



National
College *of*
Ireland

*An exploration of how marketing technique and
promotion via Instagram drives domestic tourism in
Ireland*

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MSc in Marketing

Submitted to the
National College of Ireland, August 2021

Abstract

The recent worldwide pandemic has altered international tourism across the world, providing a need for an increase in the promotion and marketing of domestic tourism in Ireland. This study explores the impact of marketing technique and promotion through Instagram, in driving domestic tourism in Ireland.

This research utilized secondary data through an extensive literature review to develop and establish an appropriate research question and objectives. Primary research ensued, in the form of qualitative, in-depth, telephone and electronic interviews, with six Instagram users who met the criteria of the study. The data collected was thematically analysed and compared against the existing literature and research, as to establish conclusions and recommendations.

The main research findings showed that Instagram users have interpersonal and informational motives for actively using Instagram, especially regarding travel and tourism; they consider their friends and online peers to be honest and trustworthy when searching for travel opinions, recommendations and information, supported by Instagram's visual influence; travel and tourism related marketing/promotion via Instagram pages and influencers are acknowledged as a key influential factor in driving tourism domestically in Ireland.

The leading conclusion of the study was that marketing and promoting through Instagram has a high impact on driving domestic tourism in Ireland, through Instagram's unique functions and visual communications, which enable promotional pages and influencers to showcase what Ireland has to offer, to the masses.

Further opportunities surrounding this research were identified and displayed in the conclusion of this study.

Declaration

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to offer my sincerest thanks to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Louise Maguire, for her constant guidance, support, mentoring and encouragement throughout the process of completing this dissertation.

I am also really grateful to all the NCI lecturers and staff I have had the pleasure of meeting and have gotten advice from throughout this whole year.

I would like to thank my mam and dad for their continuous support and encouragement through everything I do in life, especially throughout this college experience. You have helped me immensely, through everything that went on this year, and I cannot thank you enough. I love you both and I hope I made you proud.

I would like to also thank my beautiful and supportive girlfriend, Michelle, who has been by my side supporting me, loving me and encouraging me throughout this tough process. I love and miss you a lot.

I want to extend my appreciation to all the participants who have taken time out of their daily lives to help and contribute towards my research. Thank you for your valuable time.

Lastly, I want to thank my classmates and all the individuals which I have had the pleasure of working with throughout this year.

The unconditional support and encouragement of the people around me has made this year and this thesis a special memory and one that I will hold near, forever.

Rares Chiriluta – 2021

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background

As Ireland is progressing through the COVID-19 pandemic, the easing of regulations has opened up new opportunities for growth and sustainability, especially in the travel and tourism sector. Domestic tourism has been regarded as a critical factor for Ireland's overall tourism economy, as Irish holidaymakers will be the main contributors towards its revenue (McQuinn, 2021). This is evident as over €4 million has already been invested into the marketing and promotion of domestic tourism in Ireland, in a bid to boost the economy and drive tourism within the country (Slattery, 2021).

Research by Failte Ireland into the domestic tourism of Ireland has determined that prior to the pandemic, over 11 million domestic trips were made in 2019 alone, with approximately 50% of trips regarded as travel and tourism related (Failte Ireland Research, 2021).

The statistics imply that domestic tourism is an increasing trend in Ireland and further efforts are needed to promote and advertise Ireland domestically, as Slattery (2021) suggests that prior to travel restrictions easing, only 46% of the Irish population had plans to travel domestically.

Several organizations and businesses have therefore begun to integrate social media marketing and promotion as a means of communicating to the masses, while promoting travel in Ireland through unique content. Instagram's unique and visual functions have supported its continuous increase in popularity and growth. With a projected 988 million users by 2023, Instagram has become a fundamental social media platform, especially for marketing practices and promotional techniques (Clement, 2020).

1.2 Research Focus

This research particularly focusses on exploring the impact of marketing techniques and promotion via Instagram in driving domestic tourism in Ireland. Instagram provides versatile methods of approaching marketing and promotion (Bashar, Ahmad and Wasiq, 2012). Users and businesses can connect and communicate with ease, while marketing efforts can reach a large audience and attract users through eye-catching imagery and visual communication efforts (Holmes, 2021).

Instagram's popularity and unique visual take on communication have been supporting factors for the recent integration of marketing and promotional efforts. Furthermore, the increasing need for domestic tourism in Ireland is a recent development, stemmed from the current pandemic. Therefore, there is a lack of literature surrounding the impact of marketing techniques and promotion through Instagram on the influence and behaviours of users, with regards to driving domestic travel and tourism in Ireland.

Previous studies and literature have highlighted the impact of Instagram marketing, along with associated phenomena such as electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) and social influence (Erkan, 2015; Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007). However, no studies have placed focus on the impact of EWOM and social influence through marketing and promotion via Instagram in driving domestic tourism in Ireland. The goal of this study is to expand on current research, while placing focus on further exploring the identified gap in the literature, surrounding marketing via Instagram and its impact on driving domestic tourism in Ireland.

1.3 Overall research aim, objectives and methods

The overall aim of this study is to explore how marketing technique and promotion via Instagram drives domestic tourism in Ireland. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To evaluate the motives and uses of Instagram in regards to travel/tourism
- To explore the effects of EWOM and social influence on Instagram users looking to travel domestically
- To explore the impact of Instagram marketing and promotion on users looking to travel domestically

The primary research conducted applies a qualitative approach by means of in-depth telephone and electronic interviews, with Instagram users who have been observed to follow and interact with a number of pages and influencers who promote travel and tourism within Ireland. The insights gathered from the primary research will be expected to add further value to the existing literature and theory, while discovering further research potential within the scope of the topic.

1.4 Organization of Thesis

A detailed literature review will explore and critically analyse relevant literature, theory and past research relevant to this study. The insights and knowledge gathered through the literature review will aid in the development of the research question, along with various objectives pertaining to the study. Following the establishment of the research question and objectives, the research methodology will display the manner in which the research should be executed, along with the relevant theory which will support each choice. The data and insights of the research will be analysed and compared against the relevant theory and literature to establish the final conclusions. Applicable recommendations will be outlined for further research while research limitations will be highlighted.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Congruent with the continuous growth of social media, marketing and promotional techniques via social media platforms such as Instagram is a growing movement among marketers and academics alike, as past research and literature has uncovered the effectiveness of Instagram marketing on altering awareness, influence and overall user behaviour (Ha, 2015; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Bashar, A., Ahmad, I. and Wasiq, 2012). Additional marketing research into social media and its effects on consumer behaviour has yielded phenomena such as ‘social influence’ and ‘electronic word-of-mouth’ as being critical factors in usage and consumption of information and content from social media platforms such as Instagram, with these factors playing a critical role in a consumer’s decision-making processes (Flache *et al.*, 2017; Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Venkatesh and Brown, 2001). As a result of these phenomena, marketers have integrated certain social media techniques as to garner awareness, while also influencing and enticing users through promotional practices, in a bid to alter the decisions a consumer will make (Tuten and Solomon, 2017; Krallman, Pelletier and Adams, 2016).

The tourism industry is a highly competitive field, always expanding and creating choice for the consumer, resulting in destinations and tourism organizations competing against each other in order to gain an advantage in their respected area (Ashworth and Page, 2011). The purchasing of tourism/destination related elements by consumers often involves purchasing a service and/or an experience, therefore frequently needing extensive research prior to purchase (Bennett and Strydom, 2001). Contemporary users are increasingly looking to social media and in particular Instagram, due

to its visual elements, to garner information, peer reviews and additional content, promotional or organic, which aid in influencing the user's decisions (Virtanen, Björk and Sjöström, 2017).

This literature review will explore in detail, the effectiveness of Instagram marketing and promotional techniques within the context of the tourism industry. A critical overview will be established on previous research and literature discovered. The objective of this chapter is to offer a detailed background of the current literature regarding Instagram marketing and promotional techniques within the tourism industry, while exploring the factors which accommodate these practices.

2.2 Social Media and Instagram marketing/promotion

2.2.1 Social Media Communications

With over 3.8 billion active users on a diverse range of platforms, social media is an increasingly developing technology, connecting individuals across the world and opening up avenues for marketers to innovate and promote (Kemp, 2020). Additionally, Duffet (2015; p.500) states social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have '*altered the way that numerous consumers interact with each other and organisations*', further solidifying the transformation social media has had on society and the contemporary world. With new methods of connecting and communicating with others, users have begun to establish trends and ever-changing needs, which marketers have to adapt to and evolve methodically in order to satisfy users (Saravanakumar and Suganthalakshmi, 2012). Sigala (2010) states that marketing on social media platforms differs from traditional methods, as different resources and strategies need to be established as to effectively communicate and connect with social users. Furthermore, Xiang (2011) suggests a clear focus and understanding is needed when marketing on social media, as the appropriate audience need to be targeted.

Alalwan (2018) states that due to their interactive nature, social media advertisements connect to users in a more effective manner compared to traditional media, as a deeper communication can be enabled through these platforms. As a result, Alalwan *et al.* (2017) state there are various techniques to marketing on social media, all with different focusses and outcomes, as marketers could choose to advertise, build customer relationships or increase brand awareness, all on various different platforms. Additionally, marketing on social media platforms urge users to interact with ads and ultimately the brands themselves, through actions such as liking, commenting or sharing, further nurturing the user-brand relationship (Tuten and Solomon, 2017). Tuten and Solomon (2017) further suggest that a key aim of marketing on social media relates to the ability to influence and alter the behaviour of a consumer through their decision-making process, by means of the social relationships built between

user and brand. Psychological factors such as awareness and perception can be enhanced by marketing activities on social media (Alalwan *et al.*, 2017). Noticeably, Duffett (2015) suggests there is a correlation between the effectiveness of promotional activities on social media and the perceptions and attitudes of the consumers towards said activities, with these behavioural factors also being evident towards the brand itself (Alalwan *et al.*, 2017).

2.2.2 Instagram and User Motives

Instagram boasts a projected 988 million users by 2023 and is regarded as one of the most popular social media platforms, with a unique take on connecting and communicating with the world, through the use of imagery and visual elements (Clement, 2020). Instagram's unique, visually-forward, social platform comes at a time where users are becoming less interested in text-based communications and are converting to visual imagery as a method of communication (Gadbsy, 2017). This is further supported by the ephemeral content supported by Instagram through its 'stories' feature, which enables users to post short visual content which disappears after a period of 24 hours (Belanche, Cenjor and Pérez-Rueda, 2019).

Past research by Sheldon and Bryant (2016) suggests there are differences in the manner and motive in which users use Instagram. The theory of uses and gratifications (U&G) was related to the research by Sheldon and Bryant (2016), with the idea that users choose and use media based on their needs and gratifications, with each communication behaviour differentiating from another due to social and psychological factors (Wu, Wang and Tsai, 2010). While the traditional use of the U&G theory focussed on traditional media, recent research has yielded uses such as convenience and expression of opinion as motives to the utilization of social media (Whiting and Williams, 2013; as cited in Sheldon and Bryant, 2016). Regarding the U&G of using Instagram, Sheldon and Bryant (2016) have documented factors such as knowledge about others, creativity and documentation and information, as key elements to the motives of using Instagram and how users are influenced by the content displayed on the platform. This is made apparent by Instagram's fundamental feature, as the platform enables users to post and share pictures, videos or other forms of visual content with the masses (Fatanti and Suyadnya, 2015). Posting visual content on Instagram enables users to capture and share a piece of their reality, along with showcasing their experiences, whether travelling or indulging in a hobby (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013). From a marketing perspective, marketers can utilize these motives and the ability to easily connect with users through platforms such as Instagram, to further advertise and interact with their targeted audience.

