

RECOMMENDATIONS' AND PREFERENCES' IMPACT ON ONLINE TRAVEL PURCHASES

– A quantitative study investigating Instagram influencers' travel recommendations and consumers' travel preferences effect on online travel purchases

AHO, LAURA

JAATINEN, SALLA

School of Business, Society & Engineering

Course: Master Thesis in Business Administration
Course code: FOA403
15 credits

Supervisor: Professor Ulf R. Andersson
Date: 8 June 2020

ABSTRACT

Date: 8 June 2020

Level: Master Thesis in Business Administration, 15 credits

Institution: School of Business, Society and Engineering, Mälardalen University

Authors: Salla Jaatinen Laura Aho
(92/06/05) (92/11/13)

Title: Recommendations' and preferences' impact on online travel purchases – A quantitative study investigating Instagram influencers' travel recommendations and consumers' travel preferences effect on online travel purchases

Tutor: Professor Ulf R. Andersson

Keywords: Online travel purchases, Travel recommendations, Travel preferences, Consumer behavior, Influencer marketing, Instagram

Research questions: To what extent Instagram influencers' recommendations are impacting consumers travel purchases online?
To what extent consumers' preferences are affecting when doing travel purchases online?

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore Instagram influencers' travel recommendations and consumers' travel preferences, and how they relate to the travel purchases in an online setting.

Method: This empirical study was made with a quantitative research method through a web-based survey.

Conclusion: Quantitative data analysis revealed that out of the two proposed hypotheses, consumers' travel preferences have a positive effect on online travel purchases, while Instagram influencers' travel recommendations did not have a positive effect on consumers' online travel purchases. Despite that, male respondents experienced travel recommendations to be more influential than their own travel preferences when purchasing travel. However, the results indicate that there is a need for further research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
1 INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 Background	7
1.2 Research problem	8
1.3 Purpose and research questions	9
1.4 Outline of the paper	10
2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK	11
2.1 Online travel purchases	11
2.1.1 Internet and online travel sales	11
2.1.2 Consumer behavior in online travel purchases	13
2.2 Influencer marketing	15
2.3 Travel recommendations	16
2.4 Consumers travel preferences	17
3 HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL	19
3.1 Hypotheses development	19
3.2 Conceptual model	20
4 METHOD	22
4.1 Research approach and research method	22
4.2 Sampling and data collection	22
4.3 Questionnaire design	24
4.4 Operationalizations	25
4.5 Data analysis	26
4.6 Validity and reliability	29
4.7 Ethical aspects	30
5 RESULTS	32
5.1 Crosstabulation	32
5.2 Reliability	32
5.3 Correlations	33
5.4 Regression	34
5.4.1 Regression for all constructs	34
	3

5.4.2 Regression for education	35
5.4.3 Regression for gender	37
5.5 Hypotheses testing	38
6 DISCUSSION	40
7 CONCLUSIONS	43
7.1 General conclusion	43
7.2 Managerial implications	43
7.3 Limitations	43
7.4 Suggestions for future research	45
REFERENCES	46
APPENDICES	52

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Online travel sales growth worldwide from 2014 to 2020 (Statista, 2016).	12
Figure 2. A model of consumer purchase behavior in travel (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2014, p. 167).	14
Figure 3. Proposed conceptual model.	21

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Sociodemographic information.	23
Table 2. Reliability statistics.	32
Table 3. Correlation matrix of constructs.	33
Table 4. Results of the regression estimation (Dependent variable: Travel Purchases).	34
Table 5. Results of regression estimation between education levels (Dependent variable: Travel Purchases).	36
Table 6. Results of the regression estimation between female and male respondents (Dependent variable: Travel Purchases).	37
Table 7. Results of hypotheses testing.	39

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Operationalizations of the constructs.	52
Appendix B. The nationalities of the respondents.	53
Appendix C. Crosstabulation calculations.	54
Appendix D. Collinearity statistics for all constructs.	55
Appendix E. Collinearity statistics for education.	55
Appendix F. Collinearity statistics for gender.	55

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This master's thesis has been written as a dissertation for *Master of Science in Business Administration with specialization in International Marketing* degree at Mälardalen University in Västerås, Sweden.

Authors would like to express their appreciation to their supervisor Professor Ulf R. Andersson for his guidance and constructive suggestions throughout the writing process. Additionally, we would like to thank Professor Cecilia Lindh with helping out in constructing the survey and the two other thesis groups, who we had a common research project with. Furthermore, we would like to thank Gustav R. Trocken for his unconditional support throughout the writing process.

Finally, we would like to thank all the respondent who partook in the survey and the ones who shared it forward with their friends and family. Without you, this study would not have been possible!

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Under the last decades, researchers in tourism and consumer behavior have been interested in understanding the characteristics of consumers' travel planning and the choices they make (Moiescu, 2013). It is important to understand the difference between tourism and travel. The definition of travel is when an individual leaves familiar surroundings and normal routines to go somewhere. Tourism can be seen as more comprehensive than travel. Tourism is defined as vacations in hotels, people who visit their relatives, people who are going to destinations or having day trips somewhere (Davidson, 1998, p. 28). In this study, the authors discuss travel and tourism as the same meaning mainly using the word *travel*. For the purposes of this study, travel includes flights, trains, cruises, hotel rooms and vacation packages to a foreign destination and also tours and activities made on a trip. Travel and tourism markets' whole revenue for the year 2019 was 685,068 million dollars and the revenue of online purchase was 66.3 per cent of it (Travel & Tourism – worldwide, 2020).

With the growth of Internet usage, consumers' travel purchasing has changed drastically (Amaro & Duarte, 2015). Before travel agencies have been the intermediary between the consumers and the travel suppliers (Cheyne, Downes, & Legg, 2006). Online travel purchases refer to the transaction of travel products or services handled over the Internet, whether the payment is charged online or offline (for example in the hotel upon arrival to the travel destination). In the past decades, travel providers were heavily dependent on travel agencies to advertise information about travel destinations and sell their products and services. With the Internet, travel suppliers found a new efficient, and money-saving way to reach customers directly. In the mid-90s online travel agencies, such as Expedia, reformed the way travel was purchased (Amaro, 2014).

Social media is a way for people to interact with each other online and create content (Vollenbroek, de Vries, Constantinides, & Kommers, 2014). On different social networks, people can build bonds, share their beliefs and experiences with other users (Chung & Koo, 2015). Social media has also become a powerful source when consumers are planning their travels and making decisions (Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016). Different platforms are also

great ways to share information and opinions among consumers, further, it gives them the ability to influence the marketing process (Arrigo, 2018). Social media has also become a significant way for marketers to get through to consumers (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Hyoyeun, 2017). Back in the days, people's choices were influenced by people who were close to them, e.g. family, friends or even colleagues from work (Galeotti & Goyal, 2009). When people think about influencers, they usually end up thinking of different celebrities who are in commercials endorsing products, but nowadays, anybody can be an influencer by using different social media platforms (Glucksman, 2017). According to Freberg, Graham, McGaughey and Freberg (2011), an influencer is a "third-party endorser who shapes audience attitude", for instance on social media platforms like Instagram.

Before social media, sources to collect information about a travel destination were limited (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2019). Now with the social media era, travelers gather information and share information from different online platforms, such as Facebook and TripAdvisor. On these various platforms, people can share their travel experiences and adventures for everyone to see (Leung, Law, Van Hoff, & Buhalis, 2013). The most used social media channels in January 2020 were Facebook with 2.449 billion active users and YouTube with 2 billion active users (Statista, 2020a). Instagram is the most known social photo-sharing platform owned by Facebook and it was launched in 2010 (Sammis, Lincoln, Pomponi, Ng, Gassmann Rodriguez, & Zhou, 2016). As of January 2020, Instagram had one billion active users and they are mostly young females (Statista, 2020a; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Of all global social networks, Instagram is the sixth on the ranking by the number of users (Statista, 2020a).

1.2 Research problem

Consumers use the internet to collect information about products (Stubb, Nystöm, & Colliander, 2019). When influencers promote products or services on their social media channels, consumers appreciate that more than the traditional way of advertising products and services (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). For marketer's social media is a perfect field to obtain a larger audience than via traditional marketing. A great number of brands and companies do paid collaborations with different social media influencers. On paid collaborations, influencers create content for their social media channel, where they recommend the product or service and get compensation from the company (Stubb et al., 2019). Social media contains many

platforms, but for this study, Instagram was the most ideal choice to concentrate more on because the authors were most familiar with Instagram and thought it was the most interesting platform because of its visuality (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). Accordingly, in this study, the focus is only on Instagram influencers and all the other social media influencers are delimited from this research. This is due to the research gap in previous literature about Instagram influencers and how their recommendations affect consumers' online travel purchases.

When people are looking for a travel destination, gathering information is a big part of the process (Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017). Before the online media, people used to gather information about the destination from advertisements, documentaries and travel guides (Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco, & Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015). It is also known that relatives, friends and different online travel reviews have an influence on travel purchases (Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017). Different social media platforms where one can share pictures have become a trend in the tourism industry in recent years. Pictures and information people share on these platforms can be useful for others and it also helps to raise attention for destinations (Putit, Chan & Hanan, 2014; Kaperonis, 2018). Past studies also show that younger generations are more likely to collect information on travel destinations from different social media channels (Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017). This leads to that, consumers' travel preferences should be investigated more in connection to online travel purchases, as there are only models about general purchase decision-making. This could be a problem for marketers if they are not aware of how consumers are influenced when making their online travel purchases.

1.3 Purpose and research questions

This study examines Instagram influencers' travel recommendations and consumers' travel preferences impact on travel purchases in an online setting. On a larger scale, the theme around these topics is consumer behavior. These topics have received little attention from previous researchers. Majority of previous literature investigates how the brands recommended by influencers impact on people's general purchase habits. Instagram influencers' travel recommendations and consumers' travel preferences need attention to a greater extent and therefore, this topic was chosen for this study. To provide a better understanding if Instagram influencers' travel recommendations and consumers' travel preferences can increase people's online travel purchases, an international data set will be analyzed. Purchase intention is widely

studied before and therefore, the authors decided to study actual purchases. This will be elaborated more on the following chapters.

The research questions of this investigation are as follows:

RQ1: To what extent Instagram influencers' recommendations are impacting consumers travel purchases online?

RQ2: To what extent consumers' preferences are affecting when doing travel purchases online?

It is expected that Instagram influencers' recommendations and consumers' travel preferences have an impact on people's online travel purchases. This is expected because previous studies have confirmed that consumers' travel decisions are highly influenced by social media and demographics have an impact on consumers' travel preferences (Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016; Moisescu, 2013). Additionally, recommendations are proved to have an effect on consumers purchases (Chang & Chin, 2010). Therefore, this study investigates if these topics also have an influence on actual online travel purchases.

