the dependent variable. Looking at the individual coefficients, it is correct to say that three independent variables have statistically significant relationships with the dependent variable at a p-value of .05 or lower: "After seeing pictures/videos uploaded by Instagram travel influencers, I determined to travel to that destination" ($B = .127$, $p = .014$), "Instagram travel influencers influence my decision-making in booking a trip" ($B = .196$, $p < .001$), and "I usually choose my trips from the posts provided by Instagram travel influencers" ($B = .094$, $p = .059$, which is close to but slightly above the .05 threshold). The positive signs of these coefficients indicate that higher scores on these independent variables are associated with higher scores on the dependent variable, meaning that Gen Z individuals who are more influenced by Instagram travel influencers are more likely to find their information reliable. Therefore, according to these findings, ' H_1 : Gen Z's trust in Instagram travel influencers as a source of reliable information plays a crucial role in their

travel decision-making process.’ and ‘ H_2 : Instagram travel influencers have a significant impact on Gen Z's travel decision-making process, from the awareness stage to the final purchase decision.’ can be **approved**. The other independent variables, such as negative posts from Instagram travel influencers and Instagram travel influencers' reviews, do not have statistically significant relationships with the dependent variable at the $p < .05$ level. It is worth noting that the statistical significance of the results is influenced by the sample size, therefore it is possible that with a larger sample.

Table 10

Multiple regression analysis between trust towards Instagram travel influencers and Gen Zers travel decision-making (Coefficients)

Coefficients					
			Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
			Beta		
(Constant)	2,483	0,390		6,360	0,000
<i>1) After seeing pictures/videos uploaded by Instagram travel influencers, I determined to travel to that destination.</i>	0,127	0,051	0,125	2,475	0,014
<i>11) Instagram travel influencers influence my decision-making in booking a trip.</i>	0,196	0,054	0,202	3,668	0,000
<i>13) I usually choose my trips from the posts provided by Instagram travel influencers.</i>	0,094	0,050	0,105	1,896	0,059
<i>a. Dependent Variable: 8) Information by Instagram travel influencers regarding tourism seems reliable to me.</i>					

Furthermore, Pearson correlations was checked between various demographic variables and two dependent variables related to Gen Zers' trust towards Instagram travel influencers (See Annex 6). The correlation coefficient for statement "Information by Instagram travel influencers regarding tourism seems reliable to me" is significant at the 0.01 level, negatively correlated with gender ($r = -0.145$), and positively correlated with income level ($r = 0.137$). The negative correlation with gender suggests that females tend to perceive the information provided by Instagram travel influencers as less reliable compared to males. In contrast, the positive correlation with income level suggests that individuals with higher income tend to perceive the information provided by Instagram travel influencers as more reliable. The correlation coefficient for statement "I will continue to use

Instagram travel influencers and recommend it to friends in search of tourist destinations" is significant at the 0.05 level, positively correlated with education level ($r = 0.101$) and income level ($r = 0.076$), and negatively correlated with birth year ($r = -0.159$). The positive correlations between education level and income level suggest that individuals with higher education and income levels are more likely to use and recommend Instagram travel influencers for tourism purposes. The negative correlation with birth year suggests that younger people are more likely to use and recommend Instagram travel influencers for tourism purposes compared to older people. However, there are no significant correlations between birthplace, marital status, or employment status and either statement on two dependent variables related to Gen Zers' trust towards Instagram travel influencers. These findings may be useful for marketers and tourism companies who use Instagram travel influencers as a means of promoting tourist destinations.

3.1.2. Qualitative research data collection and analysis findings

When conducting research using a phenomenological approach, it is crucial to be selective with participants to ensure that those who have actually experienced the important situation or phenomenon are included in the study. It is important that the participants have gained the necessary experience and are selected in a manner that ensures a homogeneous distribution.

3.1.2.1. Expert interview with Instagram travel influencers

With this perspective in mind, a sample set was created from Instagram travel influencers primarily to conduct interviews. When determining the sample, a purposive sampling technique was used by the researcher to limit the universe and establish certain criteria in order to obtain a rich data set related to transmedia storytelling. The participant selection criteria include having a presence on Instagram, prior experience collaborating with tourism businesses, and having 15,000 or more followers on the platform. As the research was carried out on a voluntary basis, influencers with the specified characteristics were identified by observing them on social media platforms. In addition, 35 travel influencers were reached via their Instagram Direct Messages. Summary information about the research was provided to the travel influencers. After the request for an interview, 5 influencers and one travel nomad, who did not consider herself as an influencer, volunteered to participate in the study, and 2 influencers initially accepted but later did not respond to the interview request.

The expert interview first aimed to explore the motivations of travel influencers in sharing their experiences on Instagram (See Annex 7). The first question asked was "What motivates you to share your experiences through Instagram?" The purpose of this question was to gain insight into the reasons behind travel influencers' sharing their experiences on the social media platform Instagram. I6 responded, "*Being productive, creative, open-minded.*" I1's main motivation was "*To be able to create a brand and a following which would allow me to start earning from sharing my experiences.*" I4 stated, "*To be rewarded for my efforts, for my reels views to reach millions, my followers'*

comments, messages..." I5 said, "I love to share my experiences traveling with other people so that they can have a great time too." I3's motivation was "To want all people to experience travel." Finally, I2 expressed, "I love photography and documenting my travels and I think Instagram is a great place to do that. I see my Instagram as a reminder/diary of my travels for myself, but I also love to see how people get inspired by it and ask questions about certain destinations.". The responses showed a range of motivations for sharing travel experiences on Instagram. Some influencers were motivated by personal fulfillment, such as being creative or having a diary of their travels. Others were driven by external rewards, such as earning money or receiving comments and messages from followers. Despite these differences in motivation, there was a common theme of wanting to share travel experiences with others, whether it was to inspire them to travel or to share the joy of traveling.

The purpose of the second question was to investigate the experiences of travel influencers who had brand partnerships with tourism businesses. In addition, the question aimed to gather information on the process, reactions of followers, budgeting, positive aspects, and negative aspects of these partnerships. To this end, the participants were asked the question, "Have you ever had a brand partnership with any type of tourism business?" All of the influencers responded positively. They were then asked to provide information about their experiences. For instance, I6 stated that she created brand awareness for her partner through social media. I1 had two successful cooperations with the cities of Kaunas and Gent, which resulted in an increase in followers. I4 noted that her followers appreciated her honesty in sharing both good and bad experiences. I5 discussed the importance of the right to content, and she mentioned "It depends on the collab and the type of brand. Sometimes they contact me to ask if I want to take part in their campaign, sometimes I contact them to pitch and see if they have a budget for influencer collabs. Some brands want to see the content in advance and approve it, some don't and give you lots of flexibility. When the tourism partner fits well with my content & audience, I usually receive a lot of positive reactions in the form of DMs (direct messages) and comments.". I3 reported that her followers were interested in tips about hotels and discounts on airline companies. Finally, I2 shared her trip with the tourism board of Sri Lanka to promote the East coast and she mentioned " I loved seeing that once I started sharing content about it, so many people were interested in going there. I don't remember the negative aspects, other than that it was 10 super busy days.". Overall, the results showed that brand partnerships with tourism businesses can be beneficial for both the influencer and the business. It is important that the majority of the influencers did not want to share details about the budget. Also, it is interesting to note that all the participants reported positive reactions from their followers, which suggests that such collaborations are generally well-received by the audience. Additionally, while some participants mentioned the importance of authenticity in their collaborations, others emphasized the need for contracts and control over the content.

The question of how influencer marketing activities affect Gen Z's decision-making in the tourism sector was asked to the Instagram travel influencers to gain insight into the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's decision-making in tourism and to understand how influencers perceive their role in this regard. The responses varied among the influencers. I6 said that *"Gen Z is more likely to search for multiple experiences and genuine reviews before making a decision because they are more purposeful."* I1 believes that influencer marketing helps in choosing travel destinations and planning itineraries. I4 replied *"I think we have the power to influence the decision-making processes of Gen Z in the tourism sector only if we work long-term."* which emphasizes the importance of a long-term relationship between influencers and tourism businesses to effectively influence Gen Z's decision-making. I5 said *"I don't know about Gen Z specifically because it's not my target audience, but people send me messages that they've travelled to the places I showed on Instagram or did the things I did."* which indicates that influencers can have a significant impact on travel decisions even if they are not targeting Gen Z specifically. I3 *"I think Gen Z is more interested in budget travel than for example luxury tourism. They stay in hostels or book a budget room on Airbnb, they eat in budget cafes, more visit historical places and etc."* which highlights the preference of Gen Z for budget travel and the importance of providing information in this direction. I2 mentioned *"I think it influences Gen Z a lot, and sometimes find it sad to see that when a destination goes viral, you have to line up in a queue to have your picture taken there. But it can be used in a positive way too, like promoting eco-tourism, for example."* which suggests that influencer marketing can have both positive and negative effects. The responses indicate a range of views on the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's decision-making in tourism. However, the importance of a long-term relationship, genuine reviews, and providing information on budget travel appear to be consistent themes across the responses.