2.2.3 Instagram as a marketing/advertising medium

Recognized as a unique method of marketing to the masses, Instagram enables a two-way communication platform for businesses to gain insightful knowledge and analytics regarding their consumers, while establishing marketing and advertising practices in a bid to innovate and further expand (Bashar, A., Ahmad, I. and Wasiq, 2012). With an advertising revenue of over \$18.16 billion in 2020, it is evident marketers have been increasingly utilizing Instagram as part of their marketing techniques (Newberry, 2021).

Visually dominant

Virtanen, Björk and Sjöström (2017) state that businesses are enabled, via Instagram, to enhance their storytelling through visual communications, further nurturing the relationship between user and brand. The visual content displayed becomes eye-catching and stand-out, compared to traditional media and text communications (Miles, 2014). Additionally, contemporary users consume and process visual information at faster and more effective rates than the textual counterpart, enabling users to gain a deeper understanding of the messages being communicated by brands (Virtanen, Björk and Sjöström, 2017).

Measuring capability

Marketing on Instagram may hold different aims and objectives, with contrasting metrics utilized in measuring efficiency and success. Basic metrics such as likes, comments and shares can be numeric representations of the progress of certain marketing efforts (Krallman, Pelletier and Adams, 2016). Sherman *et al.* (2018) express that the metrics featured by Instagram are key to how users perceive content, as users can be influenced and urged to interact due to the levels of activity on certain posts, videos or content displayed. Miles (2014) further suggests that metrics used for Instagram can showcase the levels of engagement between user and brand and/or the users themselves, within the community, enabling brands to locate potential ambassadors and opinion leaders who vocalize the brand's message and values.

Co-creation ability

Instagram's many features urge users to take action, increasing the interaction between user and brand while endorsing the advertised content (Miles, 2014). Furthermore, Instagram's enablement of easy interactivity between user and brand can lead to the establishment of co-creation, as brands may look to utilize 'user-generated content' or 'electronic word-of-mouth', referred from hereafter as EWOM,

to advertise or promote marketing efforts (Krallman, Pelletier and Adams, 2016). Renowned scholars, Vargo and Lusch (2008) discuss the notion of ‘co-creation’ in their conceptualization of the new service dominant logic, expressing the need for businesses to collaborate with consumers in the creation and management of value. By interacting and listening to users via Instagram, businesses can gain invaluable insights into the needs and wants of their consumers, while establishing promotional efforts through the use of content generated by users and/or EWOM (Bashar, Ahmad and Wasiq, 2012). Relating back to the uses and gratifications of using Instagram, the ability to co-create and interact with brands, motivates users to continuously interact and become part of a community, nurturing the self-esteem and the sense of belonging (Krallman, Pelletier and Adams, 2016).

2.3 Electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) and Social Influence

2.3.1 Word-of-mouth (WOM)

According to Liu and Park (2015) a consumer’s decision-making process is affected by feelings of uncertainty and the need to gain information before purchasing or consuming a product, service or intangible elements. The idea of word-of-mouth (WOM) has been a long-lasting term facilitating the obtainment of information, with an original concept established by Kats and Lazarsfeld (1966) who define it as the communication of information between consumers from personal experiences, which can alternate and influence the behaviours and attitudes towards certain products, services or processes. This is especially prevalent in circumstances involving intangible elements such as travel, as users long to gain information and opinions when deciding on certain travel options, albeit location or other travel related choices (Liu and Park, 2015; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). The influence garnered through WOM is deemed critical by Huete-Alcocer (2017) in such situations involving intangible elements, as an assessment cannot be made until after consumption, therefore information from other peers is key in a consumer’s decision-making process.

Additionally, past research by Cheung and Thadani (2012) determined that the concept of WOM has greater credibility and influence on consumers compared to more traditional methods of gaining information such as television or radio. This is due to the fact that users tend to place their trust in other individuals, allowing themselves to be influenced by the information and opinions of their peers, ultimately establishing WOM as a ‘*consumer-dominated channel of marketing communication*’ (Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007; p.4). The independence consumers gain through WOM further increases the reliability and credibility of this concept, making it an attractive manner for individuals to gain further information and perspective (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

2.3.2 Electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM)

The constant surge of social media in the contemporary world has led to many users utilizing platforms such as Instagram to gain insights and information from other peers, in the form of electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM), to satisfy any uncertainty related to any situation (Yang, Park and Hu, 2018). Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008; p.9) define EWOM as '*all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services*'. This ability to freely research the Internet and various social media platforms has evolved the manner in which communications transpire, as user-generated content and information can be exchanged at a rapid pace, increasingly influencing the behaviours of individuals in regards to products, services or locations (Gómez, Martínez and Martínez-Caraballo, 2017). EWOM enables users to confide in strangers and online communities for information and opinions such as reviews, to gain information and reduce uncertainties prior to any purchases (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). The information displayed on the Internet which can be utilized through the medium of EWOM can range from detailed reviews to simple comments, shares or likes, showcasing the feelings users hold towards a certain brand, product or service (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

Yang (2017) further suggests there are three influential factors leading to EWOM: experience, motivation and platform. As context, an individual may have had a positive experience and is motivated to share said experience through visual imagery via the platform of Instagram, ultimately creating the phenomena of EWOM, as other users will visualize this and be influenced by it.

TripAdvisor (2020) states that in the matter of travelling and holiday making, 94% of individuals claim EWOM, in the form of online reviews, is critical in their decision-making processes, regarding location or accommodation, further outlining the contemporary importance EWOM has created for users, especially in the travel and hospitality industries. Furthermore, businesses can utilize the phenomena of EWOM to better understand consumers and monitor the manners and behaviours displayed online which relate to their brand (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). However, EWOM cannot be fully regulated or controlled, as the opinions and perceptions shared by users are an element controlled only by the users themselves, therefore businesses need to ensure a positive consumer experience as to avoid any negative feedback (Yang, 2017). As EWOM is regarded as 'consumer-dominated' and usually uncontrollable by businesses, a sense of trust and reliability is established between peers, making it a highly influential phenomenon (Yang, 2017). Therefore, businesses can utilize EWOM in their favour, integrating positive consumer-generated content into their marketing and promotional techniques, further gaining the trust of users through peer-to-peer influences (Yang, 2017). Furthermore, businesses can utilize EWOM through various social media channels such as Instagram

to unveil further consumer needs, and establish a solid communication channel between brand and user (Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

2.3.3 Social Influence

Similar to EWOM, the phenomenon of social influence revolves around the manner in which individuals may alter their actions, perceptions, attitudes and overall behaviour based on the influence of other individuals whom they have interacted with (Flache *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, Venkatesh and Brown (2001) state due to behavioural patterns which emerge in communities via social media, individuals are influenced and behaviours are altered as to integrate with the majority. Furthermore, these social influences are a critical factor in varying the perceptions and decisions an individual may have towards products, services and/or locations, as the value perceived by the mass population is displayed through social media, making it easily accessible and an increasingly utilized method in which individuals gain information (Fulk and Boyd, 1991; as cited in Venkatesh and Brown, 2001).

Within social influence theory and literature, there are two common types of phenomena. Soper (2020) conceptualizes the first phenomena as ‘informational social influence’, with individuals aligning their behaviours based on the acceptance of information gathered from other individuals which are classed as strangers and have no relationships with the user being influenced. Furthermore, Soper (2020; p.218767) states within the contemporary digital world, ‘*informational social influence continues to drive individuals to defer to the group opinion or behave according to group expectations*’, with this aspect being prevalent through social media platforms such as Instagram. From a marketing perspective, Kaptein and Eckles (2012) reveal that marketers can influentially guide individuals by means of a consensus, directing users who are in a state of uncertainty, towards observing the beliefs and opinions of a community in regards to a certain product/service/location.

The second type of phenomena related to social influence is defined as normative social influence and is conceptualized by Deutsch and Gerard (1955) as the need for individuals to belong within a social group, therefore allowing themselves to be influenced by the overall group beliefs and behaviours. From a marketing and online context, this phenomenon of normative social influence can be seen in influencer marketing, as influencing figures and promotional organizations can prompt individuals towards certain communities and social societies (Brown and Hayes, 2008).

Social influence is showcased on social platforms such as Instagram, through actions such as ‘liking’, ‘sharing’ and/or ‘commenting’ on certain content relating to specific products, services or locations. Muchnik, Aral and Taylor (2013) suggest that online users are influenced by content which is deemed ‘popular’, due to the mass digitized opinions of the social population, while also contributing to this element by conforming to the behaviours of different social groups, to fit in. The digital and social developments which are constantly occurring have altered the manner in which individuals display certain areas of their lives, as the ability to easily share texts, images and/or videos of experiences, possessions or opinions, enables users to display their ‘extended selves’ to the mass audience (Belk, 2013).

2.4 Influencer Marketing

With the ever-growing surge of social media and the apparent effects of social influence on consumer behaviour, marketers have increasingly begun to use influencer marketing. The idea of influencer marketing refers to the utilization of the influence an individual holds, to promote and advertise a brand’s products or services, on various social media platforms (Jin, Muqaddam and Ryu, 2019). These influencers are regular people who have garnered large followings on social media platforms such as Instagram and have become online personalities, from which other users seek information or opinions (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Often regarded as ‘third-party endorsers’, influencers communicate and alter the attitudes and perceptions of the mass online population using social media, in the form of blogs, videos and/or reviews (Freberg *et al.*, 2011). Additionally, social media influencers typically hold a level of expertise and knowledge in certain areas, such as travel or food, establishing a level of credibility and resonance regarding information pertaining in that area (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Typically, influencers will collaborate with brands and create promotional content relating to their area of expertise, appearing organic in-nature and easy to consume, making it an effective method of marketing on social media platforms (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). Furthermore, social media influencers correlate with both phenomena of EWOM and social influence, as influencers are regarded by Forbes (2016) as experts, with content created by such influencers regarded as credible and dependable information from which decisions and opinions can be made.

Compared to traditional ‘celebrities’, social media influencers are conceptualized as ‘*grassroots individuals*’, who have established themselves as trusted sources of information and opinions, through the continuous and consistent creation of content and relationships created with their ‘followers’ (Lou and Yuan, 2019; p.59). Additionally, marketing on social media is an incessant process, as it may involve daily creation of content along with continuous engagement with followers. This difficulty in effectively managing social media has led to brands utilizing influencers not just for

their mass followings and influence, yet for their varied skill sets and knowledge of ever-changing online trends and topics (Campbell and Farrell, 2020).