1.4 Outline of the paper

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next chapter consists of theoretical background and framework. This is followed by hypotheses development and conceptual model which are proposed for this study. The following chapter describes the methods used in this study, such as the choice of using a quantitative research method and how the data was collected. In order to answer the research questions, analysis in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software was carried out. The fifth section displays the empirical data where the results from the survey are shown. After the results, the following chapter discusses the information gathered through data collection and the theoretical background. The final section consists of a conclusion of this study giving also managerial implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

2.1 Online travel purchases

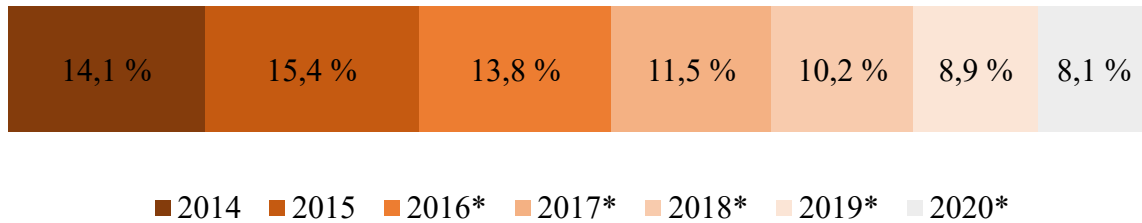
2.1.1 Internet and online travel sales

In recent years, the travel and tourism industry has gone through drastic changes because of the Internet. The changes are both on a business level and in consumer engagement (Serenko & Stach, 2009). Internet is connecting people worldwide and it is recognized as an important computer network system for the modern information society. Additionally, the Internet is the main form of gathering information before a trip (Bobâlcă, Maha, Tugulea, & Maha, 2014). According to Bobâlcă et al. (2014), the main advantages of using the Internet in travel search are that it offers a lot of information, there are no costs on using travel websites, there are no time or space limits, consumers have more freedom, websites offer images with destinations and it presents other traveler's reviews.

As of April 2020, there were 4.57 billion people using the Internet worldwide. It makes 59 per cent of the global population (Statista, 2020b). It would be hard to imagine a world without the Internet as it is a vital base for online purchases but not all Internet users make purchases online. They might be reluctant to provide personal and transactional information for electronic payments online. The reason for this is because they do not trust e-commerce. A study of e-commerce shows that more than 87 per cent of Internet users were concerned about security and privacy protection issues when they shop online (Ponte, Carvajal-Trujillo, & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2015). Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2014, p. 522) have also described online privacy issues by showing that the majority of people are concerned about it. Additionally, Bobâlcă et al. (2014) stated that the main disadvantage of the Internet in the travel context is the lack of trust on the website.

Figure 1 below shows the online travel sales growth globally from 2014 to 2020. Annual growth has been decreasing since the year 2015 (Statista, 2016). The numbers show the prediction for the year in 2016 to 2020. From the timeline, one can predict that the global online travel sales

will still continue to grow year by year. If Internet usage increases in the future, most likely the online travel purchasing will continue to increase as well (Amaro, 2014).



*Prediction for the year.

Figure 1. Online travel sales growth worldwide from 2014 to 2020 (Statista, 2016).

When planning to purchase a trip, travelers can choose between contacting a travel agency or go online (Bobâlcă et al., 2014). As the majority of travel purchases are made online, the biggest platforms to book trips in December 2019, were Booking.com with 80 billion-dollar in sales and the second largest was Trip.com with almost 20 billion dollars in sales and the third one was Expedia with almost 16 billion-dollar in sales (Statista, 2020a).

According to Amaro (2014), the Internet is a vital distribution channel for travel products and services, and its success has been recognized earlier in previous studies. Nowadays anyone with Internet access can compare travel rates across numerous websites from online travel providers. However, the increase in Internet usage is not the only factor why online travel purchases have been growing. Ponte et al. (2015) show that the Internet is optimal for the travel industry because of the characteristics of tourism products. Tourism products are intangible, perishable, seasonal, and their production and consumption cannot be separated. Additionally, the Internet is used by consumers, when they search for information about trips and enter into online transactions. Kotler et al. (2014, p. 520) stated that online marketing and the use of the Internet are replacing magazines, newspapers, stores and travel agencies as sources of travel information and buying.

2.1.2 Consumer behavior in online travel purchases

Travel purchase intention is widely studied, and it has been postulated as the best predictor of actual purchase behavior. The stronger the purchase intention is, the more likely the intention will result in an actual purchase (Amaro & Duarte, 2015). Nevertheless, there is a lot of information about consumers' travel purchase intention, actual travel purchases have remained relatively unstudied.

According to Kotler et al. (2014, p. 167) factors that are strongly influencing consumers behavior are cultural, social, personal and psychological. Additionally, Amaro (2014) describes that in order to understand consumers' online travel purchasing behavior one needs to consider people's personal characteristics. Kotler et al. (2014, p. 167) suggest that culture is the most determinant factor of consumers, wants and behavior. Social factors, such as family, reference groups, online social networks, social roles, and status have an effect on consumer behavior (Kotler, et al., 2014, pp. 170–173). Additionally, personal factors, such as age, occupation, economic situation, personality and lifestyle have an influence (Kotler, et al., 2014, pp. 174–176). Finally, the four major psychological factors, such as motivation, perception, learning, and beliefs and attitudes have an influence on consumers' behavior and buying choices (Kotler, et al., 2014, pp. 178–181). Amaro (2014) suggest that demographics, personal traits, travel-related behaviors and knowledge of Internet and usage are the most important characteristics to understand in consumers' travel purchasing behavior.

According to Kotler et al. (2014, p. 166) researchers have been trying to understand the consumers' purchase behavior and the concept for it is the model (Figure 2) below. This model is suitable for all types of consumer purchase behavior, as well as for travel purchases. One can see from the model that marketing stimuli and other impacts enter to buyer's "black box" and its outcome causes buyer's responses in travel. According to Kotler et al. (2014, pp. 166–167) marketing stimuli consists of the 4Ps: product, place, place and promotion. Other impacts consist of five important environmental forces: economic, technological, political, cultural and ecological. Buyer's black box is the reaction to these impulses and environment. Buyer characteristics implement these stimulations and the buyer decision process shows how the consumer is affected by them. Simultaneously all these factors have an influence on buyer's responses. Consumers characteristics and decision process result in buying attitudes and

preferences, such as product, brand and dealer choices, and purchase timing and amount (Kotler, et al., 2014, pp. 166–167).

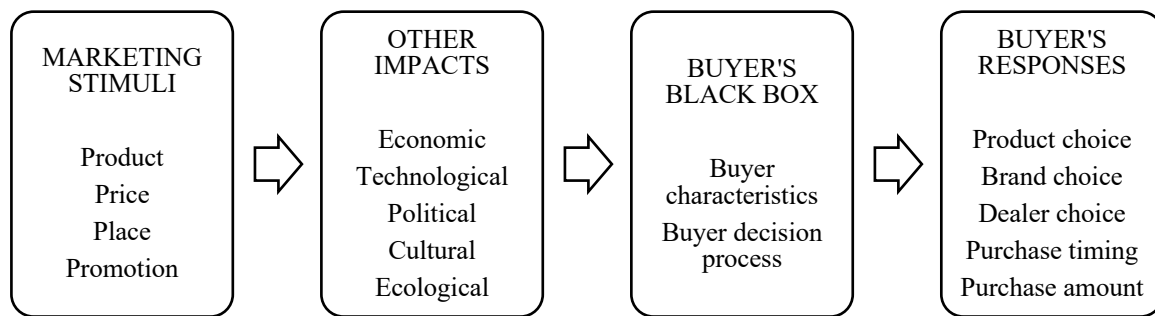


Figure 2. A model of consumer purchase behavior in travel (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2014, p. 167).

Previous studies of tourism have paid attention to consumers' information search and decision-making process. When consumers begin their decision-making process before a trip, they are likely to have zero to four potential travel destinations in mind (Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017). According to Ribeiro, Fonseca Amaro, Seabra, & Luís Abrantes (2014) traveling is highly engaging by its nature because it requires high-involvement processes due to its inseparability and intangibility. Amaro and Duarte (2013) show that online travel purchasers tend to have similar personality traits and they are innovative, as well as, more prone to high technology. According to Pesonen and Pasanen (2017), a study shows that the Internet and social media are more commonly used by young travelers. Amaro and Duarte (2013) found out in a study that online travel purchasers have high levels of income and they are generally young consumers. According to Amaro (2014), the majority of studies show that consumers with higher education and income levels were more likely to purchase travel online. Additionally, these studies show that consumers who purchase travel online are generally from the younger generation than those who purchase travel products or services from traditional travel agencies. The majority of studies also show that consumers who search for travel information online are also more likely to purchase travel online (Amaro & Duarte, 2013).

Furthermore, Alnsour, Ghannam and Alzeidat (2018) study about airline industry shows that financial and hedonic benefits of social media have a positive effect on purchase intention while functional, psychological, and social benefits of social media have no relationship with

customers' purchase intention when buying airline tickets. The hedonic benefit can be amusement and financial benefits of social media can be discount codes, special prices or deals that influencers share on their social media account for their followers. These financial factors on social media have proven to have positive affect customers' purchase intention (Alnsour et al., 2018).

Results of previous studies show that travel online purchase intention depends on perceived value and trust. The main factors of perceived trust are information and security quality (Ponte et al., 2015). Additionally, Wen (2012) shows that system quality is one additional measurement when evaluating factors that are affecting consumers' online purchase intentions for travel products. Ponte et al. (2015) show that consumers' perceived security can depend on familiarity with the website, website investment, third-party assurance seals, vendor reputation, privacy and security policies, Internet privacy concerns, and disposition towards third-party certification. Furthermore, Wen (2012) shows that travelers' attitudes, customers satisfaction and the quality of travel website design have significant influences on travelers' purchase intentions, and it can result in actual travel purchases. According to Amaro and Duarte (2013), a study showed that consumers with higher education levels did not trust travel websites as much as the ones with lower education.

2.2 Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing is a type of social media marketing. It is the skill of motivating people online who are influential to share information with their audiences (Sammis, et al., 2016). Influencer marketing has become a strategic communication and advertising tool to directly influence social media users purchase intention and their buying behavior (Alnsour et al., 2018). Vollenbroek et al. (2014) show that social interaction is one of the most common motives for using the Internet and therefore, actors, interactions and networks are the three important parameters in social media influence.