The next question was related to the communication strategies employed by influencers in influencer marketing collaborations targeted at Gen Z. Specifically, the question asked whether the influencers differentiate their communication strategies based on the target audience's generation or segment their audiences at all. The responses indicated a unanimous trend, as all six influencers responded in the negative, stating that they do not differentiate or segment their communication strategies. One influencer stated that they try to give information that works for everyone. This trend suggests that influencers do not tailor their communication strategies based on the target audience's generation or segment their audiences, instead choosing to communicate in the same way across all their followers. From an analytical perspective, it can be concluded that the influencers' responses reflect a lack of perceived difference between their target audience's generations, possibly due to the similarity of interests and preferences across generations. This similarity may be a result of the

democratization of travel and leisure activities enabled by the internet and social media, which has led to the homogenization of experiences across different age groups.

The question posed to the influencers was aimed at understanding the stage of the tourism consumption process at which travel influencers have the most significant impact on Gen Z. Five out of the six influencers agreed that the information search stage was the most significant stage for influencer impact. On the other hand, I5 believed that influencers had a more significant impact on the problem recognition stage. The similarity in the influencers' responses implies that travel businesses looking to target Gen Z should focus their influencer marketing efforts on the information search stage to maximize the impact of their campaigns. The next question asked in this interview was, "From your experience, what influencer marketing strategies have been successful in influencing Gen Z's tourism decisions?" to gain insights into the effectiveness of different influencer marketing strategies on Gen Z's tourism decision-making. The answers provided by the interviewed influencers varied. According to the answers provided, it is evident that sponsored posts and collaborations with brands and products are a recurring theme among successful strategies. It is also interesting to note that guest blog posts and themed campaigns were mentioned by only a few influencers. Overall, it can be concluded that a combination of different strategies may be necessary to successfully influence Gen Z's tourism decisions.

The following question "As an influencer, what advice do you have for businesses seeking to appeal to Gen Z in the tourism industry?" was aimed to obtain perspectives on how tourism businesses can successfully attract Gen Z consumers. I6 advised businesses to "*find a purpose, find a cause and support it, and be genuine*" while I1 emphasized the importance of being authentic, stating that "*Gen Z is very sensitive to ads that seem like they're made only for advertising purposes.*" I4 advocated for influencer marketing, while I5 suggested that businesses should aim to be "*inspiring and real.*". Finally, I3 advised businesses to be aware that Gen Z consumers are "*very comfortable searching for information*" and "*more open for any kind of collaboration.*" These responses highlight the need for tourism businesses to focus on creating authentic and meaningful content, while also collaborating with influencers to reach Gen Z consumers. Interestingly, the responses suggest that influencer marketing can be an effective tool for businesses, as recommended by I4. Overall, the responses indicate a common thread of authenticity and collaboration as key components of successful marketing to Gen Z, while also acknowledging the importance of understanding this demographic's unique characteristics.

Lastly, the question "As an influencer, what advice do you have for other influencers looking to effectively communicate with Gen Z in the tourism industry?" was aimed to gain insight into the strategies that influencers use to effectively communicate with Gen Z, a generation that has grown up in a digital age with a unique set of preferences and expectations. The responses given by the

influencers were diverse. I6 emphasized the importance of understanding the different channels, formats, durations, and content that Gen Z prefers. I1 recommended being authentic and natural, avoiding content that seems like advertising. I4 suggested being original, creative, and informative, while I5 echoed the sentiment of being oneself and offering inspiration. I3 and I2 did not provide any response. Overall, these responses suggest that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to effectively communicating with Gen Z, however, there are some similarities between the responses, such as the importance of authenticity and creativity.

In summary, the expert interview was conducted to investigate the influencers' experiences with brand partnerships with tourism businesses, and the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's decision-making in the tourism sector. The study concluded after conducting interviews with five influencers and one travel nomad who volunteered to participate in the study. The results showed that brand partnerships with tourism businesses can be beneficial for both the influencer and the business. The importance of a long-term relationship, genuine reviews, and providing information on budget travel appeared to be consistent themes across the responses on the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z's decision-making. In addition, the influencers did not differentiate their communication strategies based on the target audience's generation or segment their audiences, suggesting a lack of perceived difference between their target audience's generations, possibly due to the similarity of interests and preferences across generations. The majority of the influencers believed that the information search stage was the most significant stage for influencer impact on Gen Z's tourism decisions. Also, sponsored posts and collaborations with brands were recurring themes among successful influencer marketing strategies. Finally, the influencers advised businesses seeking to appeal to Gen Z in the tourism industry to focus on creating authentic and meaningful content while also collaborating with influencers to reach Gen Z consumers. The importance of understanding this demographic's unique characteristics and providing information on budget travel was also emphasized. The study recommends tourism businesses to focus on creating authentic and meaningful content while collaborating with influencers to reach Gen Z.

3.1.2.2. Expert interview with professionals from tourism and marketing industries

With the aim of exploring the perspectives of professionals in the tourism and marketing industries on influencer marketing and their impact on Gen Z, a sample set was created for conducting interviews. The researcher utilized a purposive sampling technique to select participants who met specific criteria, in order to obtain a diverse and informative data set. The participant selection criteria included having experience in the tourism or marketing industry, as well as experience with influencer marketing. Participants were identified through a combination of networking and online research. A total of 19 participants answered the request for the interview, with 9 having experience in influencer marketing and 10 having no previous experience. The interviews were conducted using

Google Forms, with open-ended and likert-scale questions designed to allow participants ample time to provide thoughtful and detailed responses.

As one of the participant selection criteria was having prior experience with influencer marketing, the 10 professionals who did not meet this criterion were asked about the reasons why they had not previously collaborated with influencers, and what factors had prevented them from doing so. The 10 professionals who did not have a prior experience provided a variety of reasons for not having previously collaborated with influencers, including ethical concerns about influencer marketing, difficulty in identifying the right influencer to work with, specializing in niche tourism services, targeting an older demographic, having a limited customer base, and preferring alternative marketing methods. Some professionals deemed influencer marketing unnecessary or requiring extensive research and planning, but a few expressed interests in considering potential collaboration in the future. After gaining insight into the perspectives of the professionals who did not use influencer marketing, the 9 participants who have experience with influencer marketing voluntarily agreed to be interviewed (See Annex 8). The participants' age and education level varied, with the majority being in the age range of 25-34 years old and having at least a bachelor's degree. Out of the 9 professionals who were interviewed, the majority of their company's target audience fell within the age range of 25-34 (5 out of 9). Based on the provided information, 6 out of 9 interviewees stated that they carry out research and monitoring of potential candidates for influencer marketing campaigns, while the remaining 3 did not. Among the 9 interviewees, 2 indicated that influencers have a significant influence on promoting tourism for their company, while 3 suggested a moderate impact, 3 mentioned a slight impact, and 1 was uncertain.

To understand the factors that influence the selection of Instagram travel influencers for marketing campaigns and to gain insight into the priorities and preferences of the interviewees when choosing influencers for their respective companies, the criteria for selecting Instagram travel influencers was asked. P1 and P2 stated that the criteria for selecting Instagram travel influencers include the number of followers, quality of content, engagement level, demographic of their followers, and metrics such as reach, impressions, and conversion rates. P3 emphasized quality of content, reliability, and geographic location. P4 mentioned brand and influencer compatibility, reliability, reputation, and credibility. P5 included additional criteria such as reputation and credibility, cost-effectiveness, and more detailed metrics. P6 highlighted brand and influencer compatibility, engagement level, geographic location, demographic of their followers, and reputation and credibility. P7 included brand and influencer compatibility, number of followers, quality of content, reliability, and geographic location. P8 mentioned brand and influencer compatibility, number of followers, demographic of their followers, and metrics such as reach, impressions, and conversion rates. Finally, P9 only mentioned the number of followers and cost-effectiveness. Overall,

the interviewees' responses suggest that the criteria for selecting Instagram travel influencers vary depending on the company's objectives and preferences. However, some common themes were identified, including the number of followers, quality of content, engagement level, geographic location, demographic of their followers, reputation and credibility, brand and influencer compatibility, and metrics such as reach, impressions, and conversion rates.