Furthermore, there are different types of influencers which exist, bringing various values to brands. Campbell and Farrell (2020) showcase in *Figure 1*, the diversity between social media influencers, as different characteristics, skills and collaborative requirements diversify each type of influencer, each unique in their own respect. The influencer groupings take into consideration the numeric value of one's following, along with key factors such as expertise, cultural capital, authenticity and accessibility (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). From a business perspective, marketers would evaluate their strategy and available funds, in order to assess the appropriate type of influencer to invest in, all while ensuring that the influencer correlates with the values and image of the brand.

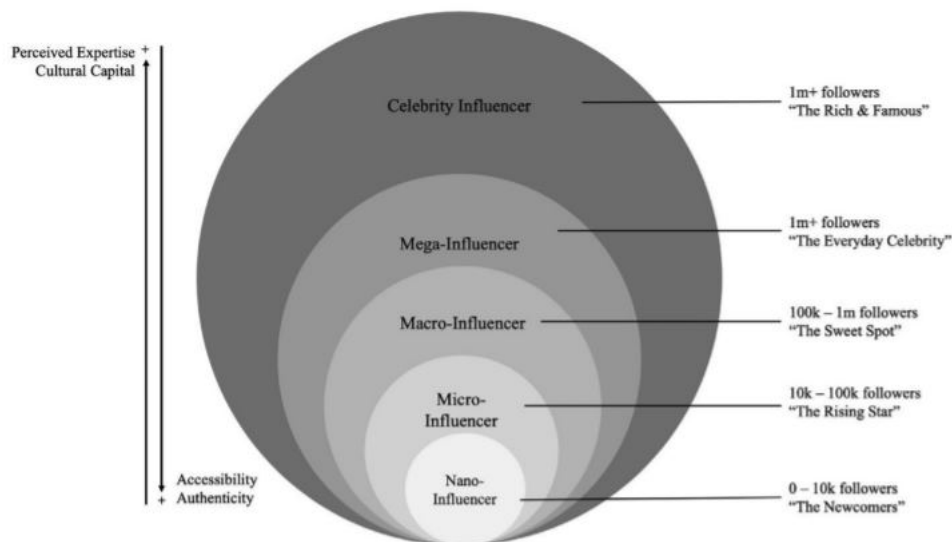


Figure 1. Types of Influencers (Campbell and Farrell, 2020)

Past research by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) and Lu, Chang and Chang (2014) has displayed certain elements contributing to the effectiveness of influencer marketing, such as the strong relationships between influencer and user, while factors such as credibility and trust are crucial to the success of this marketing technique. Forbes (2016) suggests that behaviours may be influenced through example. With influencers constantly recommending certain factors or views through their everyday content, users may be led to unconsciously adopt the same behaviours, ultimately moulding the users' opinions and perceptions of certain products, services or locations (Forbes, 2016).

Furthermore, Lee and Koo (2015) suggest a constant display of positive characteristics by influencers, such as trustworthiness and expertise, positively affects the purchase intentions of the users who are exposed to this display, further showcasing the power influencers hold regarding the alteration of consumer behaviour.

It is evident influencer marketing is a highly effective technique, being increasingly incorporated into marketing strategies, as Campbell and Farrell (2020) state the industry itself is projected to be worth over \$101 billion, with most brands looking to collaborate with social media influencers in a bid to increase brand awareness, lead generation and ultimately sales.

2.5 Destination/Tourism Marketing and Promotion

2.5.1 Destination Marketing

Baker and Cameron (2008) state that a destination can be a place ranging from a country, city, location or area which can attract visitors and act as a catalyst for tourism and the offering of products, services and experiences. Additionally, the idea of destination marketing has been established as a key factor in the development and sustainability of tourism over the last decades, as competition constantly sees an increase and options are prevalent for tourists (Pike and Page, 2014). Destination marketing can be defined as the marketing of certain destinations, whether national or international, through four primary activities: constructing the ideal mix of features and services within a community; establishing incentives which attract current and potential users; efficiently delivering a location's products and services with ease of access; and lastly promoting and marketing the unique values a location offers to users through various mediums (Kotler *et al.*, 1993; as cited in Baker and Cameron, 2008). Additionally, Terzibasoglu (2004) suggests that destination marketing both aids in bringing tourism to certain locations while also offering business to communities and sellers/stakeholders within these locations, ultimately acting as a key element of an area's infrastructure. In many cases, the main objectives of destination marketing are to act as a method of gaining tourism insight while operating as a wide mix of activities in attracting tourists to certain destinations/locations (Pike and Page, 2014). Past research by Ashworth and Page (2011) suggests there has been an increase in the utilization of destination marketing practices, as competition constantly grows within every national or international tourism industry.

Baker and Cameron (2008) critically suggest that the idea of destination marketing holds many stakeholders, as the marketing of a destination includes business owners, government bodies, residents among other participating figures, therefore control by an individual stakeholder regarding

marketing activities is impractical. Therefore, Pike and Page, 2014) state destinations look into solving the impracticality of control over marketing efforts by funding and establishing a ‘Destination Marketing Organization’ (DMO) through a collaborative process, which will enable a destination to attract visitors, increasing tourism and business in the respected locations. Li, Robinson and Oriade (2017) recognize how destination marketing and DMOs have been impacted by the recent developments in technology and specifically social media and Web 2.0, as users gain the ability to research, compare, book and review travel related elements at a rapid pace, while being influenced by phenomena such as EWOM, social influence and influencer marketing. Additionally, Li, Robinson and Oriade (2017; p.1) delve into the aspect of co-creation, which has been mentioned previously, correlating with user-generated content and EWOM, as the ‘*prosumption of images and representations of first-hand visual experiences supports the network of resources that facilitate the tourist gaze in the first place*’. Therefore, the activities surrounding destination marketing and tourism authorities such as DMOs are tasked with continuously strategizing and utilizing new trends and promotional tools to effectively advertise their respected locations and the offerings they hold to potential visitors (Pike and Page, 2014).

2.5.2 Tourism Marketing and Promotion

Similar to destination marketing, tourism marketing places focus on tourism products and services, as Kotler and Armstrong (2007) define the concept as the balance between the needs of tourists with the aims of tourist organizations and businesses. Additionally, Bennett and Strydom (2001) state tourism marketing holds similar characteristics as service marketing, as individuals purchase services or experiences relating to tourism/travel. Tourism services are ‘*high in experiential qualities*’, therefore they are also heterogenous in nature, as each consumer will render their services/experiences in diverse ways, dependant on the events which occur during their consumption of said services/experiences (Bennett and Strydom, 2001; p.6). Therefore, tourism marketing is crucial to the manner in which an individual consumes their travel/tourism services, as promotional efforts, or lack of, may influence the events which occur throughout their travel experience (Bennett and Strydom, 2001).

In order to maintain a successful whole experience for consumers as they research, purchase, consume and digest their travel/tourism related products/services, Sadq, Othman and Khorsheed (2019) suggest the utilization of certain marketing activities conceptualized within the tourism marketing mix:

Tourism Promotion

The efforts and activities concluded to promote the tourist product/service act as the communication between organization and public, conveying the values and offerings to consumers (George, 2014). In the contemporary world, promotional methods are plentiful, as organizations can utilize digital or traditional marketing techniques to influence and convince consumers (Thwala and Slabbert, 2018). In the context of this research, the social media platform Instagram, enables touristic organizations to visually promote and communicate with the mass audience, while utilizing phenomena such as EWOM, social influence and influencer marketing to further attempt to acquire visitors. Additionally, recent research by Mele, Kerkhof and Cantoni (2021) into cultural tourism via Instagram, yielded results suggesting that the ability to communicate and display unique offerings such as culture and history through a visually-forward platform such as Instagram is crucial in gaining awareness and generating interaction.

Competitive Capabilities

The idea of competitive capabilities refers to the ability to provide a competitive advantage within the field of tourism so to stand out from competing organizations and businesses. Within the context of tourism marketing, Bassano *et al.* (2019) display the idea of storytelling, as a method of differentiation and enhancement of competitive advantages. Tourist organizations can market the concept of ‘place storytelling’ with the addition of culture and history to further influence potential consumers, while standing out from competing destinations (Bassano *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, the utilization of social platforms such as Instagram, which urge visual storytelling, can further enhance the marketing efforts of touristic organizations (Mele, Kerkhof and Cantoni, 2021). While the action of ‘place storytelling’ can be processed internally, organizations can utilize co-creation and user-generated content to express the experiential values certain areas and locations hold (Bassano *et al.*, 2019). As mentioned previously, co-creation in this context can be through collaboration with local businesses and figures, while the opportunity to showcase the experiences of past consumers is also an alternative, once again utilizing phenomena such as EWOM and influence (Miles, 2014).

2.6 Domestic Tourism

Much of the research regarding tourism and Ireland, concentrates on overseas tourism and not on the domestic aspect of the industry. However, tourism in Ireland is regarded as a critical factor in the country’s economy. Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, Ireland has had a potential loss of over €6.9 million in regards to tourism, as approximately 75% of Ireland’s tourism economy evolves around international travel, a factor which has been halted for the near future (ITIC, 2020). Due to the

current pandemic and the international restrictions put in place in regards to overseas travel, domestic tourism can be regarded as fundamental to any country's tourism economy, with McQuinn (2021) stating Irish holidaymakers will be the primary source of revenue to Ireland's tourism economy for the foreseeable future. Additionally, recent research by Failte Ireland (2021) has yielded results suggesting the Irish population will look to travel domestically, as 48% of the population anticipate to *'take either a short or long break'* within Ireland, while 30% of the population intending to exclusively travel domestically for the conceivable future. Furthermore, research by Athanasopoulos and Hyndman (2008) in to domestic tourism in Australia has uncovered information suggesting that domestic tourism is key to the overall infrastructure of a country's tourism economy, as certain areas may only be primarily visited by local tourists. There is evidence showcasing the importance of domestic tourism in the current times, with further indication suggested by Slattery (2021) as Failte Ireland are attempting to revive the tourism economy in Ireland through domestic tourism, with a €4 million marketing campaign defined as 'Keep Discovering', urging the Irish population to travel domestically and aid in the recovery of the tourism industry. Failte Ireland's campaign to revive tourism in Ireland supports the domestic tourism industry through marketing toolkits, consumer insights and guides along with national awareness through digital and traditional media (Slattery, 2021).

Regarding the literature surrounding domestic tourism, Massidda and Etzo (2012) state there is little research concentrating on this topic and the factors associated with it. Research into domestic tourism in Italy by Massidda and Etzo (2012) suggests there is an importance in economic variables in relation to domestic tourism, along with choice factors which may be influenced by past experiences, regional differences or relative pricing. Additionally, research into rural tourism in Galicia (Spain) by Garín-Muñoz (2009) further detail factors such as location perception and diversification in regards to marketing campaigns are key to improving the flow of domestic and international tourism. The author suggests a gap in the literature is evident, as little research has been concluded on the topic of domestic tourism along with primary focus on the location of Ireland.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature review examines relevant literature surrounding the topics of marketing technique and promotional tools via Instagram, while addressing relevant phenomena such as social influence and EWOM, within the realm of tourism. Much of the literature acknowledges the constant growth of social media, especially visually forward platforms such as Instagram, entailing the utilization of these platforms to market and promote (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Tuten and Solomon, 2017).