Social media influencers (SMIs) are users in social media who establish credibility by being active in a specific industry. Companies use SMIs to promote and review their products and services (Stubb et al., 2019). Influencers can exist on any social media channel or platform. Influencers normally build a big engaged audience on social media. Anyone has access to

become an influencer. If one is able to build an audience, one can also influence that audience (Sammis, et al., 2016). Indicators of influencing capacity might be the person's social activity, charisma, expertise, communication, power, authority, shared interests, uniqueness, creation of follow-up activities, innovativeness, awareness, personal messages and number of followers or friends in social media (Vollenbroek et al., 2014). Stubb et al. (2019) show that consumers follow SMIs activity regularly and they are perceived as trustworthy. The primary reason why users follow and engage with influencers content is hardly ever commercial. Xu and Pratt (2018) acknowledge that by creating and sharing content on social media channels, influencers can influence and shape people's attitudes.

2.3 Travel recommendations

According to Ellonen, Wikström, and Johansson (2015) commercial content can be online advertisements, sponsored competitions or any other similar type of content featured on the website or social media if it is intended for a product, service or activity. Kotler et al. (2014, p. 517) describe that the forms of online advertising might appear anywhere on an Internet user's screen and this content is usually viewed by the user. According to Sittisom (2020), various social media channels contain a different kind of content. It can be text, pictures, videos and audio. Blogs have mainly written content, but they can also consist of photos and videos. Video content can be shared on a channel like YouTube (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). For instance, influencers can share videos where they endorse and evaluate products or services provided by various companies. Instagram influencers, on the other hand, share images and videos with a short caption to their followers and there the users can interact with the influencers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Evans, Jamal and Foxall (2009, p. 242) describe that social group is "a plurality of persons who interact with one another in given context more than they interact with anyone else". In social groups others often influence us, and we can also influence people within these groups (Evans, et al., 2009, p. 241). A reference group can be an individual or a group of individuals that can influence one's behavior. Reference groups can have a social perspective that one follows as a reference to one's own action (Evans, et al., 2009, pp. 242–243). Many of the decisions made by consumers are taken from the primary groups. Primary groups are characterized by a close relationship (Evans, et al., 2009, p. 242). Tanford and Montgomery (2015) show that consumers

rely on the word-of-mouth (WOM) of friends and family when making purchases. Additionally, Pesonen and Pasanen (2017) show that recommendations from friends and family have a great influence on travel decisions. Therefore, many desires and attitudes are affected by other family members (Evans, et al., 2009, p. 242).

Kotler et al. (2014, p. 518) show that there are a number of social media analytical programs which allow companies and managers to monitor user reviews and comments on their websites. Amaro et al. (2016) show that the travel content created online by travelers is more credible and trustworthy than the online reviews and information marketers and professionals have written because travelers can share their own experiences about travel with other consumers. Tanford and Montgomery (2015) state that E-WOM is a dominant source of influence on travel decisions. One study noted that 75 per cent of participants reviewed online comments of other consumers before booking a hotel and 78 per cent of respondents believed online ratings and reviews were extremely important in deciding where to stay on a trip. Ribeiro et al. (2014) show that highly involved travelers are more likely to spread information about the trip. Consumers can keep up to date and they can change information about travel with the help of social media. Additionally, consumers might feel fellowship with different travel communities (Amaro et al., 2016). In another study, results indicated that social media influencers have a positive contribution with consumers to visit the endorsed travel destinations (Xu & Pratt, 2018).

2.4 Consumers travel preferences

During the last decades, the subject of understanding the nature of travel plans and choices have collected a great deal of attention from consumer behavior and travel marketing researchers. Researchers have proven differences in consumers' travel and tourism behavior and preferences. Demographics, such as age, gender, nationality, race and ethnicity, family life cycle, and household composition and income, are confirmed to influence on people's travel behavior and preferences (Moisescu, 2013). According to Ribeiro et al. (2014), people's travel involvement is the state of interest and motivation to travel.

Consumers need to search for information online to make travel decisions, such as which travel destination, airline company, accommodation and travel activities to choose on a trip (Amaro et al., 2016). When it comes to travelers' perceptions, there are three effective measurements

of travelers' attitudes when purchasing travel products online. These three factors are convenience, value and merchandise options (Wen, 2012). Consumers' travel decisions are highly influenced by social media and they have different behaviors when using social media for their travel planning. Consumers are motivated to use social media for travel purposes because it provides informational benefits for its users (Amaro et al., 2016).

A study found out that usually younger consumers perceive a higher level of enjoyment with the use of social media for travel purposes (Amaro et al., 2016). The results of a study by Moisescu (2013) indicated that the older and richer people are, the more they require for their accommodation comfort levels. It also showed that females usually settle for slightly lower accommodation levels than males. When it comes to older people and consumers who have a higher income level, they prefer the trip to be longer and they also prefer transportation to be by plane. Moisescu (2013) also showed that lower-income consumers are better to adopt transportation by train when traveling. This study also pointed out that consumers with higher education levels prefer smaller traveling groups, while people with lower education levels more frequently settle for larger traveling groups.

3 HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

3.1 Hypotheses development

With the help of the concepts presented in the theoretical background and framework, the hypotheses are proposed. The hypotheses will further be tested in the following chapters. For this study, the authors determined that the term *travel recommendations* mean all the commercial content influencers share on their Instagram channel and *travel preferences* are considered as consumers' choices and desires they have when purchasing travel.

There is a lack of information on how Instagram influencers' recommendations can impact on consumers' travel purchases. The majority of previous studies have concentrated on influencers' brand recommendations, purchase intention and travel destination choice, but there are no studies about the effect Instagram influencers' endorsements have when consumers are purchasing travel. In this study, the authors have determined that a travel recommendation can be anything from travel-related photos to travel information shared by Instagram influencers.

Influencers can be seen as a part of a reference group because of the ability to influence one's behavior (Evans, et al., 2009, p. 242). With the commercial content shared on Instagram, influencers try to impact on Instagram users' opinions and behavior. A travel recommendation can also be a travel advertisement shared by an Instagram influencer. Amaro et al. (2016) presented that some studies have shown that consumers prefer the travel content shared by the traveler itself. That is also one reason why this study investigates if people trust more travel recommendations by Instagram influencers than service providers. A study of online travel shopping found out that social influence did not affect online purchase intentions (Amaro & Duarte, 2016). However, Amaro and Duarte (2016), think it is evident that the most influencing factor is the influence of others. Additionally, Amaro et al. (2016) stated that social media has a high influence on consumers' travel decisions. Therefore, the question is, if reference groups have an influence on actual travel purchases? Accordingly, the first hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Instagram influencers' travel recommendations have a positive effect on consumers' online travel purchases.

Robinson, Heitmann, & Dieke (2011) stated that people's demographics have a significant influence on consumers' travel preferences and behavior. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many stimulating factors have an effect on consumer behavior and it results in buying attitudes and preferences (Kotler, et al., 2014, p. 167). Additionally, Evans et al. (2009, p. 242) described that many desires and attitudes are affected by reference groups and therefore, consumers' travel preferences may have been influenced by other individuals. Moisescu (2013) indicated that different education levels and income levels have an effect on consumers' travel preferences, as well as there are fine differences between females' and males' travel preferences.

Consumers' travel preferences have received little attention from previous researchers. The topic is still relatively unstudied whether there are repetitive patterns in consumers' travel preferences and how consumers are actually influenced by influencers when purchasing travel. For that reason, this study investigates if consumers' travel preferences have a positive effect on online travel purchases. This research mainly focuses on consumers who use Instagram, and, in the hypothesis, consumers are referred to as Instagram users. Hence, consumers' travel preferences can be travel destination alternatives they evaluate before purchasing travel, desires about the travel destination or decisions they do on a trip. Therefore, the second hypothesis is proposed:

H2. Consumers' travel preferences have a positive effect on online travel purchases.

3.2 Conceptual model

A conceptual model was formed aligned with the literature to test the relationships between the concepts. A total of two hypotheses were formed through a problematization in the theoretical background and framework. In this study, the independent variables are Instagram influencers' travel recommendations and consumers' travel preferences. The control variables are age, gender and education. The dependent variable stands for online travel purchases. The first hypothesis (H1) tests the relation between Instagram influencers' travel recommendations and online travel purchases. The second hypothesis (H2) utilizes the relationship between consumers' travel preferences and online travel purchases. From Figure 3 below, one can see the proposed conceptual model for this study.

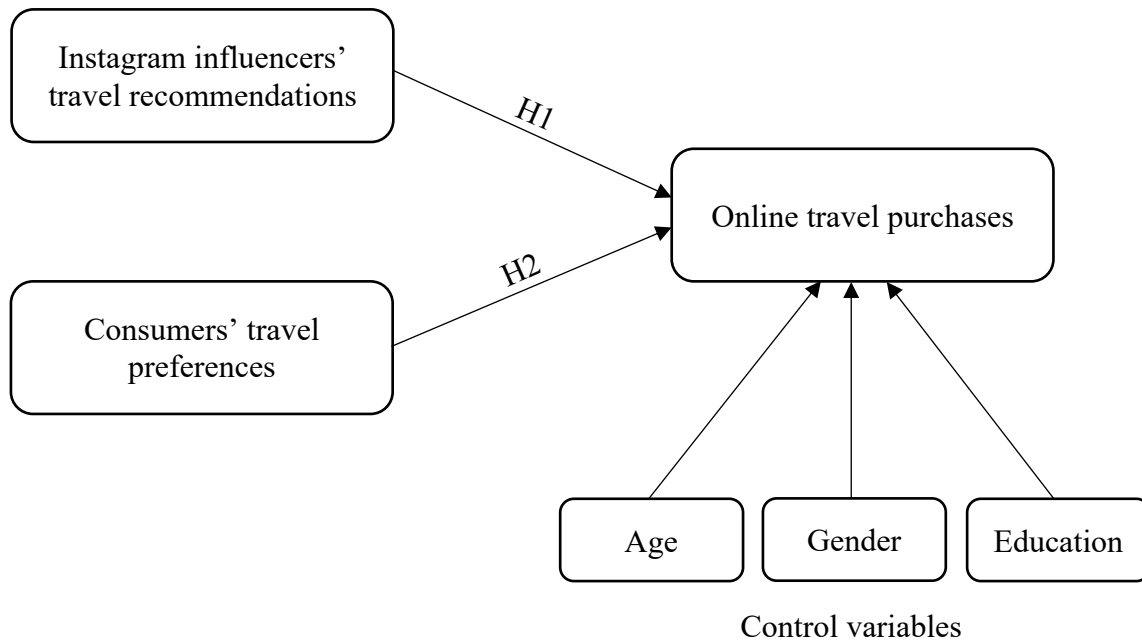


Figure 3. Proposed conceptual model.