The question "How effective was influencer marketing for your company in achieving your marketing goals, such as increasing brand awareness, driving website traffic, generating leads, or boosting sales?" was asked to gain the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in achieving their marketing goals. The responses can provide insight into the success or limitations of influencer marketing as a marketing strategy for different types of companies. P1, P3, P4 and P8 gave positive responses, indicating that they believe influencer marketing to be very effective in achieving their marketing goals. P2, P5, P7 and P9 mentioned influencer marketing as exceptionally effective, while P6 rated it as strongly negative in terms of effectiveness. Overall, the majority of participants had a positive view of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in achieving marketing goals, with some variations. It is important to note that the participants' individual experiences and goals may have influenced their responses.

The question "What suggestions would you offer to other tourism businesses regarding working with influencers?" was asked to gain insights from participants about their experiences and recommendations on working with influencers. P2 suggested selecting the right fit influencers with high engagement levels to increase brand recognition and loyalty and added "*To ensure a smooth communication with influencers is another important factor to increase a brand recognition and loyalty level as well.*". P3 emphasized the potential for influencers to reach a wide audience and promote products effectively. P4 recommended choosing influencers with fewer but loyal followers for better value for money. P5 stressed the importance of quality over quantity. P6 mentioned that influencer marketing is not worth the money. P9 recommended a written agreement to avoid confusion or misunderstandings and added "*They need to clearly communicate the expectations to the influencer, including the goals of the campaign, required deliverables and pricing.*". Overall, the participants' suggestions focused on the importance of selecting the right influencers with high engagement and loyalty levels, clear communication, and a focus on quality over quantity. However, P6's negative experience should also be taken into consideration, indicating that influencer marketing may not work for all tourism businesses. Additionally, having a written agreement outlining expectations can be crucial for ensuring a successful influencer marketing campaign.

The question "To what extent do you agree that tourism businesses should partner with influencers to target Gen Z consumers?" was asked to explore the participants' opinions on the effectiveness of partnering with influencers to reach the Gen Z demographic. P1, P4, P7, and P9 were

somewhat neutral. P2 and P8 were slightly more inclined to agree, while P3 and P5 strongly agreed, and P6 strongly disagreed.

P2: *"It's important to keep up with current trends and Gen Z is a major market that can be reached through influencer partnerships."*

P5: *"Gen Z is a demographic that spends a lot of time on social media and influencer partnerships is an effective way to reach them."*

Overall, the answers suggest that there is some level of agreement that influencer partnerships can be an effective way to reach Gen Z consumers. However, there are differing opinions on the effectiveness of this strategy, and some participants are more skeptical of its value. Next, the advantages of advantages and reasons for collaborating with Influencers was asked. Participants provided various answers, which can be categorized into several themes. P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P8, and P9 all mentioned generating buzz and word-of-mouth marketing as a key advantage. P2, P3, P5, P7, P8, and P9 also mentioned building brand awareness and loyalty, while P2, P3, P5, and P9 emphasized creating authentic content and experiences. P3, P4, and P7 mentioned reaching a targeted audience as a benefit. Generating financial returns and enhancing a brand's online presence were mentioned by P2, P3, P5, P7, and P8, while P5 mentioned providing social proof and credibility. In summary, these findings suggest that partnering with influencers can be a valuable strategy for tourism businesses looking to expand their customer base and improve their online presence.

The next question asked was "What are the disadvantages of using Influencers?" and the purpose of the question was to identify the potential drawbacks of collaborating with influencers for marketing purposes. P1, P2, P4, P6, P8, and P9 mentioned limited control over the influencer's messaging and content, while P3 and P7 highlighted the potential for influencer scandals or controversies to negatively impact the brand. Difficulty in measuring ROI (return on investment) was identified by P1, P4, and P9, and difficulty in finding the right influencer for the brand's specific needs was mentioned by P4, P7, and P8. Overall, the answers suggest that there are several potential disadvantages to working with influencers, including limited control over messaging and content, high costs, and difficulty in measuring ROI. It is important for tourism businesses to carefully consider these potential drawbacks before deciding whether to collaborate with influencers for their marketing campaigns. They should also take steps to mitigate these risks, such as carefully selecting influencers who align with their brand values and messaging, establishing clear expectations and guidelines for content creation, and monitoring influencer activities closely.

The question asked was whether using young influencers can help attract a younger segment of tourists to a destination. The purpose of the question was to understand whether partnering with young influencers is an effective strategy for tourism businesses targeting younger consumers. P4 and P5 strongly agreed, while P1, P2, P3, P7, P8 and P9 agreed to some extent. On the other hand,

P6 disagreed. P4 stated that "*Young influencers have a strong influence on the younger segment of tourists as they can relate to them better and are more likely to follow their recommendations.*" Similarly, P5 expressed that "*Young influencers have a strong social media presence and can help to increase the visibility of a destination to younger audiences.*" The overall analysis suggests that using young influencers to attract a younger segment of tourists is seen as an effective strategy by a majority of the participants. Younger influencers tend to have a strong social media presence and are more relatable to younger audiences. This makes them an attractive option for tourism businesses targeting younger consumers. However, it is important to note that not all participants agreed on this, indicating that other factors may also play a role in targeting younger consumers.

The last question asked was about the extent to which influencer marketing can lead to increased tourism revenue for businesses targeting Gen Z. The purpose was to explore the potential benefits of influencer marketing for tourism businesses. Participants' responses varied, with P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7 and P8 agreeing that influencer marketing can lead to increased tourism revenue, while P6 and P9 disagreed. Overall, the responses suggest that while influencer marketing has the potential to increase tourism revenue for businesses targeting Gen Z, it should not be relied on as the sole strategy. A clear and comprehensive marketing plan is needed to ensure success.

In conclusion, the expert interviews conducted with 9 professionals from the tourism and marketing industries aimed with learning the perceptions of the effectiveness of influencer marketing, and the impact on Gen Z. The findings suggest that the criteria for selecting Instagram travel influencers vary depending on the company's objectives and preferences, but some common themes include the number of followers, quality of content, engagement level, geographic location, demographic of their followers, reputation and credibility, brand and influencer compatibility, and metrics such as reach, impressions, and conversion rates. The majority of participants had a positive view of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in achieving marketing goals, with some variations. The results can inform companies' decisions about incorporating influencer marketing into their marketing strategies, particularly when targeting Gen Z as a demographic.

3.2. Validity and limitations of empirical research results

The empirical research results presented in the research findings provide valuable insights into the influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's travel decision-making process. Overall, the research findings appear to be reliable and accurate, but it is important to evaluate the validity of the data collected and consider potential limitations that may affect the generalizability of the findings. The research findings include a combination of interview findings and the results of an empirical research analysis. The use of qualitative interviews allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences. However, the sample size and characteristics of the participants should be considered when evaluating the reliability of the data. It is important to assess

the representativeness of the sample and consider potential biases that may have influenced the responses. Moreover, ensuring questionnaire reliability is essential for obtaining dependable and accurate information, and one method to assess reliability is by using Cronbach's Alpha, which assesses the internal consistency of survey questions, typically aiming for a value of 0.70 or higher to indicate dependable and coherent questions (Lance et al., 2006). In this study, the obtained Cronbach's Alpha of 0.829 surpasses the acceptable limit, indicating that the responses were reliable and can be considered a valid measure of the participants' views.

One potential limitation is the sample size of the participants. The research findings should be interpreted with caution as the generalizability of the results to the broader population may be limited. The characteristics of the participants, such as their demographics and backgrounds, may also introduce biases. For example, if the majority of participants were from a specific geographic region or had a particular socioeconomic status, the findings may not be representative of the entire Gen Z population. Additionally, the survey design and interview process may introduce biases through the wording of the questions or potential interviewer effects. It is important to acknowledge these limitations when interpreting the findings. While the research findings support the positive influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's travel decision-making process, it is essential to consider potential confounding variables or alternative explanations. Other factors beyond the scope of the research, such as personal preferences, peer influence, or cultural differences, may also impact Gen Z's travel decisions. It is important to acknowledge that the influence of Instagram travel influencers is just one aspect of a complex decision-making process, and additional research is needed to explore the interplay between various factors.

In summary, the limitations of the research findings should be acknowledged to assess the generalizability and robustness of the results. The sample size, characteristics of the participants, and potential biases in data collection may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Furthermore, the research focused on the influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z, and the findings may not be applicable to other demographic groups or social media platforms. The specific context and time frame of the research should also be considered when evaluating the generalizability and robustness of the findings.