Within the context of tourism, the literature showcases the variety of marketing techniques implemented through social media, to promote and advertise touristic elements (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Lu, Chang and Chang, 2014; Bennett and Strydom, 2001). Furthermore, psychological phenomena became apparent, in the form of social influence and EWOM, with the increasing usage of social media and the manner in which users interact with the social media platforms and their users (Yang, 2017; Flache *et al.*, 2017).

The researcher has identified a gap in the literature as the use of marketing and promotional techniques via Instagram to attract domestic tourism in Ireland has not previously been examined. This gap in literature enables the researcher to further do research, with specific focus on how Instagram users utilize the platform when considering travel, the effects of marketing/promotional practices on Instagram users and how their behaviours and considerations may be altered through these practices. The following section will outline the research question and the objectives which this research will focus on.

Chapter 3 – Research Question and Objectives

3.1 Research Question

Reviewing relevant literature revealed a common theme which highlighted the need for further exploration towards insights in relation to marketing technique and promotion through Instagram, with a focus of driving domestic tourism in Ireland. Therefore, the following research question was established:

‘How does marketing technique and promotion via Instagram drive domestic tourism in Ireland?’

3.2 Research Objectives

As to adequately answer the primary research question, the following set of research sub-objectives were formulated, based on the current literature and research:

- **3.2.1 – To evaluate the motives and uses of Instagram in regards to travel/tourism**

The existing literature indicates a variety of motives for using Instagram, with motives such as documentation, information and knowledge about others, being driving factors for the continuous use of the platform (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016). With domestic tourism on the rise due to the current

pandemic, this objective will attempt to further explore the motives and uses of Instagram in regards to travel and tourism within Ireland.

- **3.2.2 – To explore the effects of EWOM and social influence on Instagram users looking to travel domestically**

EWOM and social influence are considered key, influential factors in a user's decision-making processes (Chatterjee, 2001). Flache *et al.* (2017) consider these phenomena to have the ability to alter the behaviours and perceptions of users, especially in online and social environments. Tourism and travel orientated elements are experiential in nature, therefore users are often searching for user information and content in their process of making a decision (Yang, 2017). This secondary objective seeks to explore the effects of EWOM and social influence via Instagram on users researching and looking to travel domestically in Ireland.

- **3.2.3 – To explore the impact of Instagram marketing and promotion on users looking to travel domestically**

The continuous growth of Instagram has increased the ways businesses operate on the platform. Marketing and promotion on Instagram are regarded in the literature as unique methods of communicating and interacting with the masses, as the platform enables businesses to attract new customers while building relationships with current ones (Bashar, Ahmad and Wasiq, 2012). Tourism marketing enables businesses and organizations to promote and advertise travel and tourism related factors, with the objective of gaining awareness and increasing business (Thwala and Slabbert, 2018). The ability to promote tourism and travel related factors via Instagram allows businesses and organizations to visually present the value they offer to the masses, influencing their decisions and urging action. Therefore, this objective aims to explore the impact of Instagram marketing and promotion on users looking to travel domestically in Ireland.

The following chapter will outline the selected research methods and relevant theory, framed around the established research question and objectives.

Section 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Following a detailed review of the literature surrounding the topics within the research focus, the author will provide a comprehensive section detailing the methodological elements of this research. A well-grounded methodology section is needed to establish the relevant theory and philosophy of the undertaken research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.2 Research Philosophy

The philosophy of the research is a crucial starting point of the process, forming a basis for the entire research (Melnikovas, 2018). Holden and Lynch (2004) suggest that the methodology of a research project should be led by the researcher's philosophy and the phenomena being explored. This is further accepted by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), as they established the 'Research Onion', as a framework to aid researchers in choosing the appropriate methodological choices throughout their respected research, while ensuring an organized and effective research flow.

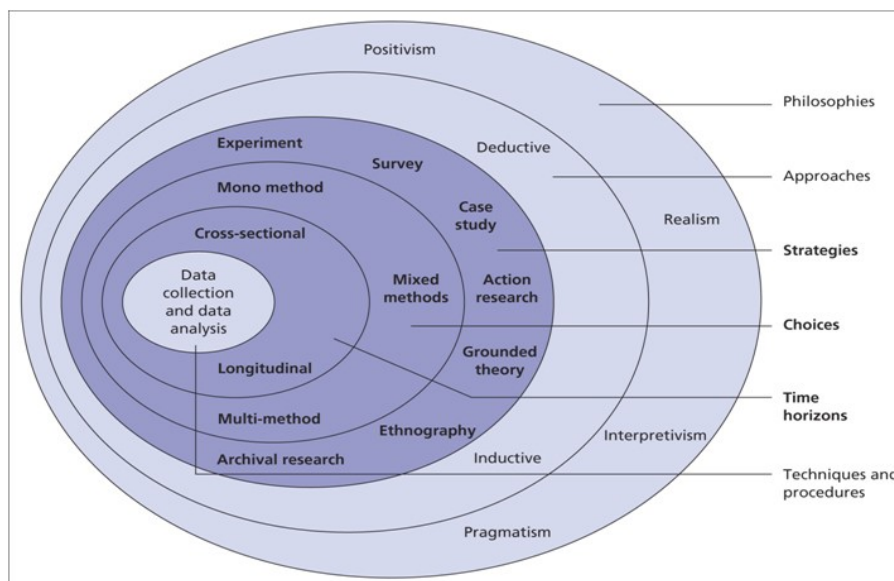


Figure 2. 'Research Onion' - Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009)

By utilizing the 'Research Onion' model, the appropriate approaches to the research have been decided upon. The philosophy of the research is regarded by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) as a crucial aspect in the methodology and research process, having a strong influence on the decisions and approaches taken for the rest of the study. As the main objective of the research is to explore

marketing technique and promotional tools, with secondary focus on aspects such as ‘social influence’ and EWOM, the need for a detailed and robust research is apparent.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) suggest two fundamental research philosophies; epistemology and ontology. Epistemology surrounds the idea of knowledge and how one may consume, validate and communicate knowledge to other individuals (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). In contrast, Floridi (2003; p.155) states ‘*ontology seeks to provide a definitive and exhaustive classification of entities in all spheres of being*’. Assumptions on reality is a key factor of ontology, as past literature and theory establish certain norms regarding elements of research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Additionally, Goertz and Mahoney (2012) differentiate epistemology and its counterpart, ontology by stating that ontology places focus on existing elements and assumptions while epistemology aims at exploring the nature of knowledge and information from the social reality.

Within the philosophy of epistemology, there are two prevalent categories which define the type of assumptions being made regarding the idea of knowledge. Interpretivism aims at gaining information and knowledge of behaviour through the perspective of the participant (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2011). Interpretivism contains a subjective nature as it utilizes human information rather than specific data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Contrastingly, positivism is utilized to gain and justify knowledge of the sciences through facts and data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Gill and Johnson (2002) state that a positivist view helps establish a cause-and-effect outlook to the research through the specific data collected and the objectives outlined.

Similar to epistemology, ontology is comprised of two theoretical elements, with objectivism incorporating ‘*assumptions of the natural sciences*’, ‘*embracing realism*’ and acting on the assumption that social realities are independent and external to people (social actors)(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019; p.135) while subjectivism incorporates ‘*assumptions of the arts and humanities*’, proclaiming that the actions and perceptions of people (social actors) creates a social reality (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019; p.137).

As the aim of the study is to research the influence that marketing techniques and promotional tools via Instagram can have on users looking to travel domestically in Ireland, an epistemological approach surrounding attitudes, perceptions and behaviours has been chosen (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Within the epistemological approach, the researcher will employ an interpretivist

view, as the aim of the study is to understand the knowledge from the participants through gaining insights into their beliefs, perceptions and experiences (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2011).

Furthermore, Wilson (2014) states an interpretivism approach requires that the researcher be within the environment of the research process and within the social reality of each participant, as a better understanding is awarded when participating in the process and gaining first-hand knowledge and understandings. Therefore, the author has proposed to conduct in-depth interviews, as to garner the most detailed and relevant information from the participant's understandings, views and perceptions. The following section will detail the proposed research design and the reasoning behind each decision through a methodical perspective.

3.3 Research Approach

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) state that the appropriate approach to a research question should be chosen prior to designing and performing the research, as particular decisions and strategies will influence the flow in which the research will continue. Bell, Bryman and Harley (2018) showcase two approaches in carrying out social research, coined as inductive and deductive. Soiferman (2010) states the main differentiating factor between the two approaches revolves around the focus of the research, as an inductive approach focuses on exploring phenomena, experiences and observations, while a deductive approach is based upon theory, rules and law. Furthermore, Soiferman (2010) suggests inductive researchers work upwards towards establishing a theory, while deductive researchers lead with a preconceived theory and work down towards a broader observation.

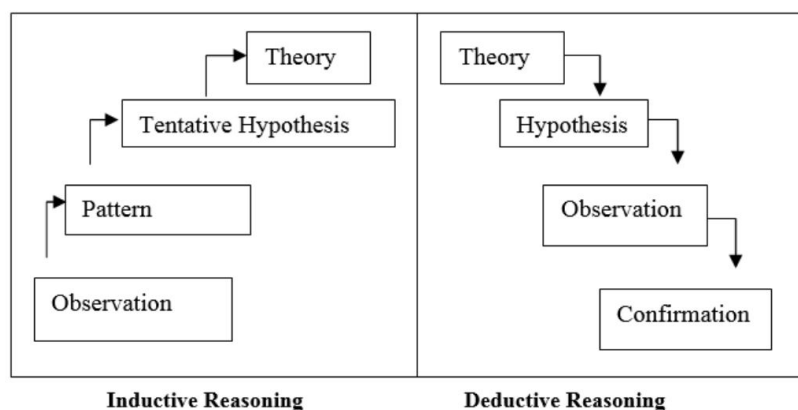


Figure 3. Research Theory Reasoning (Bryman, 2015)

The research being compiled places focus on the perceptions, experiences and behaviours of Instagram users in regards to domestic tourism and marketing/promotional techniques. Furthermore, certain phenomena such as social influence and EWOM are being explored, therefore an inductive research approach will be adopted by the researcher.

3.4 Research Design

Creswell (1994; p.34) states “*research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research*”. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), establishing an appropriate research design begins by outlining the type of research which will be utilized. The quantitative and qualitative research approaches are universally utilized as the main methods of research, with the option of integrating a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative procedures (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

It is important to note the decision of choosing a qualitative approach over quantitative, and the reasoning behind said decision. As the objective of the research revolves around exploring Instagram marketing technique and tools to drive domestic tourism, along with elements such as ‘social influence’ and EWOM, the ability to gain “*rich data about real life people and situations, and being more able to make sense of behaviour*” is critical and is enabled through a qualitative approach (De Vaus, 2013; p.6). In contrast, a quantitative approach places focus on numeric data, with a scope of explaining a phenomena through probability sampling and regression tactics on large numeric sample sizes (Khalid, Abdullah and Kumar, 2012). Therefore, a key element in the decision process, regarding the research approach, is the level of detail and information enabled through a qualitative approach, compared to the lack of rich information gathered through the opposing, quantitative approach. Lastly, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) suggest a connective link between qualitative research and interpretivism, as the knowledge of behaviour from humans is apparent in both the interpretivism philosophy and the qualitative method of research.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 In-Depth Interviews

The reliability of the data generated from in-depth interviews is a key reason to the author’s decision, as the objectives of the research can be comprehensively explored. Past research into Instagram and consumer purchase decisions and behaviours conducted by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) has also utilized in-depth interviews as a mode of gaining valuable data, proving its capabilities. Milena,

Dainora and Alin (2008; p.1279) state in-depth interviews create a ‘vivid picture of the participant’s perspective on the research topic’, with the interviewer processing the information at various times, such as during the interview and also following the interview, when analysing the data, allowing for further digestion of information and knowledge.