As mentioned before, the majority of the previous studies about travel and purchasing concentrate on travel purchase intention, but there is a lack of studies about online travel purchases. One can indicate that online travel purchase is a stronger variable than the travel purchase intention because one knows how much consumers have actually bought, instead of knowing what they are maybe going to buy. This expectation has already been proved by Amaro and Duarte (2015) since they showed that purchase intention is more likely to result as an actual purchase. Therefore, the authors came to a decision to choose online travel purchases as one concept for this study. Additionally, previous researches have stated that gender, education and age have an effect on consumers' decision-making (de Acedo Lizárraga, de Acedo Baquedano & Cardelle-Elawa, 2007). Age, gender and education were included in the model as control variables because it is expected that these constructs have a significant effect on hypotheses.

4 METHOD

4.1 Research approach and research method

The research for this paper was done with a deductive approach because the aim of this master thesis was to test the theories of Instagram influencers and people's travel purchases by only using studies that have already been published. If an inductive approach would have been chosen, the theories should have been built from the ground and no already existing theory could have been used. Added reasons for using a deductive approach in this study, was that the research begins with a theory and hypotheses, then it is followed by collection of data. It was also the most reasonable choice when bigger samples are analyzed and best suited for the aim of this paper (Hair, Celis, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2016, pp. 295–296). Furthermore, this approach was implemented through a quantitative approach, which means the data collected is focusing on numbers. Most often it is collected through a questionnaire (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009, pp. 127 & 151).

Quantitative research method indicates that the data collected is standardized and numerical. When an analysis is conducted of the gathered data, one gets statistics and diagrams. In addition, quantitative research focuses on consumer behavior and the authors of this paper wanted to find out if people are influenced by influencers and their recommendations when purchasing travel (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 416). Quantitative research is concerned about quantification when considering the data collection and analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 37). This is different from the qualitative approach that focuses on collecting data that is non-standardized and the analysis is conducted through the use of conceptualization (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 482).

4.2 Sampling and data collection

For this particular research, primary and secondary data were collected and used. Primary data means that the data is specifically collected for this paper (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 256). Secondary data means that it is collected through previous studies. It can be everything from e-mails and diaries to public records (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 258). This study applied secondary data in the theoretical background and framework in forms of already existing statistics. The

primary data was collected through an online survey that was public from March 3rd to April 15th, 2020. It was shared on various social media channels and communication tools e.g. LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and WhatsApp. The survey had 476 participants in total from 48 different nationalities. From the respondent's, 26.3 per cent were from Germany followed by Finland with 23.9 per cent and Sweden with 23.3 per cent. All the nationalities of the respondents can be seen in Appendix B. Young adults (21–30-years old) were the biggest age group with 68.9 per cent of the participants. The majority of the respondents were women. The most common education level was a bachelor's degree with 43.6% of the respondents and it was followed by high school or equivalent (28.2%) and master's degree (22.7%). One can see more information about the respondents' sociodemographic background in Table 1. Additionally, relevant literature was collected by utilizing Mälardalen University's online library. This way several online databases were accessed, such as Google Scholar, Emerald Insight and ABI/Inform Global.

		Sampling (n = 476)	
		Frequency	Percent
Age	<i>< 20</i>	29	6.1 %
	<i>21-30</i>	328	68.9 %
	<i>31-40</i>	57	12%
	<i>41-50</i>	19	4%
	<i>51-60</i>	27	5.7%
	<i>61 ></i>	15	3.2 %
	<i>Don't want to say</i>	1	0.2%
Gender	<i>Female</i>	327	69.0 %
	<i>Male</i>	141	29.7 %
	<i>Other</i>	2	0.4%
	<i>Don't want to say</i>	4	0.8 %
Education	<i>PhD</i>	12	2.5%
	<i>Master's Degree</i>	107	22.7%
	<i>Bachelor's Degree</i>	206	43.6%
	<i>High School or Equivalent</i>	133	28.2%
	<i>Primary School</i>	4	0.8%
	<i>Don't want to say</i>	10	2.1%

Table 1. Sociodemographic information.

When constructing a questionnaire, it is important to sample the results that the survey provides. Sampling was done to get as accurate data as possible (Saunders, et al., 2009, pp. 212–213). In this particular research, self-selection sampling was exploited. This approach was applied for

the survey because it was shared on online platforms and people were able to choose if they wanted to participate on it or not (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 241). Additionally, the snowball sampling method was used. Snowballing means that respondents share the survey further to other potential participants (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 240). The authors asked the participants to forward the survey to their friends and family. Additionally, an international sample was collected, in order to get answers as broad as possible (Anastasiadou, Lindh, & Vasse, 2019).

4.3 Questionnaire design

An online questionnaire was made to test the hypotheses and to answer the research questions. Furthermore, an online questionnaire was optimal for this study to reach as many participants worldwide as possible and to get a bigger sample to analyze. The questionnaire contained 13 questions with the theme of consumer behavior and purchasing habits. It was made in collaboration with two other master thesis pairs, but all of the groups had their own hypotheses and conceptual models. Therefore, not all the survey questions were used in this study. Relevant questions for this particular research can be found in the operationalization table in Appendix A. The questionnaire began with demographical questions. Some of the demographical questions were used as control variables. After general questions, the focus moved on to more detailed questions.

The survey included three different types of questions: category questions, open questions and rating questions. To collect detailed answers from a survey, some open questions were used. Category questions are questions that can only fit one category. These questions were utilized for this survey to collect data on people's travel purchase behavior. To gather data on people's opinions, rating questions were applied (Saunders, et al., 2009, pp. 375–379). The survey utilized an eight-point Likert-style rating scale that varied from "Totally disagree" to "Completely agree" and there was also a "Don't know" option if the participant did not have an opinion about the statement.

4.4 Operationalizations

The operationalization table can be found in the appendices (Appendix A), to get a broader view of the measurements and scaling of constructs. Operationalization table consists of three control variables, two independent variables and one dependent variable.

The construct of *Online travel purchases* was calculated with a 6-point scale. The scale began with “I have never purchased travel online” (1), 1–3 times (2), 4–6 times (3), 7–10 times (4) and “More than 10 times” (5). It also included a “Don’t know” (0) option for people who were unsure. The question item for this was used to measure the construct to “How many times did you purchase a trip to a foreign destination (flights, train, hotel etc.) on the Internet in the last 12 months?” and it was developed from Xu and Pratt (2018). For this question, the authors have not determined if the travel is for business or leisure. All the participants have made the decision themselves.

Another construct was *Instagram influencers’ travel recommendations* and was measured with an 8-point scale. The scale was from “Totally disagree” (1) to “Completely agree” (7) and “Don’t know” (0). This construct consisted of three statements: “I am influenced by recommendations of travel preferences that influencers have posted on their Instagram”, “Next time I go on a trip, I will visit a destination that has been advertised on Instagram by an influencer” and “I trust more travel information and photos shared by Instagram influencers than service providers (e.g. hotels own webpage)”. These question items were developed from Terttunen (2017) and Xu and Pratt (2018).

The following construct concerning *Consumers’ travel preferences* was measured with an 8-point scale. The scale was from “Totally disagree” (1) to “Completely agree” (7) and “Don’t know” (0). The question items were used to measure the construct of the following statements: “Instagram influencers help me to evaluate travel destination alternatives”, “Instagram influencers have an effect on my decisions made on the trip (e.g. if I want to see a sight or do an activity)” and “Instagram influencers make me feel excited about the travel destination”. These question items were developed from Terttunen (2018).

The first control variable in the questionnaire was *Age* and it was measured with a 7-point scale. The scale started with < 20 years (1), following with 21–30 years (2), 31–40 years (3), 41–50 years (4), 51–60 years (5) and > 61 years (5). Additionally, the questionnaire offered the possibility to answer, “I don’t want to say” (0). The question item that was used to measure the construct was “How old are you?” and it was adapted from Xu and Pratt (2018). The following control variable was *Gender* and it was calculated with a 4-point scale. The answer options were Female (1), Male (2), Other (3) and finally “I don’t want to say” (0). This question item was inquiring “What is your gender?” and it was continuously referring to Xu and Pratt (2018). The final control variable was *Education*, and this was calculated with a 6-point scale. The scale varied between Primary school (1), High school or equivalent (2), Bachelor’s degree (3), Master’s Degree (4) and PhD (5). Again, participants were able to choose “I don’t want to say” (0). This question item was “What is your highest level of (completed) education?” and it was developed from Wen (2012).

4.5 Data analysis

Multiple regression is an approach where the researcher can explore the relationship between one dependent variable and a number of independent variables (Pallant, 2013, p. 154). Multiple regression shows “how well a set of variables is able to predict a particular outcome and which variable is the best predictor of an outcome” (Pallant, 2013, p. 155). Multiple regression provides information about the whole model and the contribution of each variable (Pallant, 2013, p. 154). According to Pallant (2013, p. 155), there are three main types of multiple regression analyses, which are standard, hierarchical and stepwise. For this study, the standard multiple regression was chosen because this paper investigates the model as a whole and there were a set of variables (two independent variables and three control variables). Standard multiple regression was the most obvious way to add the variables into the equation simultaneously to see how much variance all the other variables can explain as a group in a dependent variable (Pallant, 2013, p. 155). In the SPSS software, the control variables were entered into the first model. The next step was to add the independent variables (travel recommendations and travel preferences) separately with the control variables (age, gender and education) into the second and third model. The fourth model included all constructs. This was utilized to see whether the following models are able to explain the variance (Pallant, 2013, p. 169).

Crosstabulation

Crosstabulation is referred to as a non-parametric statistic. Non-parametric techniques are ideal when the data is measured on scales (Pallant, 2013, p. 221). Crosstabulation is one of the simplest methods for describing the relationships between the sets. When utilizing crosstabulation analysis, two or more variables are compared together to see what the relationship is between them (Hair, et al., 2016, p. 352). Percentages show what the relationship is between the sets (Pallant, 2013, p. 228). Crosstabulation calculations were utilized in this study to get richer information about the respondents' demographics.

Cronbach's alpha

The Cronbach's coefficient alpha "calculates the average of all possible split-half reliability coefficients". It varies between zero (0) and one (1), zero meaning there is no internal reliability and one meaning that there is perfect internal reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 169). Higher values indicate greater reliability (Pallant, 2013, p. 6). To get the desired result, the coefficient should be over 0.7 (Pallant, 2013, p. 101). Nevertheless, the coefficient should be minimum of 0.7, some researchers acknowledge different levels of reliability (Pallant, 2013, p. 6). To measure the internal consistency for this study, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used.