3.3. Acceptability of research hypotheses and assumptions

Based on a comprehensive literature review, this study formulated two hypotheses and two research assumptions. To ensure a thorough investigation, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative part involved distributing an online questionnaire to a representative sample of Gen Z individuals. The questionnaire collected data on their attitudes towards Instagram travel influencers, and the impact of influencer-generated content on their decision-making. Statistical analysis with SPSS was then

applied to the collected data to test the formulated hypotheses and provide empirical evidence. Alongside the quantitative aspect, the study also conducted qualitative interviews with experts in the field of travel, marketing, and Instagram travel influencers. These interviews aimed to explore the research assumptions by examining the perceptions, motivations, and strategies of Instagram travel influencers. The insights gained from these interviews complemented the quantitative analysis, offering a deeper understanding of the subject matter. By employing this mixed-methods research design, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Instagram travel influencers shape Gen Z's travel choices. The integration of quantitative data and statistical analysis with qualitative insights from expert interviews allowed for a nuanced examination of the complex dynamics involved in this context. The study's findings are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field and have practical implications for marketers, professionals in the travel industry, and social media influencers. Understanding and leveraging the influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's travel decision-making can provide valuable insights for these stakeholders.

The findings of the multiple regression analysis and correlation coefficients support the acceptance of both hypotheses (Table 11). The results indicate that Gen Z individuals who place greater trust in Instagram travel influencers are more likely to consider the information provided by them as reliable. The first hypothesis, H_1 is accepted based on the statistically significant relationships found between trust in influencers and the dependent variable related to information reliability. The positive coefficients for the three significant independent variables suggest that higher influence from Instagram travel influencers leads to a higher perception of reliability among Gen Z individuals. Furthermore, the study confirmed the second hypothesis, H_2 . The statistically significant relationships between influential factors such as destination determination, decision-making in trip booking, and trip choice through Instagram influencers validate the hypothesis. These findings support the idea that Instagram travel influencers have an influential role from the awareness stage to the final purchase decision among Gen Zers.

The interview findings suggest that the majority of participants had a positive view of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in achieving marketing goals. Several advantages of collaborating with influencers were mentioned, such as generating buzz, building brand awareness, reaching a targeted audience, and enhancing online presence. These findings indicate that Instagram influencers can indeed have a significant impact on promoting tourism for companies targeting Gen Z. Therefore, RA_1 is **accepted** based on the interview results. The interview findings indicate that some participants agreed that using young influencers can help attract a younger segment of tourists to a destination. Younger influencers were seen as more relatable to younger audiences and were believed to have a stronger influence on the younger segment of tourists. However, it is important to

note that not all participants agreed on this, indicating that other factors may also play a role in targeting younger consumers. Therefore, while the age of travel influencers may be a consideration for some tourism businesses and marketers, it is not a universally accepted preference according to the interview results. Thus, *RA*₂ is **not fully accepted** based on the interview results.

Table 11

Acceptability of research hypotheses and assumptions

<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>H</i> ₁ : Gen Z's trust in Instagram travel influencers as a source of reliable information plays a crucial role in their travel decision-making process.	<i>Accepted</i>
	<i>H</i> ₂ : Instagram travel influencers have a significant impact on Gen Z's travel decision-making process, from the awareness stage to the final purchase decision.	<i>Accepted</i>
<i>Research assumptions</i>	<i>RA</i> ₁ : The power of Instagram influencers in promoting tourism is significant for tourism companies targeting Gen Z.	<i>Accepted</i>
	<i>RA</i> ₂ : The age of travel influencers affects the preference of tourism businesses and marketers for advertising to Gen Z.	<i>Not fully accepted</i>

In conclusion, this study utilized a mixed-methods approach to examine the influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. The integration of quantitative data analysis and qualitative insights from expert interviews provided a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics involved in this context. The findings of the study support the acceptance of both hypotheses, indicating that Gen Z individuals who trust Instagram travel influencers perceive the information provided by them as reliable and are influenced by them in destination determination, trip booking decision-making, and trip choice. These findings highlight the significant role of Instagram travel influencers in shaping Gen Z's travel decision-making process. Furthermore, the interview results support the acceptance of Research Assumption 1, indicating the positive view of participants regarding the effectiveness of influencer marketing in achieving marketing goals. Collaboration with influencers was found to generate buzz, build brand awareness, reach a targeted audience, and enhance online presence. However, Research Assumption 2 was not fully accepted, as not all participants agreed on the preference for younger influencers to attract a younger segment of tourists. The study's findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field and have practical implications for marketers, professionals in the travel industry, and social media influencers. Understanding and leveraging the influence of Instagram travel influencers can provide valuable insights for these stakeholders, enabling them to effectively target and engage Gen Z consumers in the tourism industry.

3.4. Scientific discussion of empirical results

There has been a significant amount of research on the travel preferences and choices of other generations, specifically on Generation Y, also known as millennials. This generation has been a significant focus of tourism research due to its increasing economic power and potential impact on industry. Studies have investigated factors such as travel motivations, preferences, and behaviors. However, with the emergence of Gen Z as a new tourism market segment, there has been comparatively little research on their travel choices.

Comparing and contrasting the empirical findings with the results of previous studies in the same or related research areas, several similarities and differences can be observed as it can be seen in Table 12 below. Mchavu et al. (2022) found that Instagram influencers have a direct impact on Gen Z's intentions to visit local tourism destinations. Tolibjonov et al. (2021) found that Gen Zers in Uzbekistan use Instagram daily for account searches and direct messaging. While the author's research did not focus on usage frequency, it supports the idea that Instagram influencers influence Gen Z's decision-making in booking a trip. Dewi et al. (2021) found that Gen Z considers social media, online reviews, and recommendations during their pre-trip planning decision-making process. This is consistent with the research findings, which indicate that Gen Z's trust in Instagram travel influencers plays a crucial role in their travel decision-making process. Kazanci (2022) examined the influence of social media influencers' content on university students' intention to browse and purchase products. Although not specific to travel, the study's findings align with the idea that the content shared by influencers on social networks significantly affects consumer intentions. This supports the notion that Instagram travel influencers can have a significant impact on Gen Z's travel decision-making. Simavoğlu (2019) found that Gen Z is affected by advertisements on social media platforms, and online purchasing behavior varies according to age and educational status. While the research focused on travel influencers rather than advertisements, the findings suggest a similar influence of digital media on Gen Z's decision-making, particularly regarding travel.

Table 12

Previous studies on Gen Z and travel

Scholars	Research aims/objectives	Methodology	Main findings
Mchavu, Ali, & Yilmazdoğan. (2022)	To measure the perceptions of the Gen Z living in Zanzibar towards social media influencers and to try to understand how these perceptions affect their travel intention.	A quantitative study using survey collected data from 530 Gen Zers in Zanzibar and analysed with correlation and regression tests.	The travel influencers on Instagram have a direct impact on Gen Z's intentions to visit local tourism destinations.

Table 12 continuation

Tolibjonov, Axrorov, & Mamirov. (2021)	To grasp Instagram's influence on the behaviour, motivation, and decision-making process of Gen Z.	A quantitative study using survey collected data from 50 Gen Zers in Uzbekistan and analysed with the descriptive method.	While many respondents travel no more than three times a year, they use Instagram daily.
Dewi, Gede, Kencanawati, & Mataram. (2021)	To investigate the Gen Z perceptions toward the usage of social media and its features in the pre-trip planning decision-making process.	A qualitative approach by administered questionnaires for data collection to 50 Gen Zers and analysed with the descriptive method.	Gen Z considers social media, online reviews, and recommendations during information search.
Kazanci. (2022)	To examine if the social media influencers' content affect university students' intention to browse and purchase products and services.	A qualitative approach by questionnaires for data collection to 1018 university students and analysed employing the descriptive method.	The content shared by influencers significantly affect the product browsing and purchasing intentions of university students.
Simavoğlu. (2019)	To analyze the effect of digital media tools and advertisements on the online purchasing behavior of Gen Z.	A quantitative study using online questionnaires collected data from 720 Gen Zers in Turkey and analysed with correlation and regression tests.	Gen Z generation is affected by advertisements on social media platforms

Source: This table was created by the author based on Mchavu, Ali, and Yılmazdoğan (2022); Tolibjonov, Axrorov, and Mamirov (2021); Dewi, Gede, Kencanawati, and Mataram (2021); Kazanci (2022); Simavoğlu (2019).

In summary, these insights highlight the importance of understanding Gen Z's preferences, perceptions, and behaviors when utilizing Instagram influencers in tourism marketing strategies. Marketers and tourism companies can leverage these findings to effectively target and engage with Gen Z through influencer collaborations and tailored content.