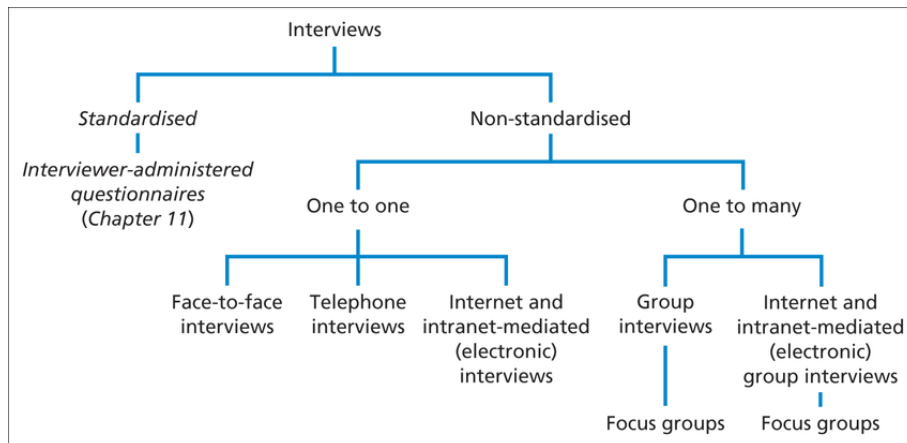


Figure 4. Interview Structure (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019)

Hair *et al.* (2010) states in-depth interviews hold a unique element, as the data collection process enables the researcher to ask inquisitive questions to urge detailed answers which ultimately will aid in the overall research study. Furthermore, Hair *et al.* (2010) proposes a number of benefits to conducting in-depth interviews over other qualitative data collection methods, as valuable and personal detail can be uncovered from a participant through the one-on-one interview process, while the likelihood of influenced answers is decreased due to no other participants taking part in the interview at the allocated time, decreasing the chances of influenced or biased insights.

Key skills are needed in order to conduct successful interviews and achieve optimum research data, with listening and probing skills being critical. Knowing what questions to ask and allowing the participant sufficient time to answer is key, as critical information may arise at any time of the interview and the interviewer needs the ability to conduct this process accordingly (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

The design of the interview is also key, as the structure and method in which the questions are processed determines the manner in which the interview will operate. The construction proposed by the author is of a semi-structured approach, as it balances the formality of the interview and the openness of the conversation, enabling the participant to respond in a natural manner (Walle, 2015).

Hair *et al.* (2010) suggests the semi-structure approach to interviews enables a communication between interviewer and participant, allowing for conversation to flow and detailed information to surface, benefiting the researcher. Furthermore, this conversational flow would enable the interviewer to enquire into certain specific details surfaced throughout the interview, accessing information which may not have been attainable through other structures (Walle, 2015).

Finally, through knowledge gathered from Hair *et al.* (2010) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), the in-depth interviews have been conducted through a non-standardised, one-on-one approach. As Covid-19 has currently made it difficult to meet in-person, the interviews utilized a combination of telephone and internet/electronic based mediums, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp, with each interview being recorded through various recording apps.

3.5.2 Sampling

To gain accurate data from the appropriate participants, a sampling technique was necessary. According to Taherdoost (2016), two sampling techniques are conceptualized as to aid in research. Probability sampling is defined by Taherdoost (2016) as an equal sampling technique in which everyone within a population has an equal chance of being sampled. This technique decreases the likelihood of any bias; however, it is regarded as a time and energy consuming tactic (Taherdoost, 2016). Contrarily, non-probability sampling places focus on a certain phenomenon along with a smaller sample, integrating certain criteria and judgement when sampling participants (Sharma, 2017).

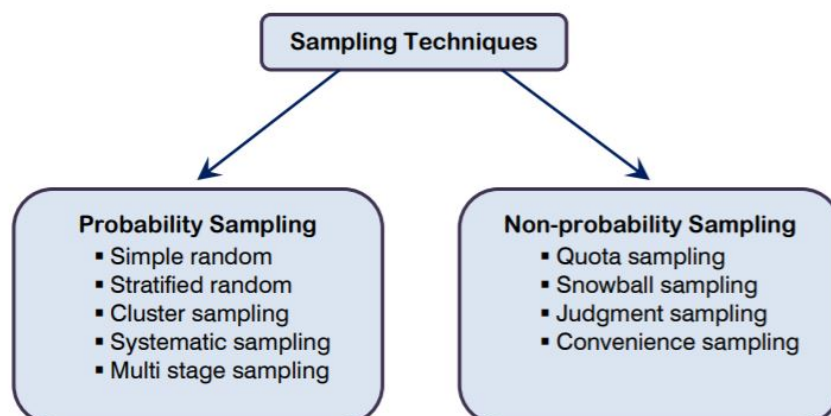


Figure 5. Sampling Techniques

Due to time constraints and limitations, the author chose non-probability sampling as the broad sampling technique. Within the non-probability sampling bracket, there are four limited sampling methods: quota, snowball, judgement and convenience (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

A convenience sampling technique within the framework of quota sampling was chosen, which enabled the author to select participants who are available and willing to participate, while certain quotas were established as to represent the targeted population (Etikan and Bala, 2017). Further research suggests this method of sampling is widely utilized by students due to its suitability and ease of access (Ackoff, 1953; as cited in Taherdoost, 2016). A level of critique is identified by Sharma (2017) who states a level of bias may be identified within certain sampling techniques, which may affect the results of the research.

The quotas which have been established relate to the focus of the research, therefore the participants have been sampled through the social media platform of Instagram. Additional criteria pertain to the relationship between the users and certain social media pages/influencers, as the sampled participants have been following Irish travel related social media pages and influencers, while being active users and interacting with the respected pages.

3.5.3 Sample Size and Observation

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) suggest a sample size ranging from four to twelve participants, as part of a purposive sample. However, it is critical to take into consideration that due to the relevant small size of the sample, purposive samples cannot represent the population being targeted, from a numerical standpoint (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). This research placed focus on the views of certain users, as six participants took part in the study. As mentioned in the previous section, certain criteria were established when choosing participants, with the respected participants being contacted through Instagram. An observation period ensued prior to any contact, beginning on the 29th of June, with the researcher following a number of Irish, travel related, promotional pages and influencers via Instagram. The researcher took time to observe users and connect with potential participants.

A pilot study was concluded prior to the initiation of the main study, following suggestions by In (2017), which states that a pilot study provides the researcher with insights and improvements which work towards the efficiency and overall quality of the main study. Hence, a pilot interview was

conducted with an Instagram user who follows Irish, travel related, promotional pages and influencers, as to trial the interview design and identify any difficulties which would result throughout the interviews, prior to the initiation of the main study.

3.6 Data Analysis

Based on the chosen interpretivist and inductive research philosophy, a qualitative manner was chosen to analyse the data. Qualitative analysis varies based on the focus of the research, with the data being analysed through either a thematic or active approach (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Thematic analysis was thereby chosen as the appropriate manner in which to analyse the data collected. Braun and Clarke (2012) recognize thematic analysis as a process in which data is organized and searched, with the goal of identifying themes and topics which can be utilized as interpretations in research. Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2006) display a six-step process in effectively applying a thematic analysis approach, displayed in Table 1.

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis - Braun and Clarke (2006; p.87)

The decision to integrate a thematic approach to analysing the data collected was due to its theoretic accessibility and flexibility, ensuring the researcher is able to collect the most insights and themes within the allocated time frame (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.6.1 Interview Participation

Under GDPR rules and National College of Ireland guidelines, each interview participant has had their identity and personal details protected, with anonymity and confidentiality being kept throughout the research process. Therefore, the researcher allocated letters for each participant, ranging from A-F,

as to distinguish each individual and ensure all guidelines and rules were followed. Additionally, consent was obtained at first contact with the participants and also prior to the interview, through a consent form established with the help of the NCI board. As mentioned in the previous sections, the interviews were concluded through a variation of telephone and internet/electronic methods, with the interviews being recorded either through a voice recorder or the features within apps such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Following a brief period of observation, a total amount of thirteen potential users were contacted via Instagram, with six individuals being interviewed. All interviews conducted were voluntarily. The participants composing the study were made up of two male and four female respondents, all in the age range of 20 to 30 years old.

	Age Range	Gender	Pages and Influencers followed on Instagram
Participant A	20 – 30	Female	@Tourismireland @Thewildatlanticway
Participant B	20 – 30	Female	@Discoverireland.ie @Rozannapurcell
Participant C	20 – 30	Male	@Ireland_before_you_die @Lovindotie
Participant D	20 – 30	Male	@Ireland_passion @Thisisgalway
Participant E	20 – 30	Female	@Sinead_adventures @Discoveringireland__
Participant F	20 – 30	Female	@Irelandsancienteast @Elizabeth.keeney

Table 2. Interview Participants

4.7 Limitations of research

The first limitation the researcher came upon was the current events unfolding worldwide. The Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions it has posed, limited the manner in which the researcher conducted the research, along with how the information was gathered.

The second limitation refers to the criticism surrounding qualitative research, as Sharma (2017) suggests there can be a certain level of bias when conducting qualitative research, with the potential of

affecting the outcomes of the research. Due to this critical limitation, the researcher attempted to limit any level of bias and conduct the qualitative research in a professional manner.

Lastly, the researcher discovered a further limitation to qualitative research, revolving around generalizability. Due to the rather small sample size of individuals which partook in the interview process, the findings established cannot account for the general population (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017).

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics are the established rules and guidelines that protect the individuals which aid in a research process, while ensuring their rights are fully acknowledged and implied (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019; Akaranga and Makau, 2016). As mentioned previously, the researcher followed and obeyed GDPR and NCI ethical rules and guidelines when contacting individuals and conducting research. Confidentiality and anonymity were established with each interview participant. Prior to every interview, a consent form was emailed to each participant, outlining key, ethical elements as per GDPR and NCI guidelines. A sample of this form can be found in the appendix of this paper.

Each interview was recorded via an audio recording app or a built-in recording feature on apps such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The audio files along with each consent form have been kept in a secure location on the researcher's device, with a password lock, as to avoid any security threats.