Correlations and Multicollinearity

A correlation coefficient was calculated with Spearman's correlation to ensure the constructed validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 360). Spearman's correlation or Spearman's rho as it is also called can be either positive or negative (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 354). The correlation coefficient value that indicates the strength varies from a positive one (1) to negative one (-1). If the size of the correlation coefficient has a value of one (1), that indicates that the correlation is perfectly positive and if it is zero (0) there is no relationship at all. When the correlation is a negative one (-1) it has a perfect negative correlation. If the correlation is negative, it does not refer to the strength, but to the direction the relationship has. Additionally, the value is small if it's between 0.1 to 0.29, the medium is from 0.3 to 0.49 and all above 0.5 are considered as large (Pallant, 2013 p. 139). When the independent variables are highly correlated, multicollinearity exists (Pallant, 2013, p. 157). According to Pallant (2013, p. 157), multiple

regression analysis does not desire multicollinearity. Ideally, the predictor variables should be strongly related to the dependent variable, not strongly related to each other (Pallant, 2013, p. 176). Correlation higher than 0.8 or 0.9 is a reason for further examination (Pallant, 2013, p. 300).

T-value and P-value

In a regression model, there is a *t*-value that indicates if an “independent variable is significantly associated with a dependent variable”. If the *t*-value is lower than 2, it indicates that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected (Silvia, Swankoski, Watt, Bullard, & Iqbal, 2014). The *t*-value shows if the regression coefficient is different enough from 0 to be statistically significant (Hair, et al., 2016, p. 388). Statistical significance, also known as *p*-value, can also be calculated in SPSS. The desired value varies between zero (0) and one (1) (Rumsey & Unger, 2015, p. 42). If the value is less than 0.05, it indicates that the *p*-value is small, and the statistical relationship is significant. If the *p*-value is over 0.05, it indicates that the relationship is not statistically significant (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 450).

Standardized Beta

In Standardized Beta coefficient all the variables are converted to the same scale so that they can be compared. For this study, this was useful, because the contribution of different variables was compared (Bring, 1994). Standardized Beta tells a value for each variable and it shows the contribution (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). The scale of Beta coefficients varies from minus one (-1) to plus one (+1). If the value of the Standardized Beta coefficient is large it has more importance in predicting the dependent variable (Hair, et al., 2016, p. 389). The largest absolute Beta value tells that the variable has the strongest contribution in explaining the dependent variable (Pallant, 2013, p. 167).

R Square and Adjusted R Square

The R Square, also known as regression coefficient or R^2 , indicates how much of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the model (Pallant, 2013, pp. 166–167). R Square can have a value between zero (0) and plus one (+1). This helps to estimate the variance between a

dependent variable and one or more independent variables (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 461). R Square explains the overall variance of the dependent variable in per cents (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). For example, if the R Square value is 0.046 it means there is a 4.6 per cent variance in the model. R Square usually increases when one adds more variables to the regression. The Adjusted R Square corrects the R Square value to provide a better estimate of the true value (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). Adjusted R-square takes into consideration that more variables are required “to account for the variation in the dependent variable” (Silvia, et al., 2014, p. 117).

F-value

The F-value shows the differences between the groups and how significant the model is (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 458). F-test examines “whether the explanatory variables are statistically useful in explaining the variation in the dependent variable” (Silvia, et al., 2014, p. 116). The result tells if there is a relationship and if it is significant (Hair, et al., 2016, p. 389). If there is a low difference between the groups the F-value is high and it has a high probability to be statistically significant (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 458). If the F-value is significant, it means it is unlikely that the variable will produce a large R Square value (Hair, et al., 2016, p. 390).

Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

The tolerance value indicates a specific independent variable that is not explained by other independent variables in a construct. The variance inflation factor (VIF) is the inverse value of the tolerance (Pallant, 2013, p. 164). The tolerance value of less than 0.1 indicates a possibility for multicollinearity. If the VIF value exceeds 10, there is a high degree of collinearity (Pallant, 2013, p. 164).

4.6 Validity and reliability

Validity measures how accurate the scale is. This study focuses on content validity, also known as face validity and constructs validity (Hair, et al., 2016, p. 257). Content validity can be established by asking experts in the field to go through the concepts and ask for opinions. This concept was also used for the study to get more valid content (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 170).

Construct validity determines what the construct or scale is measuring (Hair, et al., 2016, p. 258). In order to assess construct validity, one has to investigate two things: convergent validity (related) and discriminant validity (unrelated) (Pallant, 2013, p. 7). Valid measures expect reliability and random errors to be reasonable (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 79). For this study to be validated, the survey questions were developed from already existing literature (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

Reliability refers to the consistency of the measure (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 373). Reliability indicates how free the scale which is measured is from random errors (Pallant, 2013, p. 6). It is important to find scales that are reliable for the study (Pallant, 2013, p. 101). When calculating reliability, it cannot be exact, but an estimate can be calculated through various measures (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Internal consistency is the degree to see if all the items in the scale are measuring the same underlying attribute. To measure the internal consistency, the most common statistic is Cronbach's coefficient alpha. This was implemented to measure the consistency of this study (Pallant, 2013, p. 101). However, the reliable result does not need to be valid (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 79).

4.7 Ethical aspects

According to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 187), ethical issues are important throughout the research to gain ethical integrity. Ethical aspects were considered when designing the questionnaire. The research did not subject to the research population in any unethical way, which could result in embarrassment, harm or any other material disadvantage (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 160). Questions in the survey were designed in a way that they were neutral and weren't harmful in any way for the respondents. Respondents also had the ability to choose the option "I don't want to say" or "Don't know" in each question if they felt uncomfortable or unsure when answering the questions. Data was decided to collect through a web-based survey, to avoid discomfort or stress among respondents, which could happen for example during face-to-face interviews (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 187). In addition, the way the authors processed and stored data from participants was treated with respect considering the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (European Commission, 2020). Even though participants' names, e-mails and other personal data wasn't gathered in this survey, it still included information about age, gender and nationality. This way some people could be recognized among the respondents and

therefore the legislation was followed up closely. Therefore, anonymity played a big role in the survey design. Furthermore, individuals were not pressured or coerced into participating in the survey (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 188). All respondents were respected throughout the research process and participation in the survey was completely voluntary for them.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Crosstabulation

For this study, various crosstabulation calculations were carried out to get a broader picture of the respondents' demographics and online travel purchase behavior. Crosstabulation calculations can be seen in Appendix C. Majority of the respondents purchase travel online 1–3 times a year, second-most 4–6 times a year and third most more than 10 times a year. Young adults (21–30 years) purchase travel the most but the majority of them purchase travel only 1–3 times a year. The results indicate that young adults purchase travel online more often than older generations but due to a small sample of older respondents this needs to be investigated more in a future research. Additionally, female respondents tend to travel more often than males. When it comes to education, people who have completed a bachelor's degree and are young adults tend to purchase travel the most.

5.2 Reliability

Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used in order to test the reliability of the constructs. As one can see from the reliability statistics (Table 2) below, the Cronbach's alphas for both constructs are shown. The number of items shows how many question items the constructs had.

	Cronbach's alpha	N of Items
<i>Travel Recommendations</i>	0.771	3
<i>Travel Preferences</i>	0.901	3

Table 2. Reliability statistics.

Both of the constructs have a value of over 0.7, making them reliable (Pallant, 2013, p. 101). The results from the Cronbach's alpha test shows that Instagram influencers travel recommendations have a value of 0.771 and consumers travel preferences have a value of 0.901, which indicates perfect internal reliability for both of the constructs (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 169). According to Pallant (2013, p. 6), higher values indicate greater reliability and therefore travel preferences are more reliable than travel recommendations.

5.3 Correlations

The correlation analysis used in this study is represented in Table 3 (Correlation matrix of constructs) below. Correlations were constructed by using Spearman's rho to confirm the construct validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 360). The correlations among the constructs were calculated and the matrix shows the statistical significance with the asterisks.

Spearman's rho	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) <i>Travel Purchases</i>	1.000					
(2) <i>Age</i>	-0.013	1.000				
(3) <i>Gender</i>	-0.006	0.096	1.000			
(4) <i>Education</i>	0.119*	0.210**	0.026	1.000		
(5) <i>Travel Recommendations</i>	0.057	-0.229**	-0.133**	0.017	1.000	
(6) <i>Travel Preferences</i>	0.127*	-0.311**	-0.137**	0.007	0.807**	1.000

* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$

Table 3. Correlation matrix of constructs.

As one can see from Table 3, some of the values resulted in a negative value, which indicates there is a negative correlation. It doesn't refer to the strength of the correlation but to the direction (Pallant, 2013 p. 139). The correlations were significant between travel purchases (1) and education (4), as well as, between travel purchases (1) and travel preferences (6). When it comes to age (2), the construct had a positive and significant correlation with education (4), but a negative correlation between travel recommendations (5) and travel preferences (6). Despite that, both of the correlations were significant. Additionally, gender (3) had a significant correlation with travel recommendations (5) and travel preferences (6), but the correlations were negative. Finally, travel recommendations (5) had a significant correlation with travel preferences (6). All of the mentioned correlations resulted in a p -value of $p < 0.05$ which indicates that the results are statistically significant and valid (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 359). Other correlations were not significant. As the correlation between travel recommendations and travel preferences is very high (0.807**), multicollinearity exists and it means a statistical problem (Pallant, 2013, pp. 157 & 300). Therefore, multicollinearity between these constructs is further investigated with the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) in the regression analysis.

5.4 Regression

To test the postulated hypotheses, standard multiple regression analysis in SPSS was utilized. The results of regression analysis consist mainly of the control variables and the two independent variables: travel recommendations and travel preferences, in relation to the dependent variable of online travel purchases. In this case, the authors utilized a standard multiple regression, because the aim of the study was to see if online travel purchases can predict travel recommendations and travel preferences above and beyond with the control variables. Table 4 shows the overall regression analysis for all the constructs and Table 5 has been taken a step further by examining the differences between education levels. These analyses are followed by a regression estimation between female and male respondents in Table 6.