3.5. Directions for further research

Based on the empirical research conducted, certain gaps and areas of potential exploration have emerged, highlighting the need for further investigation. These gaps and areas for future research provide opportunities to expand upon the limitations and findings of the present study. One potential area of exploration is to examine the role of trust and authenticity in influencer marketing within the tourism industry. While the current study focused on the impact of influencer marketing on tourism consumption, there is a need to delve deeper into how trust is established and maintained between influencers and their followers. Future research could investigate the factors that contribute to the perceived authenticity of influencer content and how this authenticity influences the decision-making process of consumers, particularly within the Gen Z demographic.

Another direction for future research could be to explore the long-term effects of influencer marketing on destination image and brand perception. While the present study focused on short-term impacts, it would be valuable to understand the lasting effects of influencer-generated content on consumers' perceptions of tourism destinations. This research could involve longitudinal studies tracking changes in destination image over time and examining the role of influencers in shaping these perceptions. To address these gaps and explore the proposed research directions, several potential methodologies and approaches can be considered. Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups can provide insights into the underlying motivations and perceptions of consumers regarding influencer marketing. These methods can help uncover the nuances of trust and authenticity in influencer content and provide rich qualitative data for analysis. Additionally, quantitative research methods can be employed to measure the long-term effects of influencer marketing on destination image. Surveys and questionnaires can be administered to a diverse sample of respondents to assess changes in brand perception and destination image before and after exposure to influencer-generated content. Statistical analysis techniques can then be used to identify patterns and relationships between influencer marketing, destination image, and consumer behavior.

Given the limitations of the theoretical, quantitative, and qualitative analyses, the following additional aspects are recommended for enhancing the content and the further studies:

- Conducting an analysis of the content shared by influential travel personalities with a global reach can provide valuable insights into the types of shares that generate a significant impact.
- Investigating the utilization of Instagram travel influencers by tourism businesses and its impact on brand recognition and occupancy rates can offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies in the industry.
- Independent research projects can be undertaken to evaluate the influence of influencers on various age groups, allowing for a comparative analysis to determine potential variations in the impact of Instagram travel influencer marketing on tourism consumption among different generations.
- Applying content analysis to the visual content shared by diverse tourism businesses can facilitate the identification of specific post types that resonate the most with Gen Z followers, based on factors such as likes and comments.
- Increasing the sample size and including participants from different geographical locations, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural contexts. This broader range of participants would improve the generalizability of findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of Instagram travel influencers across diverse populations.
- Implementing longitudinal studies to track changes in perceptions and behaviors over time. This approach would capture the evolving dynamics of Gen Z's interactions with Instagram travel

influencers, enabling researchers to identify trends and developments in their travel decision-making process.

- Extending the research to include other social media platforms beyond Instagram, such as TikTok or YouTube. This expansion would enable a comparative analysis of the impact of different platforms on Gen Z's travel decision-making, offering valuable insights into platform preferences and their effects.

To expand on this research, it is recommended that future studies examine the content shared by travel influencers who have a worldwide impact, as well as the impact of influencer marketing on tourism businesses' recognition and occupancy rates. Additionally, a comparable research project focused on evaluating the influence of influencers on various age groups can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of Instagram travel influencer marketing on tourism consumption. Finally, analyzing the types of posts that receive the most engagement from Gen Z followers can help tourism businesses tailor their marketing strategies to better reach this demographic.

In conclusion, further research is warranted to explore the role of trust and authenticity in influencer marketing within the tourism industry, as well as to investigate the long-term effects of influencer-generated content on destination image. By addressing these gaps, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of influencer marketing's impact on tourism consumption and inform tourism businesses' marketing strategies in the digital age. Employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods will provide a comprehensive understanding of these phenomena and their implications for the industry. As a result of the research, it is possible to talk about the undeniable effect of the concept of influencer marketing. According to the information gathered and analyses conducted by the author, it would be correct to say there is a positive impact of influencer marketing on tourism consumption of Gen Z. Therefore, the power of the correct usage of influencer marketing should not be underestimated by the tourism enterprises. It is important for businesses to choose the social networking channel according to their target audience. It is also beneficial to choose the right influencer for the right target audience so that they can create more effective advertisements. Thus, influencers to be selected should be analyzed according to their influence and content, rather than the number of followers.

CONCLUSION

The present study contributes to the existing literature through several elements of novelty. Firstly, it focuses specifically on the perceptions and attitudes of Gen Z consumers towards influencer marketing in the context of tourism. While previous research has explored the impact of influencers on consumer behavior, the unique characteristics and preferences of Gen Z make them a distinct and important target audience. By examining their perceptions and behaviors, this study examines the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies in reaching and engaging this influential consumer segment. Additionally, this study combines both theoretical analysis and empirical research, providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods allows for a more holistic exploration of the research area and enhances the validity and reliability of the findings. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this study offers valuable insights for marketers and tourism companies seeking to effectively leverage Instagram travel influencers to connect with Gen Z consumers and drive tourism consumption.

As a result of the study, the following conclusions were reached. The first objective of 'To analyze concepts of influencer and influencer marketing in case of Instagram platform' is completed by given information about the concept of influencer and influencer types, and the concept of influencer marketing. In today's social media landscape, influencers play a crucial role as trusted opinion leaders. They produce and share content on various platforms, influencing their followers' behavior. This phenomenon has given rise to influencer marketing, which businesses utilize to adapt to changing environmental conditions and reach their target audience effectively. Instagram has emerged as a popular hub for influencers and influencer marketing due to its widespread popularity. Collaborating with influencers on Instagram allows brands to promote their products or services to a broader audience and benefit from the influencers' ability to influence their followers' opinions and purchasing decisions. This marketing strategy is cost-effective, reaches a larger audience, and generates higher engagement compared to traditional advertising methods. By establishing trust through sincere content and personal experiences, influencers guide consumers towards purchasing decisions, creating a reliable and useful environment. Overall, influencer marketing on Instagram offers numerous advantages, including increased brand awareness, website traffic, and sales. Its authenticity, driven by the trusted relationships influencers have built with their followers, sets it apart from traditional advertising approaches.

The second objective of 'To examine the theoretical aspects of Gen Z's perception towards travel and tourism, as well as their attitudes towards influencer marketing in the context of tourism' is completed by given insight into the behavior of Gen Z consumers in relation to tourism consumption, including their preferences, attitudes, and motivations towards various aspects of

tourism. The rise of technology, social media, and globalization has transformed how tourism is consumed. Gen Z, born between 1995-2010, relies heavily on technology and social media for trip planning and booking. They use social media platforms to find destinations, deals, and share their experiences. Instagram travel influencers play a significant role in promoting destinations and influencing Gen Z travelers. Gen Zers value the opinions and experiences of influencers when making purchase decisions. They have unique preferences, prioritizing experiences over material possessions, seeking authentic and immersive experiences such as glamping or tiny homes, rather than traditional hotels. Gen Z travelers also emphasize sustainability, opting for eco-friendly options to reduce their carbon footprint by opting for green tourism and cheaper accommodations.

The third objective of the paper is ‘To form a methodology and conduct qualitative and quantitative analyses to determine the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption.’ In order to achieve this objective, the methodology is presented, explaining the reasons behind the author's choice of online questionnaires and expert interviews. Additionally, formulations of hypotheses, the sample data for both the quantitative and qualitative analyses, and limitations are provided.

Finally, the fourth objective of ‘To present and discuss the research findings, including the analysis of both secondary data and primary data, and to provide insights into the influence of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption patterns’ is completed in the third part of the paper. Overall, the results of the multiple regression analysis and correlation coefficients provide support for accepting both hypotheses. The findings suggest that Gen Z individuals who have greater trust in Instagram travel influencers are more likely to consider the information provided by these influencers as reliable. This acceptance of the first hypothesis (H_1) is based on statistically significant relationships found between trust in influencers and the dependent variable related to information reliability. Moreover, the study confirms the second hypothesis (H_2) by establishing statistically significant relationships between influential factors, such as destination determination, decision-making in trip booking, and trip choice through Instagram influencers. These findings validate the hypothesis that Instagram travel influencers have an influential role throughout the entire travel decision-making process, from the awareness stage to the final purchase decision, among Gen Zers. Additionally, the expert interview findings provide further insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing in achieving marketing goals. The majority of participants expressed a positive view of collaborating with influencers, emphasizing advantages such as generating buzz, building brand awareness, reaching a targeted audience, and enhancing online presence. These findings highlight the significant impact that Instagram influencers can have on promoting tourism for companies targeting Gen Z, confirming research assumption 1 (RA_1). The interview results indicate that while some participants agreed that using young influencers can attract a younger segment of

tourists to a destination, this preference is not universally accepted. Therefore, the research assumption 2 (RA_2) regarding the age of travel influencers affecting the preference of tourism businesses and marketers for advertising to Gen Z is not fully accepted based on the interview results.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- a) Tourism companies and marketers should actively engage with Instagram travel influencers to promote destinations and travel services. Collaborating with these influencers can be a highly effective strategy, as they have the power to influence Gen Z's opinions, increase brand awareness, and drive sales. Influencers should be selected based on their alignment with the values and preferences of Gen Z consumers, such as their focus on experiential travel and sustainability.
- b) Tourism businesses should consider incorporating more authentic and immersive experiences into their offerings to cater to the preferences of Gen Z travelers. This can involve providing unique and interactive activities, promoting local culture and traditions, and prioritizing sustainability and eco-friendliness in the design of tourism products.
- c) It is essential for tourism companies to establish a strong online presence and engage with Gen Z consumers through social media platforms. This includes actively sharing user-generated content, encouraging user reviews and recommendations, and responding to inquiries and feedback in a timely manner. This level of engagement can foster a sense of authenticity and trust among Gen Z travelers.