4.9 Conclusion

The objective of this section was to showcase each step that was taken throughout the research process, along with the appropriate rationale and philosophy. The researcher provided a suitable research framework, in the form of the 'Research Onion'. Based on research philosophies, the researcher chose the appropriate path of conducting research through an interpretivist philosophy, whole adopting an inductive methodology, which further enabled the researcher to utilize a qualitative approach to the research, in the form of in-depth interviews. These decisions were adopted as the most suitable manner in which to research and study the manner in which marketing technique and promotion via Instagram can drive domestic tourism in Ireland, through the user's vision and rationale. Sampling techniques and research instruments were appropriately chosen, with a valid rationale outlined in the previous sections. Furthermore, a thematic approach was chosen as the appropriate manner in which to analyse the data collected, based on previous research and its

efficiency when linked with qualitative data collected through interviews. The appropriate ethical guidelines and rules as established by the GDPR and NCI, have been acknowledged and followed thoroughly. The following section continues the methodology of research, as the researcher details and discusses the findings with relation to the established research objectives.

Chapter 5 – Analysis and Findings

5.1 Introduction

This section will showcase and analyse the findings of the six in-depth interviews conducted with Instagram users who have been sampled through the criteria mentioned in the previous section, between the period of 12th and 19th July. Based upon the six-stage thematic analysis process established by Braun and Clarke (2006), the data collected from the six interviews was analysed, with the relevant findings encapsulated within primary themes, within each of the established research objectives. Following GDPR and NCI guidelines, the participants' identity has been protected, with the researcher referring to each participant through general labels such as (Participant A, Female). Lastly, the views and opinions expressed by each participant will be presented through verbatim quotes, as to extend the findings being displayed, while bringing life to the narrative of this section (Thorne, 2020).

5.2 To explore the motives and uses of Instagram in regards to travel/tourism

The introductory research objective looked to explore the motives and uses of Instagram in regards to travel. The researcher initiated the interview by enquiring into the participants' motives for using Instagram, along with the level of assistance Instagram provides to the users, through their various features, with relation to travel research and content viewing.

Following the analysis of the telephone and electronic interviews, the following themes surfaced.

5.2.1 – Theme 1. Interpersonal and informational motives for using Instagram

The first theme to emerge revealed the general motives the participants had for using Instagram. Throughout the interviews, a majority of the participants felt their motives for using Instagram in such a continuous manner came down to the need to communicate and connect with fellow peers and social entities, along with the ability to gain knowledge and information.

Participant F (Female) stated how connecting with friends and likeminded peers on Instagram is a main motive for her constant use of the platform, along with mentioning the ability to easily display content and interact with others:

“I mainly use it to see what like what everyone else is doing, ehm connect with friends, share places and things I do, so if I’m out for dinner, I’d put pictures up of that and ehm like tag the restaurant....”

Participant D (Male) shared similar motives as he mentioned how keeping connected with friends and other peers online enables him to find inspiration and ideas in regards to travel and other hobbies:

“Now I kind of use it to see what friends and people that I like to view and follow are doing and that’s where I kind of pick up my inspiration and own content and ideas for travel and planning stuff”

Prior to statement above, Participant D (Male) mentioned a previous motive for using Instagram, it being photography and content creation, with this motive fading away due to various reasons. It was clear that the usability of Instagram supported the participant’s motive of content creation and photography, as he mentioned:

“Ehm I used to kind of put my own travel photography and content up that way, cause obviously it’s such an easy platform to use in that regard, and obviously the base of Instagram was putting up photos...”

From a research focussed perspective, Participant C (Female) claimed her constant usage of Instagram to be due to the various ways of researching and gaining information, especially in relation to travel and travel related factors such as restaurants and hotels. Additionally, this informational motive proved to be crucial in the purchasing decisions Participant C (Female) would make:

“Instagram is the biggest indicator though, cause if they have no tags of people at the place, or people tag it and it’s just awful looking, I’d never go.”

5.2.2 – Theme 2. Instagram’s Features

The following theme revolved around the features of Instagram and their importance in how the users interact with the platform. All participants felt that Instagram’s features contributed to the platform’s accessibility and popularity, as these features enhance the manner in which users experience the platform, whether connecting and interacting with friends and social entities, or doing research and retrieving information.

Participant A (Female) and Participant C (Female) both mentioned that Instagram’s save feature is a constantly used element in their day-to-day usage. This was especially crucial as both participants mentioned travel and touristic locations as the main reasoning for using this feature, as folders and lists can be established through the save function, with these lists holding content bookmarked by the user, for later viewing and future inspiration:

‘‘If I see somewhere I like, I’ll use the save function and add it to a folder to remind myself, oh yea remember come back there...’’

(Participant A, Female)

‘‘In terms of tourist locations, then I do, like I have a travel list saved on my Instagram, so that has lists of all the places I want to go to...’’

(Participant C, Female)

Although Participant A (Female) praised the save function Instagram provides, she contrasted her opinion by adding that the feature itself is not easily accessible and may be forgotten by users:

‘‘Even the save function on Instagram... you have to remember to go back into it, and ehm it’s not that easy, like they don’t have it at like the forefront, it’s not super easily accessible I don’t think...’’

Other prominent features were mentioned, as Participant B (Male) felt that the explore page is crucial with regards to finding inspiration, ideas and new content. In addition, he mentions the use of hashtags and location tags, which have emerged throughout all interviews as a key function in using Instagram for research:

“So, the explore page would be a big one, so when you, kind of find one stream of let’s say, you find a nice place to go and then you will like click into the hashtag or the location of where it is, and that will obviously give you the most popular posts, and that kind of gives you the inspiration through that...”

Similarly, Participant C (Female) also felt hashtags are a key aspect when researching, as you get to view certain factors from a user’s perspective, giving you a natural and real perception of the location, or factors you are considering:

“Because you know the way everyone tags their pictures on Instagram, and you can click the tag and see pictures, but sometimes when you Google it, like the pictures can be so misleading, but on Instagram you can scroll through loads of people, and have amateur pictures that are not perfect.”

5.3 To explore the effects of EWOM and social influence on Instagram users looking to travel domestically

With regards to the secondary research objective, two themes emerged, which emphasized the effects of EWOM and social influence on Instagram, especially within the factors of domestic travel and tourism. The following themes became apparent through the analysis of the interviews.

5.3.1 – Theme 1. People trust people

The first theme to emerge within this research objective was the considerable trust the participants had in their friends and peers on Instagram, in relation to electronic word-of-mouth, opinions and/or recommendations, and how this trust ultimately influences the participants’ decisions.

Participant B (Male) felt that interactions between himself and his friends/peers on Instagram, are *“more personal”*, therefore the information, opinions and recommendations received, holds more influence on the participant. Furthermore, Participant B (Male) considered that due to the current pandemic, online users, especially on Instagram, have become more trustful towards their friends/peers, especially in regards to travel and tourism:

“I’d trust them a lot, like typically nowadays through everything that’s happened with Covid and how big the internet has gotten during Covid, you kind of trust a lot of people and people tend to be a lot more honest when they post or get asked about a place they’ve been, and you know a lot of people aren’t really going to anything up online if they didn’t enjoy it necessarily.”

Additionally, Participant B (Male) felt EWOM is key to how people share and gain information at this moment in time, as he stated:

“Like word of mouth online is a big thing now, like one person shares one thing and it escalates and snowballs, so it can be really good!”

Participant D (Male) had similar views, as he felt that peers that follow you on Instagram are key, in regards to trust and honesty, as they would only offer you recommendations which they themselves value:

“ Yeah, I think it’s important, because if your friends or peers would recommend it, they would only really recommend it if it’s somewhere that they value...”

Participant F (Female) also had an overwhelming sense of trust towards her online peers, stating that she has *“based a lot of my decisions of people I know and my peers’ decisions”*. Additionally, Participant F (Female) felt that a peer’s opinion/recommendation comes from a place of honesty, as there is no affiliation to a business or location, therefore their word holds more trust in her eyes:

“So, if it’s someone I do know, then I know they’re not paid to say it or are affiliated with a hotel or a restaurant... they’re telling me because they actually paid money to go see it, so I’d consider their word quite trustworthy.”

In contrast, Participant C (Female) stated how some Instagram users may visit a location or establishment, purely with the intention of taking a picture; a factor which she felt would sway her from trusting these users. However, she continued by expressing that friends/peers who she feels are genuine and *“more grounded”*, can be very influential:

“I would trust the people who would put up the odd picture of a really nice place and enjoyed their experience rather than someone who goes there, takes a picture and leaves...”

5.3.2 – Theme 2. Instagram’s visual influence

The second theme to be apparent with participants in regards to this research objective, was based upon the influence Instagram’s visuals had on the interviewees, especially in relation to travel and touristic elements.

Firstly, Participant D (Male) felt *“people are more aware”* of the visual content they view on Instagram, due to the restraints the population has had over the last two years. He felt that the visual imagery Instagram users display in relation to travel, catches attention and draws users to further research and explore:

“I would see people like being somewhere they’ve never been before and seeing places I’ve never known about in Ireland, it’s just seeing how nice these places are, it like drags you in, and I think that’s what catches my eye the most...”

Similarly, Participant A (Female) felt that contemporary online users have a shorter attention span due to fast trends and content, therefore Instagram’s visual images and videos captures attention and leaves behind a greater impact than other counterparts:

“Just because it’s so visual, and I think that it appeals to absolutely every market, not just travel, if you look at restaurants and food... and I think that like our attention span has decreased so much in the last few years, because trends are so fast and everything moves so quickly that just being able to view a picture/video in 15 seconds has a lot more impact than a blog post or article”

Additionally, Participant A (Female) further considered Instagram’s visuals to be critical in the manner in which users use Instagram, as the increase of videos and reels provides a more complete viewing experience, especially within the travel and tourism industries:

‘I think that’s huge for marketing and especially the travel industry cause again it’s such a visual thing and by turning it into a video you are able to like get even more of an experience and more of an insight into what it’s like’

Overall, Participant C (Female) felt Instagram’s visuals ‘*drags people in*’, as she has discovered numerous locations and sights in Ireland through the visual content which Instagram enables people to showcase, ultimately influencing future travel decisions:

‘You see things that you’ve never seen before, and that makes you go oh I’d love to go there like I’d love to see what that is, and like most of the pictures are not that heavily edited and especially when there’s videos’

5.4 To explore the impact of Instagram marketing and promotion on users looking to travel domestically

The final research objective held the focus on Instagram marketing and promotion, especially via Instagram promotional pages and influencers. The themes which emerged gave a comprehensive outlook at how the participants felt towards these factors, and to what extent they were influenced by these marketing efforts.

5.4.1 – Theme 1. Broader sense of discovery through promotional pages

The first theme to be apparent in relation to Instagram promotion and marketing of domestic travel and tourism revolved promotional pages which showcase Ireland.

Participant A (Female) felt that Irish travel pages promoting Ireland’s locations and sights widen the views of users, as these pages utilize user-generated content, with the goal of displaying the wonders Ireland has to offer:

‘It would definitely influence me to a degree...they just highlight some of the best places, and I think as well they repost from different people, so they’re not just one person going out... you get a much broader sense of what Ireland has to offer when you follow pages such as discoverireland and Tourismireland you know...’