5.4.1 Regression for all constructs

To investigate the individual effects of the two independent variables, four models were constructed in Table 4. In the first model control variables were examined and in the second and third model, independent variables were added separately. The fourth model shows the regression estimation for all of the constructs.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Travel Recommendations</i>			0.080 (1.558)	-0.133 (-1.517)
<i>Travel Preferences</i>		0.139 (2.762)***		0.251 (2.784)***
<i>Age</i>	-0.034 (-0.716)	-0.013 (-0.263)	-0.008 (-0.161)	0.017 (0.320)
<i>Gender</i>	-0.007 (-0.147)	0.041 (0.837)	0.016 (0.314)	0.004 (0.073)
<i>Education</i>	0.132 (2.770)***	0.103 (2.112)*	0.121 (2.359)**	0.132 (2.625)***
Model summary				
<i>F-value</i>	2.593	3.375**	2.177	3.290***
<i>R²</i>	0.131	0.031	0.022	0.200
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	0.011	0.022	0.012	0.028
<i>Average VIF</i>	1.020	1.069	1.032	1.929

* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$

Table 4. Results of the regression estimation (Dependent variable: Travel Purchases).

The numbers in the columns show the Standardized Beta value, which indicates the variance of each value (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). In the parenthesis below the *t*-value is shown and the significance of the value is marked with asterisks. Only the values which resulted in a *p*-value less than 0.05 have a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). As previously mentioned, R Square tells how much of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the model (Pallant, 2013, pp. 166–167). In the first model, the R² value is 0.131 making the variance 13.1%. Model 2 has 3.1% of variance and Model 3 has 2.2% of the variance. Model 4 increases the variance to 20%. As one can note from the models, the variance is higher when all the constructs are added to the model. Model 1 resulted in a value of Adjusted R² of 0.011, making it 1.1%. Model 2 resulted in Adjusted R² of 2.2% and Model 3 with 1.2%. Model 4 resulted in the highest number of 2.8%.

The largest Beta coefficient was travel preferences in Model 4 with a value of 0.251, making the variable to have the strongest unique contribution to explaining the dependent variable (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). Other variables resulted in slightly lower numbers than travel preferences, indicating that there is less of a unique contribution (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). In addition, travel preferences resulted in a significant value because the *p*-value was *p*<0.001 (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 450). Furthermore, education showed to be highly significant in all models because of the *p*-value of *p*<0.001 (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 450). All of the models resulted in a large F-value: Model 1 with 2.593, Model 2 with 3.375**, Model 3 with 2.177 and Model 4 with 3.290***, meaning there is a low variation between the groups (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 458). The second and fourth model resulted as significant and the models indicate that travel preferences have the strongest individual effect. Additionally, VIF was calculated to see the degree of collinearity (Pallant, 2013, p. 164). Average VIF values were calculated for all models. VIF values for all constructs can be seen in Appendix D. Model 1 resulted in average VIF of 1.020, Model 2 in 1.069, Model 3 in 1.032 and Model 4 in 1.929. None of the VIF values exceeded the value 10, and therefore collinearity statistics can be considered as low (Pallant, 2013, p. 164).

5.4.2 Regression for education

Because education resulted highly significant in the first regression analysis, similar regression calculations were made to examine the differences between education levels. Results can be

seen in Table 5 below. The first model in the table shows results for high school or equivalent and it is followed by a bachelor's degree and master's degree. Respondents' who had completed a primary school or a doctoral degree (PhD) as their highest education could not be included in the calculation due to a small sample. Table 5 shows Standardized Beta and *t*-value in the same order as previous Table 4.

	Model 1 High school or equivalent	Model 2 Bachelor's degree	Model 3 Master's degree
<i>Travel Recommendations</i>	-0.262 (-1.335)	0.101 (0.768)	-0.266 (-1.744)
<i>Travel Preferences</i>	0.224 (1.106)	0.182 (1.362)	0.157 (0.992)
<i>Age</i>	-0.095 (-0.763)	0.069 (0.904)	0.037 (0.365)
<i>Gender</i>	0.022 (0.192)	0.042 (0.568)	-0.053 (-0.556)
Model summary			
<i>F-value</i>	0.615	3.120*	0.892
<i>R²</i>	0.169	0.260	0.180
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	-0.018	0.46	-0.004
<i>Average VIF</i>	2.335	2.139	1.874

* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$

Table 5. Results of regression estimation between education levels (Dependent variable: Travel Purchases).

The largest Beta coefficient was between travel recommendations and people who have completed master's degree with a value of -0.266, making the variable to have the strongest unique contribution to explaining the dependent variable (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). Bachelor's degree resulted in the highest variance of 26% with the R^2 value. Results did not show any significant values, excluding the high F-value for bachelor's degree which resulted as statistically significant. The F-value of 3.120* indicates there is a low variation between the groups (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 458). In this matrix, none of the models have a high degree of collinearity because all the VIF values remained below value 10 (Pallant, 2013, p. 164). High school or equivalent education resulted in average VIF of 2.335, bachelor's degree in 2.139 and master's degree in 1.874. VIF calculations for all of the constructs can be seen in Appendix E.

5.4.3 Regression for gender

Results of regression estimation between education levels did not have any significant effect on online travel purchases and therefore, the next step was to move on to gender estimations. To continue the standard multiple regression, similar regression analysis was also utilized for different genders to examine if there are remarkable variations between female and male respondents. Table 6 below shows the results of the regression estimation between female and male respondents. The first model examines the results among female respondents and the second model among males. 69 per cent were female respondents and 29.7 per cent were male. Genders who identify themselves as “Other” or did not want to answer their gender were not included in this analysis due to a small sample. The numbers in the columns above show the Standardized Beta value, as well as, the *t*-value in parenthesis.

	Model 1 Females	Model 2 Males
<i>Travel Recommendations</i>	-0.047 (-0.492)	-0.395 (-2.058)*
<i>Travel Preferences</i>	0.234 (2.376)**	0.332 (1.693)
<i>Age</i>	-0.002 (-0.024)	0.064 (0.634)
<i>Education</i>	0.151 (2.535)**	0.088 (0.922)
Model summary		
<i>F-value</i>	4.151***	1.397
<i>R²</i>	0.058	0.048
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	0.044	0.014
<i>Average VIF</i>	1.887	2.769

* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$

Table 6. Results of the regression estimation between female and male respondents (Dependent variable: Travel Purchases).

The variance between the constructs is shown with the R^2 -value. In the first model (females), the R Square value is 0.058 making the variance 5.8%. In the second model (males), the variance is 4.8% because the R^2 resulted in a value of 0.048. Model 1 resulted in a value of Adjusted R^2 of 4.4% and Model 2 with 1.4%. This explains that in Model 1 only 4.4% of the variances of the female respondents are explained by the variables. In the second Model, 1.4%

of the variances of the male respondents are explained by the variables. Only education, travel recommendations and travel preferences resulted in a p -value less than 0.05, making a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). Significant values are mentioned in the table with asterisks. For female respondents travel preferences and education were significant and for male respondents travel recommendations were significant. Differences between the genders show the presence of heteroscedasticity. Heteroscedasticity means the extent where “data values for the dependent variable and independent variables have unequal variances” (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 592). Different clusters of respondents can have different approaches to this, but the male respondents showed to be more influenced by travel recommendations than travel preferences and female respondents showed to be more affected by travel preferences than travel recommendations.

The results of male respondents show that the largest absolute Beta coefficient value was travel recommendations with a value of -0.395, which resulted as statistically significant. This indicates that travel recommendations have the strongest unique contribution to explaining the dependent variable (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). Despite that, the results of female respondents show that the largest Beta coefficient was travel preferences with a significant value of 0.234. The results of female respondents’ show that travel preferences and education resulted in a significant value because the p -value was $p < 0.01$ (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 450). Other variables in the matrix have less of a unique contribution (Pallant, 2013, p. 167). Exclusively the model of female respondents resulted in a large F-value and statistically significant. Model 1 resulted in an F-value of 4.151*** and Model 2 in 1.397. That means there is a low variation between the groups in the first model and it is significant (Saunders, et al., 2009, p. 458). Model 1 resulted in average VIF of 1.887 and Model 2 in 2.769. Therefore, collinearity remained low (Pallant, 2013, p. 164). Collinearity statistics for gender can be seen in their total form in Appendix F.

5.5 Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses were tested to see if the assumed relationship between variables were true (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p. 161). Results of the hypotheses testing can be seen from Table 7 below. The support of the hypotheses was evaluated in the regression analysis.

Hypothesis	t-value	Sig.	Result
<i>H1</i> Instagram influencers' travel recommendations have a positive effect on consumers' online travel purchases.	-1.517	0.130	Not supported
<i>H2</i> Consumers' travel preferences have a positive effect on online travel purchases.	2.784	0.006	Supported

Table 7. Results of hypotheses testing.

Based on the results, exclusively the second hypothesis (H2) about consumers' travel preferences is supported because the *t*-value is greater than 2. The first hypothesis (H1) about travel recommendations is not supported because the *t*-value remains below the value 2. Travel recommendations have a *t*-value of -1.517 making it unsupported and travel preferences have a *t*-value of 2.784 making it supported. Exclusively only the second hypothesis of the mentioned hypotheses resulted in a *p*-value of $p < 0.05$ which indicates that the result is statistically significant and valid (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 359).

6 DISCUSSION

The objective of this paper was to get an answer to “To what extent Instagram influencers’ recommendations are impacting consumers travel purchases online?” and “To what extent consumers’ preferences are affecting when doing travel purchases online?”. The hypotheses tested Instagram influencers’ travel recommendations (H1) and consumers’ travel preferences (H2) on online travel purchases, and solely the hypothesis of consumers’ travel preferences (H2) was supported. Because of the multicollinearity between travel recommendations and travel preferences, Instagram influencers’ travel recommendations can have an effect on consumers’ travel preferences first. Therefore, both of the constructs may have a joint impact on online travel purchases. Instagram influencers’ travel recommendations can first have a small effect on the travel decision-making, but the actual online travel purchase decision is made more by consumers own travel preferences.

The results of this study indicated that young adults purchase travel online more than older generations. This is in line with a previous study showing that online travel purchasers are generally young consumers (Amaro & Duarte, 2013). The results of this study also indicated that young adults with higher education levels purchase travel more. According to Amaro (2014), this has also been the outcome for the majority of studies because it is proved that consumers with higher education and income levels are more likely to purchase travel online.