Suggestions for further development of the research:

- a) Conducting an analysis of the content shared by influential travel personalities with a global reach can provide valuable insights into the types of shares that generate a significant impact.
- b) Investigating the utilization of Instagram travel influencers by tourism businesses and its impact on brand recognition and occupancy rates can offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies in the industry.
- c) Implementing longitudinal studies to track changes in perceptions and behaviors over time. This approach would capture the evolving dynamics of Gen Z's interactions with Instagram travel influencers, enabling researchers to identify trends and developments in their travel decision-making process.

By addressing these recommendations and pursuing further research, marketers and tourism companies can effectively engage with Gen Z consumers and tailor their strategies to meet the specific needs and desires of this influential consumer segment. In summary, this research contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into the relationship between Instagram travel influencers, Gen Z's trust in them, and their impact on tourism consumption. The findings underscore the importance of influencer marketing on Instagram and emphasize the need for the tourism industry to adapt to the changing preferences and behaviors of Gen Z travelers.

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ANNEXES

The main concepts and terminology

Baby Boomers - Baby Boomers are individuals born between 1946 and 1964, a period marked by a significant increase in birth rates following World War II (Twenge et al., 2010).

Brand Ambassador - A brand ambassador represents and promotes a brand's products or services, often being a public figure or influencer with a strong following (Peltekoğlu, 2019).

Consumer Decision-making Stages - Consumer decision-making stages include problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation (Odabasi, 1988).

Eco tourism – Eco tourism refers to responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local communities (Odabasi, 1988).

e-WOM - e-WOM refers to electronic word-of-mouth, which involves the spread of information and opinions about products or services through online channels (Akrimi & Khemakhem, 2012).

FOMO - FOMO stands for Fear of Missing Out, describing the anxiety or concern individuals feel about missing out on exciting or interesting experiences (Bradley et al., 2019).

Gen Z - Generation Z, also known as the Gen Zers, Gen M, iGeneration or Centennials, refers to individuals born between 1995 and 2012, who are the first generation to grow up entirely in the digital age (Donovan, 2019).

Generation X - Generation X refers to individuals born between 1965 and 1980, who came of age during a time of economic, political, and social upheaval (Twenge et al., 2010).

Generation Y - Generation Y, also known as Millennials, are individuals born between 1981 and 1995, who grew up in the digital age and are often characterized by their tech-savvy, collaborative, and socially conscious nature (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Giveaways - Giveaways are promotional activities where individuals or companies offer free products, services, or experiences to participants through contests or other means (Mert, 2018).

Annex 1 continuation

Glamping – Glamping refers to a form of luxury camping that combines the experience of being in nature with the comfort and amenities typically found in traditional accommodations (Geysler, 2022).

Human Oriented Marketing 3.0 - Human Oriented Marketing 3.0 emphasizes a customer-centric approach, focusing on human values, sustainability, and social responsibility in marketing strategies (Kotler et al., 2019).

Influencer - People who have become opinion leaders with the content they produce on social media, have the power to influence the masses, guide their purchasing decisions with their comments, and have a high following (Bor & Erten, 2019).

Influencer Marketing - Influencer marketing can be expressed as marketing where studies and efforts come together in order to connect and contact and define individuals who have the ability to potentially create an impact (Canoz et al., 2020).

Product Reviews - Product reviews provide detailed evaluations of products or services, offering insights into their quality, features, and user experiences (Saglık, 2019).

ROI - ROI stands for Return on Investment, which measures the profitability or effectiveness of an investment or marketing campaign (Geysler, 2022).

Silent Generation - The Silent Generation refers to individuals born between 1928 and 1945, who came of age during the post-World War II period marked by conservatism, conformity, and caution (Yelkikalan et al., 2010).

Sponsored Content - Sponsored content involves the creation or promotion of brand-related material by advertisers to engage audiences, often resembling non-sponsored content (Acar, 2014).

Tourism consumption - Tourism consumption refers to the activities, behaviors, and expenditures made by individuals or groups during their travel experiences, including accommodation, transportation, food, attractions, and souvenirs (Odabasi, 1988).

Travel influencer – A travel influencer is an individual who leverages their online presence and social media platforms to share experiences, recommendations, and promote destinations, influencing the travel decisions of their followers (Barbe & Neuburger, 2021).

The design of expert interview questions for Instagram travel influencers

Table 1

Expert interview questions for Instagram travel influencers

Adapted Questions	Adapted from
1) Can you introduce yourself? 2) What motivates you to share your experiences through Instagram? - Start-up motivations - Continuation motivations 3) Have you ever had a brand partnership with any type of tourism businesses? If so, can you please provide information about the project and the process? - Reaction of followers - Budgeting - Positive aspects - Negative aspects 4) As an Instagram influencer, which type of collaboration strategies do you prefer to use when working with brands? From your experience, what influencer marketing strategies have been successful or in influencing Gen Z's tourism decisions?	Yılmaz, Sezerel, & Uzuner. (2020).
5) What is your opinion about how influencer marketing activities affect Gen Z's decision-making in the tourism sector? 6) How do you communicate with Gen Z in terms of influencer marketing collaborations? Do you differentiate your communication based on the target audience's generation or do you segment your audiences? 7) From your experience, what influencer marketing strategies have been successful or unsuccessful in influencing Gen Z's tourism decisions? 8) At what stage of the tourism consumption process do travel influencers have the most significant impact on Gen Z, in your opinion? 9) What recommendations do you have for businesses seeking to appeal to Gen Z in the tourism industry? 10) As an influencer, what advice do you have for other influencers or businesses looking to effectively communicate with Gen Z in the tourism industry?	Created by the author

Source: This table was created by the author based on their own insights, and Yılmaz, Sezerel, and Uzuner (2020).

The design of expert interview questions for tourism and marketing professionals

Table 2

Expert interview questions for tourism and marketing professionals

Adapted Questions	Adapted from
1) Do you carry out research and monitoring of potential candidates for influencer marketing campaigns? 2) To what extent do you agree that tourism businesses should partner with influencers to target Gen Z consumers?	Femenia-Serra & Gretzel. (2020)
3) To what extent do you agree that influencer marketing is accessible and affordable for your company? 4) How much of an impact do you believe influencers have in promoting tourism for your company? 5) How effective do you think Instagram influencer marketing is in the tourism industry for targeting Gen Z consumers? 6) What are the advantages and reasons for collaborating with influencers? 7) What are the disadvantages of using Influencers?	Akdeniz & Kömürçü. (2021)
8) What are the criteria for selecting Instagram travel influencers?	Uzunoğlu & Kip. (2014)
9) If you haven't collaborated with influencers before, what are the factors that have prevented you from doing so? 10) To what extent do you agree that using young influencers can help attract a younger segment of tourists to a destination?	Akdeniz & Kömürçü. (2021)
11) How effective was influencer marketing for your company in achieving your marketing goals, such as increasing brand awareness, driving website traffic, generating leads, or boosting sales? 12) Please select which influencer marketing strategies are most effective at each stage of the customer decision-making process. 13) To what extent do you agree that influencer marketing can lead to increased tourism revenue for businesses targeting Gen Z? 14) What suggestions would you offer to other tourism businesses regarding working with influencers?	Femenia-Serra & Gretzel. (2020)

Source: This table was created by the author based on Femenia-Serra and Gretzel. (2020); Akdeniz and Kömürçü. (2021); Uzunoğlu and Kip (2014).