Following on, Participant A (Female) commented how these promotional pages influenced many of her travel decisions, further stating how these pages have helped her discover locations and sights to see, which she may have never known about:

‘‘The cave in Glenniff Horseshoe in Sligo, another place that I saw a picture of it on an Instagram page and if it wasn’t for Instagram, then I would genuinely not know about it’’

Similarly, both Participant D (Male) and Participant F (Female) felt that Irish travel pages are key to discovering ‘‘hidden gems’’ within Ireland, stating how due to the current pandemic, these pages are becoming a key element in the travel decisions of many users looking for staycations and domestic travel, while simultaneously being of crucial value to businesses and tourism alike:

‘‘I’m all up for it, because they’re promoting places that are local, and since it’s so important for us to stay at home and vacationing at home, for like the next year or two, ehm they’re valuable for businesses to really kick off.’’

(Participant D, Male)

‘‘With tourismireland and pages like that, it’s for when I’m looking for staycations or ideas, and I don’t have anywhere specific in mind... and they would put up like hidden beaches or like you know certain places you wouldn’t really know about unless you’re local, so I kind of look for those hidden gems.’’

(Participant F, Female)

Lastly, Participant C (Female) felt that Irish travel pages ‘‘opened my eyes to loads of things that are actually here and are so nice to do’’, as she stated that these promotional pages are visually attractive and have ‘‘a really positive impact’’ when showcasing what Ireland has to offer through the lens of the people:

‘‘Oh, them pages now, I definitely like, like the ‘discover’ pages, like discoverireland and them ones, they’re visually really nice and you can see people that are not influencers posting pictures and stuff... so I very much like the user-content on those pages.’’

5.4.2 – Theme 2. Influencer Marketing

One of the most substantial themes to emerge under during the interviews revolved around the feelings the participants had towards influencers and the content they display.

There was an overall sense of distrust towards large influencers, as participants felt influencers are difficult to trust due to the over saturation of paid promotions, affiliations and sponsored content.

‘‘There are some influencers that like you know yourself are like genuinely, like are a sell-out, and they just promote everything they get paid for...’’

(Participant B, Male)

‘‘It’s kind of a love/hate thing, like I go through phases of liking certain influencers and then they get to much because everything is a sponsored ad, like that’s what a lot of them have turned into.’’

(Participant E, Female)

‘‘Well, I’m not a big fan, I really don’t like following any type of big influencer people...’’

(Participant C, Female)

‘‘I don’t really pay much attention to where they go, eh I don’t really trust what they put up, because I know they’re more in it for the money, and they’re being made to make it look really good.’’

(Participant A, Female)

However, some participants did comment on a minority of influencers who are grounded and honest. Participant E, (Female) felt that influencers who are *‘‘genuine and real’’* with their target audience

can gain a lot of trust, while Participant C (Female) felt that influencers who are *'natural at their jobs'* are much more likely to be influential and gain further trust, as she commented:

"I would follow more like grounded people, like I love Roz Purcell, because I just love her content, she just shows a lot of travel content and hikes and stuff, and you know she's not like faking it."

Similarly, Participant B (Male) mentioned the same influencer (Rozanne Purcell) throughout the interview, feeling that: *'We know how honest this influencer can be through her content'*. Additionally, he mentioned how an *'extra additive to go there'* was established due to her content and influence:

"There's one influencer I know, who personally I am going to Kerry cause of the places I seen her in, I think her name is Purcell, eh Rozanne Purcell, so yeah, she was down in Kerry not too long ago and that like my girlfriend was sending me where she was... so when we go down to Kerry, we're going to visit the place she's been at."

Diversly, Participant D (Male) mentioned micro-influencers and how these smaller content creators create *'genuine stories'* through authentic and honest experiences due to their passion for travel. The participant felt that natural and real stories created by these influencers is the *'most convincing way of being targeted as a user'*, as they showcase what Ireland has to offer and naturally entices users to travel domestically:

"The difference between micro-influencers and major influencers, like I think people who have a much smaller following like up to 10/15k target audience, like I would trust what they say a lot more and the places they'd recommend... like I have followers that are in that range and I feel they have more genuine views, so what they're putting out is actually worth visiting and I think that would give me a more genuine feeling"

Discussing the topic further, Participant D (Male) felt that smaller influencers and passionate Instagrammers have different goals compared to larger influencers who continuously promote, as micro-influencers do not *'push you to have to buy this or have to stay here'*, ultimately establishing a genuine and real interaction between user and influencer.

Regarding micro-influencers, Participant B (Male) also felt more attracted to smaller influencers who are genuine and real with their content, as they go out of their way to showcase and promote content without being affiliated or sponsored:

‘‘ If it’s a smaller influencer with like a little bit of a following, you kind of tend to trust them a bit more... like when you start seeing them promoting things and you know they’re not getting paid for it... ’’

5.6 Summary of findings

This chapter provided a detailed thematic representation of the findings occurred from the in-depth interviews with Instagram users who actively follow and interact with Irish travel promotion pages and influencers. The themes were presented within the research objectives showcased in Chapter 3. This chapter has offered critical insights into the interpersonal and informational motives of Instagram users, along with how Instagram users use the platform and its features when researching travel related information and content. Additionally, it was felt that Instagram users place a high level of trust in their online peers, with the visual content Instagram enables being an influential factor in the decisions and perceptions of users, especially in relation to travel and tourism within Ireland. Lastly, a broader sense of discovery has been felt by the users through the travel promotion pages on Instagram, while over-promotion and constant sponsored ads decreased the trust the users felt towards major influencers, shifting the influence towards genuine and real influencers and content creators.

The next chapter will discuss the research findings of the thematic analysis, against the existing theory, literature and past research outlined in Chapter 2.

Chapter 6 – Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The main objective of this research was to explore marketing technique and promotion via Instagram in driving domestic tourism within Ireland. The emerging insights following a thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews, will be examined in the light of existing literature and past research which has been established in Chapter 2. of this study.

6.2 Instagram and user motive

The research findings correlate with the relevant literature surrounding the motives and uses of Instagram. The Uses and Gratifications theory (Wu, Wang and Tsai, 2010) has a key assumption which states that users seek out specific media sources in order to gratify specific needs. Ultimately, these needs act as the motives behind the use of certain sources of media (Ruggiero, 2000).

Additionally, past research by Sheldon and Bryant (2016) into the motives and uses of Instagram users, yielded motives such as knowledge about others, documentation and gathering information as the main reasons to why users use Instagram. Sheldon and Bryant (2016) further state that gaining knowledge about others was the most influential motive behind the use of Instagram. Additionally, Muntinga, Moorman and Smit (2011) observed connections between motives, as users will subsequently gain information through interacting with other peers and pages on Instagram.

This study found that users sought out Instagram to connect and interact with friends and online peers, while also utilizing the platform and its many features and functions to research information, opinions and recommendations from other online users and pages. As Ruggiero (2000) stated, these needs ultimately act as the main motives behind the active use of Instagram.

The interpersonal and informational motives which emerged within the research findings correlate with the observations of Sheldon and Bryant (2016), as the participants mentioned their motives of continuously using Instagram to be research forward, especially in relation to travel and tourism, while also keeping connected with peers and knowing what friends and others are doing.

This is valuable insight into the reasons and motives for using Instagram, especially for the travel and tourism industry, as Instagram users are constantly interacting with one another, sharing travel related information, opinions and recommendations.

Additionally, the research findings support the views of Clement (2020) as he states Instagram's unique visual aspect enables users to better connect, communicate and interact through visual factors. This is key to how users perceive and digest the information and insights they gain from other online peers and pages, especially regarding travel and tourism content which is highly visual.

From the secondary research conducted, the researcher acknowledged a lack of literature surrounding Instagram's features and how they affect the way users interact and use the platform. Instagram's 'stories' feature was acknowledged by Belanche, Cenjor and Pérez-Rueda (2019) as a fundamental function to the platform, as it provides users with quick and ephemeral content, however no further insights were provided into how this feature affects users and their use of the platform.

Tuten and Solomon (2017) state that social media platforms urge users to interact and communicate with one another via actions such as liking, commenting and sharing. Although these actions are key to online and social communications, the in-depth interviews and thematic analysis found features such as the 'save function', 'explore page' and 'location tags/hashtags' to be crucial in the manner in which the participants used Instagram. These features are key to the use of Instagram, especially in regards to information gathering and research. Video based functions such as Instagram's 'reels' were also mentioned by both Participant B (Male) and Participant A (Female) as significant features used on a daily basis for research and entertainment purposes.

This indicates the importance of Instagram's features to how users navigate the platform and discover content. These features facilitate further user research and content discovery, while enabling marketing and promotional efforts to be displayed to the masses and attract additional customers.

Soper (2020) mentions the phenomena of 'informational social influence' which entails the alteration of one's behaviour and decisions based upon the information and knowledge of other online users, who are classed as strangers. This was highlighted in the research findings, as the participants' use of Instagram's features enabled them to uncover travel related information and knowledge from other users. In particular, Participant C (Female) commented on her use of Instagram's features, such as the location tags and hashtags, having felt that these features enabled her to be '*influenced by everyone on Instagram*', as she discovered new locations and sights to see in Ireland.

The research findings show that Instagram's features cannot be overlooked, as they are key in aiding users in information gathering and research, especially in relation to travel and tourism.

6.3 Electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) and Social Influence

The existing literature on EWOM displays the importance of this phenomenon in regards to gaining honest and reliable information and assurance with regards to certain factors which need to be satisfied (Yang, Park and Hu, 2018). The ability to freely exchange information, opinions and experiences via social media platforms such as Instagram, increases the independence users gain, while ensuring an honest interaction (Huete-Alcoer, 2017). This was evident in the research findings, as the participants felt interactions and communications with other peers via Instagram to have more influence over their travel decisions in comparison to sponsored ads or affiliated content. The information and insights gained from Instagram via EWOM is perceived by the participants as more personal and organic, as it portrays reality and the experiences other users are having.

Yang (2017) illustrates EWOM to be highly influential as it is an element which cannot be controlled or regulated by businesses or organizations. This was highlighted in the research findings as users felt that word-of-mouth received online conveys more trust and honesty over less-personal methods of research such as blogs and articles. The findings suggest that Instagram users visually display their travel experiences, opinions and reviews on the platform, establishing a genuine and honest perception of the factors being displayed. This implies that marketing efforts need to implement EWOM and user-generated content when promoting, as organic information generated by users will be more influential than blogs and articles created by the business or brand themselves.

The views of the participants coincide with the literature of Yang (2017), who suggests there are influential factors which increase EWOM, with a key factor being experience. The participants felt they gained honest and genuine information regarding travel choices and touristic elements, due to the EWOM in the form of visual content and recommendations via Instagram, from friends/peers who have had an experience.

The literature on Instagram's visual capabilities displays a wide knowledge among academics as to the effects it can have on users. Instagram's unique and visually forward method of interacting, communicating and sharing content enables it to stand out and attract masses of users (Clement,

2020). The content posted on Instagram enables users to influence one another through photographic story-telling and EWOM (Virtanen, Björk and Sjöström, 2017). Furthermore, contemporary users of the internet are continuously becoming less interested in text-based content and increasingly more attracted towards the visual counterpart (Gadbsy, 2017; Miles, 2014). The research findings correlate with the existing literature, as the study suggests that Instagram's visuals catch the attention of the users, while drawing them in to further explore and research. Additionally, through a high degree of influence, users can be enticed to decide upon a destination or location to visit through the visual content they are exposed to. This outlines the influence Instagram's visuals has on users, along with how this influence can be utilized in marketing efforts, as to visually promote travel and tourism in Ireland.