The results of the hypotheses were somewhat interesting because it was expected that Instagram influencers’ travel recommendations have a positive effect on online travel purchases. As the results of the survey indicate, this was not the outcome in this study and the first hypothesis (H1) was not supported. As previous studies have examined, reference groups, such as friends and family have a tremendous influence on recommendations (Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017). Additionally, others often influence us in social groups and influencers can also be recognized as reference groups (Evans, et al., 2009, pp. 241–243). Furthermore, Amaro et al. (2016) stated that travel content created by travelers is more credible and trustworthy than content created by other sources. Therefore, the outcome of this study did not go in line with previous literature even though influencers belong to reference groups. The reason for this might be because people are receiving travel recommendations online. Recommendations might be more influential in an offline setting. What authors think was also interesting was the fact that despite

the first hypothesis was not supported, male respondents were still more likely to be affected by travel recommendations from influencers than female respondents. Heteroscedasticity was present in this study and it indicates that different groups of people have a different approach to different topics. In this research, the results indicated that males have a different approach to travel recommendations than females. Female respondents were not significantly influenced by Instagram influencers' travel recommendations. This result does not match with the prior findings of similar topics, where females were highly influenced by influencers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Therefore, the answer to the first research question is that Instagram influencers are not so much influential when consumers are doing travel purchases, but male respondents can adapt travel recommendations more easily than female respondents.

The second hypothesis investigated consumers' travel preferences and if they have a positive effect on online travel purchases. What authors found relatively interesting is that travel preferences were expected to have less impact on travel purchases than travel recommendations. The outcome of this study was the other way around and travel preferences ended up being more effective factor than travel recommendations. As already mentioned, the second hypothesis (H2) about travel preferences was supported. Nevertheless, it makes sense that consumers' travel preferences have more of a positive impact on online travel purchases because they have an effect on buying attitudes (Moisescu, 2013). Instagram users have their own desires about the trip and therefore they have preferences about travel, for example, which accommodation or hotel they choose when traveling (Amaro et al., 2016). Demographics and motivations to travel have found to have a significant impact on people's travel preferences (Moisescu, 2013; Ribeiro et al., 2014). Therefore, this hypothesis is in line with the findings of other studies. When it comes to the second research question, one can point out that consumers' travel preferences have a great impact on online travel purchases.

When it comes to the control variables, education resulted in having a significant effect on travel purchases. For example, a study by Moisescu (2013) found out higher education levels to have an impact on travel preferences. Therefore, this is in line with other studies that have confirmed the education to have an effect on travel decisions. Nevertheless, different education levels did not show much of an effect on travel purchases in this study. Exclusively, bachelor's degree resulted as the only significant model to have an effect on travel purchases. Gender, on the other hand, played a big role in the results and showed to have a big influence on online

travel purchases. Moisescu (2013) also proved that there are differences between male and female respondents. For male respondents, travel recommendations showed to be the only impacting construct on travel purchases. For female respondents, education and travel preferences appeared to be the ones affecting travel purchases. Although the significance of different levels of age was not closely studied, regression analyses showed that age did not have a significant effect on travel purchases. Again, this result is not in line with previous researches that have confirmed the age to have an impact on people's travel behavior and preferences (Moisescu, 2013).

7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 General conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine if Instagram influencers' recommendations have an effect on online travel purchases and to investigate if consumers' travel preferences have an effect on online travel purchases. The findings of the empirical data revealed that consumers' travel preferences have a positive effect on travel purchases, but there is no positive effect between Instagram influencers and their travel recommendations on online travel purchases. This indicated that Instagram users are not that influenced by the content they see on Instagram. Consumers have their own travel preferences, which can originate from sources other than Instagram. It is difficult to tell how and why consumers behave the way they do but the results of this study revealed that consumers' travel preferences have a big impact when doing a decision about travel purchasing.

7.2 Managerial implications

It is clear that consumers search for information about travel and purchase travel mainly on the Internet. Social media has proved to be important in the travel context. In order for online marketers and travel companies to succeed, they need to implement influencer marketing into their strategies. Offline travel agencies might not succeed in the world we live in today. Youth travel can be considered as a very important segment to concentrate on since younger people tend to travel more than older people. Travel companies should target their travel information and advertisement more on males because they are more influenced by travel recommendations than females. Companies still need to understand that they cannot really affect people's travel preferences because most of them are affected by other stimuli, such as cultural and economic.

7.3 Limitations

The study has some limitations as all the other studies have as well. The survey was available only in the English language in order to get as many respondents as possible from all around the world. Some respondents might have had a lack of knowledge or understanding of the English language and they might have had some difficulties when answering the survey. In

order to provide access to the survey in respondents native language could have been beneficial to get a richer data set. In addition, authors friends and family gave some feedback that the survey was too long. The survey was made in cooperation with two other master's thesis groups, so it included many questions. In order to keep the survey short and succinct, the survey should have been more compact and implemented only among the researchers of this study.

Another thing to point out is the timing of the survey distribution. The participants of the survey were asked how many times they had purchased travel online in the last 12 months. The survey was open from March 3rd to April 15th and the timing may have affected the results because the COVID-19 pandemic was rampant at the exact same time. According to WHO (World Health Organization, 2020) coronavirus reportedly started 31 December 2019 in China causing lockdown restrictions in several countries. Therefore, people had to cancel or rearrange their trips and at the time it was unclear when people were able to travel again. This pandemic may have affected strongly to respondents' answers since they didn't want to take the risk to purchase trips for the upcoming spring or summer. For this reason, the real amount of travel purchases could have been higher than it was while the pandemic. Therefore, the pandemic period is a limitation one needs to consider when thinking about the results.

When taking validity and reliability into account, the number of respondents was quite desirable. Most of the studies keep 300 answers adequate and, in this study, there were 476 respondents, making it a very acceptable amount. Despite that, respondents didn't represent evenly in the different age groups. The majority of the respondents were from the ages of 21–30. Even though, the authors believe this was a positive outcome for this research because the majority (64%) of Instagram users are 18–34 years old (Statista, 2020b). Due to a small sample of other age groups than 21–30, results may not give a completely accurate picture of consumers travel purchases, but it indicates reliable information of the travel purchase behavior of young adults.

Additionally, the survey did not include a question about respondents Instagram or Internet usage. It did not have questions whether or not the participants use Instagram, and if they do, how much they tend to use it. The authors are aware that not all respondent use Instagram, so this might have affected the answers negatively if they didn't choose the “Don't know” option. This is also one major limitation for this research, and it could have been very relevant

information for the researchers. Furthermore, the level of income was not asked from the respondents. It would have been useful regarding the study, to see if income has an effect on travel purchase.

Lack of previous researches on influencers' travel recommendations and consumers' travel preferences are great limitations for this research. It was complicated to find literature about Instagram influencers and travel together because these topics investigated in this study are relatively unstudied before. Nevertheless, there can be found a lot of information about travel destinations and travel behavior in general. Travel is widely studied, but earlier studies concentrate on other aspects of travel and tourism.

7.4 Suggestions for future research

While doing this paper, the authors found that there is a lack of information about Instagram influencers' impact on consumers' travel purchases. There is a deficiency in studies about Instagram influencers in every way because most of the studies focus on social media influencers in general. For further research the authors would suggest a study on Instagram influencers attributes, and which affect the most on people's online travel purchases. Another suggestion for future research could be "What kind of travel recommendations of Instagram influencers attract consumers?". There are no studies about travel recommendations and what kind of forms they appear in social media. This study could investigate, for example, which forms of travel recommendations, such as photos, videos, blog posts, vlogs or other texts, are the most eye-catching and interesting in consumers' opinions. Additionally, a similar survey could be distributed in a different time of the year to see if there are differences in people's travel planning behavior between the travel seasons.

REFERENCES

- Alnsour, M., Ghannam, M., & Alzeidat, Y. (2018). Social media effect on purchase intention: Jordanian airline industry. *Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce*, 23(2), 1-1. <http://www.icommercecentral.com/open-access/social-media-effect-on-purchase-intention-jordanian-airline-industry.pdf>
- Amaro, S. (2014). *Determinants of online travel purchase intentions: A holistic approach*. (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, Universidade de Aveiro (Portugal). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1894044824/>
- Amaro, S., & Duarte, P. (2013). Online travel purchasing: A literature review. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(8), 755–785. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.835227>
- Amaro, S., & Duarte, P. (2015). An integrative model of consumers' intentions to purchase travel online. *Tourism management*, 46, 64-79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.06.006>
- Amaro, S., & Duarte, P. (2016). Travellers' intention to purchase travel online: integrating trust and risk to the theory of planned behaviour. *Anatolia: Emerging Topics in Niche Tourism, the Hospitality Industry, and Online Consumer Behaviour*, 27(3), 389–400. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2016.1191771>
- Amaro, S., Duarte, P., & Henriques, C. (2016). Travelers' use of social media: A clustering approach. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 59, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.03.007>
- Anastasiadou, E., Lindh, C., & Vasse, T. (2019). Are Consumers International? A Study of CSR, Cross-Border Shopping, Commitment and Purchase Intent among Online Consumers. *Journal of Global Marketing*, 32:4, 239-254. DOI: 10.1080/08911762.2018.1528652
- Arrigo, E. (2018). Social media marketing in luxury brands. *Management Research Review*, 41(6), 657–679. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-04-2017-0134>
- Bring, J. (1994). How to Standardize Regression Coefficients. *The American Statistician*, 48(3), 209-213. doi:10.2307/2684719
- Bobâlcă, C., Maha, A., Tugulea, O., & Maha, L. (2014). USING INTERNET AND TRAVEL AGENCIES IN PLANNING A TRIP. A QUALITATIVE APPROACH. *CES Working Papers*, 6(1), 181–200. https://mdh.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=ceeol_s266719&context=PC&vid=46MH_INST:46MH_V1&lang=sv&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,internet%20and%20travel

- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2015). *Business Research Methods* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chang, C. C., & Chin, Y. C. (2010). The impact of recommendation sources on online purchase intentions: The moderating effects of gender and perceived risk. *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology*, 4(6), 111-114.
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e042/e9b47a5908687bb841638c8d67ee9475404f.pdf>
- Cheyne, J., Downes, M., & Legg, S. (2006). Travel agent vs internet: What influences travel consumer choices?. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 12(1), 41–57.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766706059307>
- Chung, N., & Koo, C. (2015). The use of social media in travel information search. *Telematics and Informatics*, 32(2), 215-229.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2014.08.005>
- Davidson, T. L. (1998). What are travel and tourism: Are they really an industry. *Global tourism*, 2. (3rd ed.). Retrieved from
<https://books.google.se/books?id=SYssBgAAQBAJ&lpg=PA25&ots=4TME8ODoao&dq=What%20are%20travel%20and%20tourism%3A%20Are%20they%20really%20an%20industry.%20Global%20tourism%2C%202.&lr&hl=fi&pg=PA28#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- de Acedo Lizárraga, M. L. S., de Acedo Baquedano, M. T. S., & Cardelle-Elawar, M. (2007). Factors that affect decision making: gender and age differences. *International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy*, 7(3), 381-391.
<https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/560/56070306.pdf>
- Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 68, 1-7.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.11.009>
- Ellonen, H., Wikström, P., & Johansson, A. (2015). The role of the website in a magazine business - revisiting old truths. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 12(4), 238–249.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2015.1107334>
- European Commission. (2020). *Data protection in the EU*. Retrieved from
https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/data-protection-eu_en
- Evans, M., Jamal, A., & Foxall, G. R. (2009). *Consumer behaviour* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, N.J: Wiley.
- Evans, N.J., Phua, J., Lim J., & Hyoyeun J. (2017). Disclosing Instagram Influencer Advertising: The Effects of Disclosure Language on Advertising Recognition, Attitudes, and Behavioral Intent. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 17:2, 138-149. DOI: 10.1080/15252019.2017.1366885