Demographic information of the online questionnaire participants

Table 3

Birth years of the participant Gen Zers

Birth year	Frequency	Percent
1995	34	8.1
1996	38	9.0
1997	39	9.3
1998	96	22.9
1999	64	15.2
2000	47	11.2
2001	34	8.1
2002	34	8.1
2003	21	5.0
2004	9	2.1
2005	1	0.2
2006	0	0.0
2007	2	0.5
2008	1	0.2
2009	0	0.0
2010	0	0.0

Reliability analysis for the online questionnaire responses

Table 4

Normality test for Gen Z answers (*Kolmogorov-Smirnov*)

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
<i>Decision-making Process</i>	0,197	420	0,000	0,872	420	0,000
<i>Trust of Instagram Influencer</i>	0,123	420	0,000	0,941	420	0,000
<i>Purchase Intention</i>	0,114	420	0,000	0,938	420	0,000
<i>a. Lilliefors Significance Correction</i>						

Correlation analysis

Table 5

Pearson correlations between demographic variables and two dependent variables related to Gen Zers' trust towards Instagram travel influencers

		Correlations						
		Gender	Birth year	Education level	Birth place	Marital status	Employment status	Income level
<i>8) Information by Instagram travel influencers regarding tourism seems reliable to me.</i>	Pearson Correlation	-,145**	-0,073	0,014	0,021	-0,060	0,058	,137**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,003	0,133	0,776	0,673	0,216	0,234	0,005
	N	420	420	420	420	420	420	420
<i>15) I will continue to use Instagram travel influencers and recommend it to friends in search of tourist destinations.</i>	Pearson Correlation	0,003	-,159**	,101*	0,010	-0,072	0,034	0,076
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,945	0,001	0,005	0,832	0,139	0,490	0,122
	N	420	420	420	420	420	420	420
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).								
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).								

Transcript of expert interview with Instagram travel influencers

Interviewer: Hello. I am conducting a research study on the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. As influencers in the travel industry, your insights and experiences are valuable in helping me better understand how social media influences the travel choices of Gen Z individuals. What motivates you to share your experiences through Instagram (such as your start-up motivations and continuation motivations)?

Interviewee (I1): My main motivation, when I did it, was to be able to create a brand and a following which would allow me to start earning from sharing my experiences, in other words, I aimed to become an influencer.

Interviewee (I2): I love photography and documenting my travels and I think Instagram is a great place to do that, even though they are focusing more on reels now. I see my Instagram as a reminder & diary of my travels for myself, but I also love to see how people get inspired by it and ask questions about certain destinations.

Interviewee (I3): I want all people to experience travel.

Interviewee (I4): To be rewarded for my efforts, for my reels views to reach millions, my followers' comments, messages...

Interviewee (I5): I love to share my experiences traveling with other people so that they can have a great time too. I also think that Belgium is very underrated and not many people know that there are so many beautiful places, so that's what I want to show.

Interviewee (I6): Being productive, creative, open minded.

Interviewer: Have you ever had a brand partnership with any type of tourism business?
All of the influencers responded positively.

Interviewer: Can you please provide information about the project and the process (such as reaction of followers, budgeting, positive aspects, negative aspects)?

Interviewee (I1): I had two cooperations, one with the city of Kaunas, and the second with the city of Gent. Both were received well by our followers and provided an increase in our followers. It was done for free as it was beneficial for us to showcase our partnerships with those cities. No negative aspects, that I could think of.

Interviewee (I2): I went on a 10-day trip with the tourism board of Sri Lanka to promote the East coast. The East coast is not as popular as the West Coast, but I loved seeing that once I started sharing content about it, so many people were interested in going there. I don't remember any negative aspects, other than that it was 10 super busy days.

Annex 7 continuation

Interviewee (I3): The reactions of followers are always positive, because most of them are interested in tips about hotels, discounts of airline companies etc.

Interviewee (I4): When I go to a tourism business, I try to share my experiences with my followers, both good and bad. Those who go to the businesses I share should go knowing my experiences and should not encounter any surprises. My followers also like this approach of mine. Therefore, our only problem is the budget. Unfortunately, the rising prices due to inflation also prevent people who want to go.

Interviewee (I5): It depends on the collab and the type of brand. Sometimes they contact me to ask if I want to take part in their campaign, sometimes I contact them to pitch and see if they have a budget for influencer collabs. Then we discuss deliverables and the budget. I don't do barter deals anymore, so if they don't have a budget, the discussion ends. Then we make up a contract with (very important) the right to the content. Some brands want to see the content in advance and approve it, some don't and give you lots of flexibility. When the brand/tourism partner fits well with my content & audience I usually receive a lot of positive reactions in the form of DMs (direct messages) and comments.

Interviewee (I6): It went very positively. I shared my own experience on social media and created brand awareness for my partner.

Interviewer: From your experience, what influencer marketing strategies have been successful or in influencing Gen Z's tourism decisions?

Interviewee (I1): Guest blog posts, product and content collaborations, brand ambassadors, reviews, discount codes, and affiliate campaigns.

Interviewee (I2): Sponsored posts, guest blog posts, product and content collaborations, competitions and giveaways, brand ambassadors, reviews, and discount codes.

Interviewee (I3): Sponsored posts, themed campaigns discount codes.

Interviewee (I4): Sponsored posts, product and content collaborations, discount codes.

Interviewee (I5): Sponsored posts, brand ambassadors, competitions, and giveaways.

Interviewee (I6): Themed campaigns, and shoutout content.

Interviewer: What is your opinion about how influencer marketing activities affect Gen Z's decision-making in the tourism sector?

Interviewee (I1): It helps to pick spots where to travel, and to set a traveling agenda once the location is selected.

Annex 7 continuation

Interviewee (I2): This is hard to say because I am a millennial. But I think it influences them a lot, and sometimes find it sad to see that when a destination goes viral, you have to line up in a queue to have your picture taken there. But it can be used in a positive way too, like promoting eco-tourism, for example.

Interviewee (I3): I think Gen Z is more interested in budget travel than, for example, luxury tourism. They stay in hostels or book a budget room on Airbnb, they eat in budget cafes, more visit historical places and etc. So, it is important to give them information in this direction.

Interviewee (I4): I think we have the power to influence the decision-making processes of Generation Z in the tourism sector only if we work long-term. I think that, if tourism businesses want to increase their Generation Z audience, they should understand that the engagement rate of the influencer is more important than the number of followers, which is a more successful strategy.

Interviewee (I5): I do not know about Gen Z specifically because it is not my target audience, but people send me messages that they have travelled to the places I showed on Instagram or did the things I did. So, this can have a big influence.

Interviewee (I6): Gen Z is more purposeful. They are open to search for multiple use experience to find a genuine review.

Interviewer: How do you communicate with Gen Z in terms of influencer marketing collaborations? Do you differentiate your communication based on the target audience's generation or do you segment your audiences at all? (For example: using Instagram stories to attract Gen Z followers)

Interviewee (I1): No.

Interviewee (I2): No, I do not differentiate anyone. But I always communicate in the same way with everybody.

Interviewee (I3): Usually I do not segment my audience at all.

Interviewee (I4): No, I am not differentiating my communication. I am who I am, I try to give information that works for everyone.

Interviewee (I5): No, I don't differentiate. It all depends on your content.

Interviewee (I6): No.

Interviewer: At what stage of the tourism consumption process do travel influencers have the most significant impact on Gen Z, in your opinion?

Interviewee (I1): Information search.

Interviewee (I2): Information search.

Interviewee (I3): Information search.

Interviewee (I4): Information search.

Annex 7 continuation

Interviewee (I5): Problem recognition.

Interviewee (I6): Information search.

Interviewer: As an influencer, what advice do you have for businesses seeking to appeal to Gen Z in the tourism industry?

Interviewee (I1): Just be yourself, make your content natural. Gen Z is very sensitive to ads that seem like they're made only for advertising purposes.

Interviewee (I3): Just be aware that Gen Z is very comfortable searching for information, more open for any kind of collaboration.

Interviewee (I4): Influencer Marketing

Interviewee (I5): Be inspiring and real.

Interviewee (I6): Find a purpose, find a cause, and support it. Be creative, be bold, and be genuine.

Interviewer: As an influencer, what advice do you have for other influencers looking to effectively communicate with Gen Z in the tourism industry?

Interviewee (I1): Being authentic and natural, avoiding content that seems like advertising.

Interviewee (I4): Being original, creative, and informative.

Interviewee (I5): The same, offer inspiration but also be yourself and show yourself.

Interviewee (I6): Understand the way they connect through different channels, the format, the duration, the content... One for all models will not work for Gen Z.