Overall, it is evident that EWOM through Instagram is crucial to users, particularly when a decision needs to be made, as the literature and research findings showcase that people trust people. The impact of EWOM and trust in peers is solidified by the visual influence Instagram has on users, as visual content enables users to view certain elements before a decision is made.

6.4 Instagram Marketing and Promotion

In the literature, tourism marketing and promotion is acknowledged as a growing strategy in the development and sustainability of travel and tourism industries (Pike and Page, 2014; Ashworth and Page, 2011). To reiterate, the idea of tourism/destination marketing is conceptualized as strategies to promote and advertise travel/tourism factors which are "*high in experiential qualities*" (Bennett and Strydom, 2001; p.6). Contemporary organizations within the travel/tourism industry, along with established DMOs are continuously looking to keep up with trends and digital developments, as the rapid growth of Web 2.0 and social media opens up new strategies to increasing tourism and travel (Li, Robinson and Oriade, 2017).

The insights within the research findings resonate with the existing literature, as participants felt that promotional pages on Instagram showcasing tourism and travel within Ireland, highlight the beauty of Ireland and influence users to explore and travel domestically. The study suggests Instagram users have become more aware about locations and sights in Ireland. This is supported by the increasing popularity of promotional Instagram pages which showcase travel and tourism in Ireland, through visually appealing content. There is an indication that due to COVID-19, users have been more enticed to explore and travel within Ireland, creating an opportunity for further marketing and promotional efforts within this industry.

The literature highlights the usage of co-creation within tourism/destination marketing, as promotional pages would utilize user-generated content and EWOM to further showcase factors relating to travel and tourism (Li, Robinson and Oriade, 2017) The primary research relates to the existing literature as users felt promotional pages showcasing travel within Ireland displayed a broader sense of what the country has to offer, through the experiences of regular users. Additionally, the research indicates that marketing and promotional efforts through Instagram need to focus on displaying content in a natural and organic manner, showcasing the true nature of travel and tourism in Ireland.

The existing literature on influencer marketing showcases the strategy as a highly popular method of advertising and marketing, as Campbell and Farrell (2020) state the influencer marketing industry is worth approximately \$101 billion. Additionally, numerous factors can dictate the effectiveness of this marketing strategy, as trust and credibility are regarded highly in relation to the success of influencers (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Lu, Chang and Chang, 2014).

Trust and credibility were crucial factors which emerged within this theme, as the participants felt there can be a lack of credibility in many influencers which are continuously advertising through paid sponsorships and affiliation programmes. This indicates how marketing through influencers needs thorough research, as promotional messages may be overlooked by the over saturation of advertisements and sponsored content which is being displayed by an influencer.

Although the participants felt a lack of trust and credibility towards some influencers, there were instances in which influence was apparent. In the literature, Forbes (2016) suggests that behaviours and decisions can be influenced through example, especially when the example comes from a trusted user. The research found that users could trust influencers who are sincere and transparent with their userbase, ultimately being enticed by their actions and experiences. Additionally, credible influencers who provide a realistic opinion or review of a product, place or service are regarded more influential and trustworthy. Therefore, the research indicates that influential characters who are regarded as trusted and honest users, can influence the behaviour and decisions of their followers by displaying realistic and genuine recommendations and reviews.

Additionally, the literature surrounding influencer marketing speaks about the different types of influencers which exist, ranging from celebrity influencers to nano and micro-influencers (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). The research suggests more trust was felt towards small scale influencers compared to the larger counterparts, due to their sincere and down-to-earth approach to content creation and interaction. Users gain a more personal experience when interacting with a smaller influencer, as more genuine views and recommendations are being shared. Capitalizing on smaller influencers and content creators may be an advantageous effort for marketing and promoting travel and tourism in Ireland. Additionally, the research indicates that marketing efforts through influencers should include full transparency and focus on the true value being offered.

Overall, the participants felt more inclined towards trusting influencers who are genuine and consider their following when creating and posting content. It was evident from the research findings, that smaller influencers held more credibility and trust, as they nurture a more personal relationship with their followers. Marketing through major influencers is displayed to be difficult, as users may not pay attention to the content being displayed, due to a lack of trust and credibility towards the respected influencers.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

The general aim of this study was to explore marketing technique and promotion via Instagram to drive domestic tourism within Ireland. Following a detailed literature review, three research objectives were established. The developed research objectives were identified and further explored using a qualitative approach in the means of six in-depth interviews. The data collected from the primary research was thematically analysed, enabling the author to gain valuable insight and understanding in to the impact of marketing and promotion via Instagram, in driving domestic tourism in Ireland. Certain research limitations were acknowledged and identified as the author was unable to conduct face-to-face interviews due to COVID-19, along with the relatively small sample size.

The comprehensive literature review which was conducted highlighted the increasing use of marketing technique and promotion on Instagram, along with the impact it can on the users' decision-making processes. The literature review revealed several authors and researchers who have contributed to this area of interest, including Flache *et al.* (2017), Huete-Alcocer (2017), Yang (2017), Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) and Venkatesh and Brown (2001). Several factors were critically

explored within the literature review, as the chapter commenced with an overview of Instagram, its uses and user motives. Other areas of research included social phenomena such as EWOM and social influence, along with marketing techniques in the means of influencer marketing and tourism/destination marketing, with an overview of domestic tourism to conclude the literature review.

The six in-depth interviews yielded crucial data which identified several themes in relation to the research. Through a thematic analysis, these themes were developed, with the data collected compared against the existing literature.

The first objective of the study was to explore the motives and uses of Instagram, in relation to travel/tourism. The findings indicated strong informational and interpersonal motives for using Instagram, especially for travel/touristic purposes. Additionally, the data indicated a sustained use of Instagram's features, highlighting the importance of these functions in satisfying the motives and needs of the users.

The second objective of this research was to explore the effects of EWOM and social influence on Instagram users looking to travel domestically in Ireland. The apparent themes which emerged from this study related to the trust online users place on their peers, along with the visual influence Instagram has on its users, especially in regards to travel and touristic elements. The findings suggested that Instagram users hold their trust in their friends and peers online when needing opinions, recommendations or information. This trust is accentuated by Instagram's ability to visually display content, drawing users in and inducing further research.

The final objective was to explore the impact of Instagram marketing technique and promotion on users looking to travel domestically. The research findings highlighted a level of distrust and uncertainty towards major-influencers due to constant advertisements and paid affiliations. Promotional pages were held in high regard and played a major role in the influence of users due to visual attraction and organic presentations through the use of user-generated content.

Overall, the main research question was:

‘‘How does marketing technique and promotion via Instagram drive domestic tourism in Ireland?’’

This study has found that Instagram holds influential factors which aid the marketing and promotion of domestic tourism and travel in Ireland. The emerging insights have shown clear informational and interpersonal motives for the continuous use of Instagram, along with the importance of Instagram’s features in supporting the users’ motives and needs. Instagram’s visual and social nature enables influential phenomena such as EWOM and social influence, which further impact the behaviours and decisions of its users. The marketing and promotion of tourism on Instagram through influencers and promotional pages are being supported by Instagram’s visuals and fundamental functions. These marketing techniques have high influential values and drive tourism domestically in Ireland, at a time in which domestic travel has seen a substantial increase due to the current pandemic. The study concludes that Instagram has the influential capabilities to alter the decisions and perceptions of its users. Marketing via Instagram revolves around the basis of honesty and trust, as users value genuine stories and user experiences when researching information and interacting on the platform.

7.2 Recommendations for Further Research

The author has noted a lack of literature and research in to Instagram’s features and video functions which have been increasingly more popular. The findings which emerged from the primary research in relation to the motives and uses of Instagram have highlighted in the importance of Instagram features such as the explore page and location tags/hashtags. The participants felt these features supported their daily use of Instagram, while facilitating further exploration and research. Therefore, the author recommends further research in to the features of Instagram and their impact on the use of the platform.

Additionally, the author recommends that further research in the area of social media and domestic tourism in Ireland should consider alternative platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. Social media platforms differ in multiple ways and the author feels that an in-depth study into other different platforms may reveal valuable insights.

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Appendix

Interview Consent Form Sample

‘An exploration of marketing technique and promotion via Instagram in driving domestic tourism in Ireland’

Consent to take part in research.

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
 - I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
 - I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview.
 - I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
 - I understand that participation involves connecting with the researcher, offering information and personal opinions and having said information and opinions applied in research.
 - I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
 - I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
 - I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
 - I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in a secure file on the researcher’s device, with access only from the researcher, supervisor or exam board, if need be, until the exam board confirms the results of their dissertation.
 - I understand that I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
-

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher:

Degree:

College:

Supervisor:

Researcher contact details:

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher

Date

Interview Question Format

Interview Question Format

Begin by establishing the objective of this interview with the interviewee and reassuring the participant of confidentiality and anonymity.

Introduction - Broad Questions:

- To start off, seeing as we are currently in the middle of summer, can you tell me, about any travel plans you have, maybe within Ireland?
- How would you usually go about researching and booking a holiday or a trip?

Use of Instagram when booking holidays

- In general, what are your motives for using Instagram?
- How does Instagram help you when searching for locations and things to do, in Ireland?
- In your preference, what of Instagram's features would you mainly use, so for example: accounts, hashtags, location tags, the save feature etc... when looking for information and specific content?

Influence and EWOM Questions

- When researching for travel related information on Instagram, what are the main elements you look for? (Do you use Instagram as a source of inspiration and to gather travel ideas?)
 - What type of Instagram content inspires you the most, in regards to travelling?
 - What influence do you think Instagram has on your travel choices of destinations or locations?
 - To what extent would you rely on EWOM from peers on Instagram, when considering a travel destination or element?
 - Explain to me a time in which you have been influenced or urged to visit a place based on the posts you have seen from people you follow on Instagram.
 - To what extent would you trust the information and content you see on Instagram?
 - What would be your main reasons for posting travel related content on Instagram?
 - Why do you think Instagram has the capabilities to influence users?
 - Instagram enables users to edit and alter any image or video.... Knowing that, how does that affect you when looking through Instagram and viewing content?
-

Effects of Marketing/Promotion Questions

- What is your opinion on social media influencers?
- Rozanna Purcell, tourismIreland, Ireland_travel, sinead_adventures, irelandnd_before_you_die... are all examples of travel influencers and pages promoting what Ireland has to offer. In what way do these influencers and social media pages influence your decisions in regards to travelling within Ireland?
- What are your main reasons for following these kinds of travel related pages on Instagram?
- How would you feel about interacting with travel influencers and these promotional pages showcasing Ireland? (eg. shared content, features through hashtags, competitions etc)
- Why do you think promo pages and influencers showcasing Ireland etc. through Instagram, have become so popular?

Closing Question

- We are right at the end of the interview now, so lastly, I want to ask would you like to add any comments or additional information on any of the topics we have discussed?
-