Transcript of expert interview with tourism and marketing professionals

Interviewer: I am conducting a research study on the impact of Instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption. As professionals in the tourism and marketing industries, your input is valuable in helping me better understand how social media influencers can be leveraged to reach and engage with Gen Z travellers. Do you carry out research and monitoring of potential candidates for influencer marketing campaigns?

Interviewee (P1): No.

Interviewee (P2): Yes.

Interviewee (P3): Yes.

Interviewee (P4): Yes.

Interviewee (P5): Yes.

Interviewee (P6): Yes.

Interviewee (P7): No.

Interviewee (P8): Yes.

Interviewee (P9): No.

Interviewer: To what extent do you agree that influencer marketing is accessible and affordable for your company?

Interviewee (P1): Somewhat agree.

Interviewee (P2): Strongly agree.

Interviewee (P3): Somewhat agree.

Interviewee (P4): Somewhat agree.

Interviewee (P5): Strongly agree.

Interviewee (P6): Neither agree nor disagree.

Interviewee (P7): Strongly agree.

Interviewee (P8): Somewhat agree.

Interviewee (P9): Strongly agree.

Interviewer: How much of an impact do you believe influencers have in promoting tourism for your company?

Interviewee (P1): Moderate impact.

Interviewee (P2): Moderate impact.

Interviewee (P3): Slight impact.

Interviewee (P4): Significant impact.

Interviewee (P5): Significant impact.

Annex 8 continuation

Interviewee (P6): Slight impact.

Interviewee (P7): Don't know / Unsure.

Interviewee (P8): Moderate impact.

Interviewee (P9): Slight impact.

Interviewer: What are the advantages and reasons for collaborating with influencers?

Interviewee (P1): Generating buzz and word-of-mouth marketing, enhancing a brand's online presence.

Interviewee (P2): Creating authentic content and experiences, generating buzz and word-of-mouth marketing, building brand awareness and loyalty, generating financial returns, enhancing a brand's online presence.

Interviewee (P3): Reaching a targeted audience, expanding customer base, creating authentic content and experiences, building brand awareness and loyalty, enhancing search engine optimization (SEO), generating financial returns, enhancing a brand's online presence, facilitating feedback from the target audience.

Interviewee (P4): Expanding customer base, generating buzz and word-of-mouth marketing, facilitating feedback from the target audience.

Interviewee (P5): Reaching a targeted audience, generating buzz and word-of-mouth marketing, building brand awareness and loyalty, providing social proof and credibility, generating financial returns, enhancing a brand's online presence.

Interviewee (P6): Reaching a targeted audience, generating buzz and word-of-mouth marketing, promoting a specific location or country, enhancing search engine optimization.

Interviewee (P7): Reaching a targeted audience, promoting a specific location or country, generating financial returns.

Interviewee (P8): Reaching a targeted audience, generating buzz and word-of-mouth marketing, enhancing search engine optimization (SEO), enhancing a brand's online presence.

Interviewee (P9): Creating authentic content and experiences, generating buzz and word-of-mouth marketing.

Interviewer: What are the disadvantages of using Influencers?

Interviewee (P1): Limited control over the influencer's messaging and content, and difficulty in measuring ROI (return on investment).

Interviewee (P2): Limited control over the influencer's messaging and content, high cost associated with working with popular influencers, and difficulty in measuring ROI (return on investment).

Annex 8 continuation

Interviewee (P3): High cost associated with working with popular influencers, and potential for influencer scandals or controversies to negatively impact the brand.

Interviewee (P4): Limited control over the influencer's messaging and content, difficulty in finding the right influencer for the brand's specific needs, and difficulty in measuring ROI (return on investment).

Interviewee (P5): Perceived as inauthentic or fake, and high cost associated with working with popular influencers.

Interviewee (P6): Perceived as inauthentic or fake, and difficulty in measuring ROI (return on investment).

Interviewee (P7): High cost associated with working with popular influencers, difficulty in finding the right influencer for the brand's specific needs, and the potential for influencer scandals or controversies to negatively impact the brand.

Interviewee (P8): Limited control over the influencer's messaging and content, high cost associated with working with popular influencers, and difficulty in finding the right influencer for the brand's specific needs.

Interviewee (P9): Limited control over the influencer's messaging and content, and difficulty in measuring ROI (return on investment).

Interviewer: What are the criteria for selecting Instagram travel influencers?

Interviewee (P1): Number of followers, quality of content, engagement level, demographic of their followers, and metrics such as reach, impressions, and conversion rates.

Interviewee (P2): Number of followers, quality of content, engagement level, demographic of their followers, and metrics such as reach, impressions, and conversion rates.

Interviewee (P3): Quality of content, reliability, and geographic location.

Interviewee (P4): Brand and influencer compatibility, quality of content, reliability, reputation, and credibility.

Interviewee (P5): Brand and influencer compatibility, quality of content, engagement level, demographic of their followers, reputation and credibility, metrics such as reach, impressions, and conversion rates, cost-effectiveness.

Interviewee (P6): Brand and influencer compatibility, engagement level, geographic location, demographic of their followers, reputation, and credibility.

Interviewee (P7): Brand and influencer compatibility, number of followers, quality of content, reliability, geographic location.

Interviewee (P8): Brand and influencer compatibility, number of followers, demographic of their followers, metrics such as reach, impressions, and conversion rates.

Annex 8 continuation

Interviewee (P9): Number of followers, and cost-effectiveness.

Interviewer: To what extent do you agree that using young influencers can help attract a younger segment of tourists to a destination?

Interviewee (P1): Agree.

Interviewee (P2): Somewhat agree.

Interviewee (P3): Somewhat agree.

Interviewee (P4): Strongly agree. Young influencers have a strong influence on the younger segment of tourists as they can relate to them better and are more likely to follow their recommendations.

Interviewee (P5): Strongly agree. Young influencers have a strong social media presence and can help to increase the visibility of a destination to younger audiences.

Interviewee (P6): Somewhat disagree.

Interviewee (P7): Somewhat agree.

Interviewee (P8): Agree.

Interviewee (P9): Agree.

Interviewer: How effective was influencer marketing for your company in achieving your marketing goals, such as increasing brand awareness, driving website traffic, generating leads, or boosting sales?

Interviewee (P1): Very effective.

Interviewee (P2): Exceptionally effective.

Interviewee (P3): Very effective.

Interviewee (P4): Very effective.

Interviewee (P5): Exceptionally effective.

Interviewee (P6): Not effective at all.

Interviewee (P7): Exceptionally effective.

Interviewee (P8): Very effective.

Interviewee (P9): Exceptionally effective.

Interviewer: To what extent do you agree that influencer marketing can lead to increased tourism revenue for businesses targeting Gen Z?

Interviewee (P1): Agree.

Interviewee (P2): Agree.

Interviewee (P3): Somewhat agree.

Interviewee (P4): Agree.

Interviewee (P5): Agree.

Interviewee (P6): Somewhat disagree.

Interviewee (P7): Agree.

Interviewee (P8): Agree.

Interviewee (P9): Disagree.

Interviewer: To what extent do you agree that tourism businesses should partner with influencers to target Gen Z consumers?

Interviewee (P1): Somewhat neutral.

Interviewee (P2): Somewhat agree. It's important to keep up with current trends and Gen Z is a major market that can be reached through influencer partnerships.

Interviewee (P3): Strongly agree.

Interviewee (P4): Somewhat neutral.

Interviewee (P5): Strongly agree. Gen Z is a demographic that spends a lot of time on social media and influencer partnerships is an effective way to reach them.

Interviewee (P6): Strongly disagree.

Interviewee (P7): Somewhat neutral.

Interviewee (P8): Somewhat agree.

Interviewee (P9): Somewhat neutral.

Interviewer: What suggestions would you offer to other tourism businesses regarding working with influencers?

Interviewee (P2): Selecting the right and best fit influencers for their campaigns as it is important to get user generated content with high visibility and engagement level. Also, to ensure a smooth communication with influencers is another important factor to increase a brand recognition and loyalty level as well.

Interviewee (P3): Influencers promote their products well; they can promote your brand very well and reach a wide audience.

Interviewee (P4): Choose influencers with less followers but who are very loyal instead of influencers with many followers, value for money is much more profitable.

Interviewee (P5): Quality not quantity.

Interviewee (P6): Influencer marketing is not worth the money.

Interviewee (P7): Good advertisements, suitable images, or videos

Interviewee (P9): I recommend that they clearly communicate your expectations to the influencer, including the goals of the campaign, required deliverables and pricing. It is crucial to have a written agreement outlining these details to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding.

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