- Fatanti, M. N., & Suyadnya, I. W. (2015). Beyond user gaze: How Instagram creates tourism destination brand?. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 211, 1089-1095. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.145>
- Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 90–92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.11.001>
- Galeotti, A., & Goyal, S. (2009). Influencing the influencers: A theory of strategic diffusion. *The Rand Journal of Economics*, 40(3), 509-532. <http://ep.bib.mdh.se/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ep.bib.mdh.se/docview/236616144?accountid=12245>
- Ghauri, P., & Grønhaug, K. (2010). *Research methods in business studies* (4th ed). Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Glucksman, M. (2017). The Rise of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Lifestyle Branding: A Case Study of Lucie Fink. *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 8 (2), 77-87. <https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/communications/journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/153/2017/12/Fall2017Journal.pdf#page=77>
- Hair, J.F. Jr., Celci, M., Money, A., Samouel, P., & Page, M. (2016). *Essentials of Business Research Methods*. (3rd ed.). New York, NY Routledge.
- Heale, R., & Twycross, A. (2015). Validity and reliability in quantitative studies. *Evidence-based nursing*, 18(3), 66-67. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102129>
- Kaperonis, S. D. (2018). The Impact of Social Media on user's Travel Purchase Intention. *Data Analytics 2018: The Seventh International Conference on Data Analytic*, 50-54. <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8603211/file/8618628.pdf#page=61>
- Kotler, P., Bowen, J., & Makens, J. (2014). *Marketing for hospitality and tourism* (6th. ed). Boston, MA: Harlow: Pearson.
- Lange-Faria, W., & Elliot, S. (2012). Understanding the role of social media in destination marketing. *Tourismos: An international multidisciplinary journal of tourism*, 7(1), 193-211. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.475.4914&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Leung, D., Law, R., Van Hoof, H., & Buhalis, D. (2013). Social media in tourism and hospitality: A literature review. *Journal of travel & tourism marketing*, 30(1-2), 3-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.750919>
- Llodrà-Riera, I., Martínez-Ruiz, M. P., Jiménez-Zarco, A. I., & Izquierdo-Yusta, A. (2015). A multidimensional analysis of the information sources construct and its relevance for destination image formation. *Tourism management*, 48, 319-328. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.11.012>

- Moisescu, O. I. (2013). An empirical investigation regarding the relationship between demographics and travel preferences. *Marketing from Information to Decision*, (6), 158-168. <http://ep.bib.mdh.se/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ep.bib.mdh.se/docview/1477969277?accountid=12245>
- Pallant, J. (2013). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS* (5th ed.). Maidenhead: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill.
- Pesonen, J., & Pasanen, K. (2017). A Closer Look at Tourist Information Search Behaviour When Travelling Abroad: What Is the Role of Online Marketing in Choice of Destination?. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2017*, 431-443. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51168-9_31
- Ponte, E., Carvajal-Trujillo, E., & Escobar-Rodríguez, T. (2015). Influence of trust and perceived value on the intention to purchase travel online: Integrating the effects of assurance on trust antecedents. *Tourism Management*, 47, 286-302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.10.009>
- Putit, N., Chan, M. K. Y., & Hanan, H. (2014). Creating risk management awareness in Park Guiding—a case study of Bako National Park, Sarawak, Malaysia. *Hospitality and Tourism*, 6(1),45-53. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320299092_RISK_MANAGEMENT_AWARENESS_AT_BAKO_NATIONAL_PARK
- Ribeiro, H., Fonseca Amaro, S., Seabra, C., & Luís Abrantes, J. (2014). Travel content creation: The influence of travelers' innovativeness, involvement and use of social media. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 5(3), 245–260. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-06-2014-0020>
- Robinson, P., Heitmann, S., & Dieke, P. U. C. (2011). *Research themes for tourism*. Retrieved from <https://books.google.se/books?id=219aFMSRPqgC&lpg=PP1&dq=Research%20The%20mes%20for%20Tourism%202011&hl=fi&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q=Research%20The%20mes%20for%20Tourism%202011&f=false>
- Rumsey, D., & Unger, D. (2015). *U can: step-by-step lessons and practice for Statistics*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley. Retrieved from https://mdh.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/46MH_INST/1t7kt3m/alma991001069727003211
- Sammis, K., Lincoln, C., Pomponi, S., Ng, J., Gassmann Rodriguez, E., & Zhou, J. (2016). *Influencer marketing for dummies*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley (2nd ed.). Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ep.bib.mdh.se/lib/malardalen-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4444885>
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill. (2009). *Research methods for business students* (5th ed.). Essex, England: Pitman Publishing.

- Serenko, A., & Stach, A. (2009). The impact of expectation disconfirmation on customer loyalty and recommendation behavior: Investigating online travel and tourism services. *Journal of Information Technology Management*, 20(3), 26-41.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284802714_The_impact_of_expectation_disconfirmation_on_customer_loyalty_and_recommendation_behavior_Investigating_online_travel_and_tourism_services/link/5d9b9cd5a6fdccfd0e810a20/download
- Silvia, J. E., Swankoski, K., Watt, S., Bullard, S., & Iqbal, A. (2014). *Economic and business forecasting: Analyzing and interpreting econometric results*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ep.bib.mdh.se>
- Sittisom, W. (2020). The Influence of Social Media on Consumers' Purchasing Choices of Tourism Related Products. *The Influence of Social Media on Consumers' Purchasing Choices of Tourism Related Products*, 11(6), 727-747.
http://eprints.ulm.ac.id/8469/1/11650_Sittisom_2020_E_R.pdf
- Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, 101742.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.011>
- Statista. (2016). *Global digital travel sales growth 2014-2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/499690/forecast-of-online-travel-sales-growth-worldwide/>
- Statista. (2020a). *Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2020, ranked by number of active users*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>
- Statista. (2020b). *Worldwide digital population as of April 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/>
- Stubb, C., Nyström, A., & Colliander, J. (2019). Influencer marketing. *Journal of Communication Management*, 23(2), 109–122. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-11-2018-0119>
- Tanford, S., & Montgomery, R. (2015). The Effects of Social Influence and Cognitive Dissonance on Travel Purchase Decisions. *Journal of Travel Research*, 54(5), 596–610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287514528287>
- Terttunen, A. (2017). *The influence of Instagram on consumers' travel planning and destination choice*. (Master's thesis, Haaga-Helia Ammattikorkeakoulu, Porvoo). Retrieved from <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-2017053011044>
- Travel & Tourism - worldwide. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www-statista-com.ep.bib.mdh.se/outlook/262/100/travel-tourism/worldwide>

- Varkaris, E., & Neuhofer, B. (2017). The influence of social media on the consumers' hotel decision journey. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 8(1), 101–118. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-09-2016-0058>
- Vollenbroek, W., de Vries, S., Constantinides, E., & Kommers, P. (2014). Identification of influence in social media communities. *Int. J. Web Based Communities*, 10 (3), 280–297. DOI: 10.1504/IJWBC.2014.062943
- Wen, I. (2012). An Empirical Study of an Online Travel Purchase Intention Model. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 29(1), 18-39. DOI: 10.1080/10548408.2012.638558
- World Health Organization. (2020). *Rolling updates on coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>
- Xu, X., & Pratt, S. (2018). Social media influencers as endorsers to promote travel destinations: an application of self-congruence theory to the Chinese Generation Y. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 35:7,958-972. DOI: 10.1080/10548408.2018.1468851

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Operationalizations of the constructs.

Construct/Variable	Type of scale and its construction	Items used	Adapted from
<i>Age</i>	7-point scale anchored by: (1) < 20 years, (2) 21-30 years, (3) 31-40 years, (4) 41-50 years, (5) 51-60 years, (6) > 61 years and (0) I don't want to say	Q1: How old are you?	(Xu & Pratt, 2018)
<i>Gender</i>	4-point scale anchored by: (1) Female, (2) Male, (3) Other and (0) I don't want to say	Q2: What is your gender?	(Xu & Pratt, 2018)
<i>Education</i>	6-point scale anchored by: (1) Primary school, (2) High school or equivalent, (3) Bachelor's degree, (4) Master's degree, (5) PhD and (0) Don't want to say	Q13: What is your highest level of (completed) education?	Question developed from (Wen, 2012)
<i>Online travel purchases</i>	6-point scale anchored by: (1) I have never purchased travel online, (2) 1-3, (3) 4-6, (4) 7-10, (5) More than 10 and (0) Don't know	Q8: How many times did you purchase a trip to a foreign destination (flights, train, hotel etc.) on the Internet in the last 12 months?	Question developed from (Xu & Pratt, 2018)
<i>Instagram influencers' travel recommendations</i>	8-point Likert-type scale anchored by: (1) Totally disagree to (7) Completely agree and (0) Don't know	Q9.1: I am influenced by recommendations of travel preferences that influencers have posted on their Instagram.	Question developed from (Terttunen, 2017)
		Q9.2: Next time I go on a trip, I will visit a destination that has been advertised on	Question developed from (Xu & Pratt, 2018)

		Instagram by an influencer.	Questions developed from (Terttunen, 2017)
		Q9.9: I trust more travel information and photos shared by Instagram influencers than service providers (e.g. hotels own webpage).	
<i>Consumers' travel preferences</i>		Q9.3: Instagram influencers help me to evaluate travel destination alternatives.	
		Q9.4: Instagram influencers have an effect on my decisions made on the trip (e.g. if I want to see a sight or do an activity).	
		Q9.5: Instagram influencers make me feel excited about the travel destination.	

Appendix B. The nationalities of the respondents.

Country	N of respondents	Per cent
<i>Germany</i>	125	26.3%
<i>Finland</i>	114	23.9%
<i>Sweden</i>	111	23.3%
<i>UK, France, Greece, Austria, USA, Spain, Netherlands, India & Denmark</i>	5–8 per country (Total: 66)	13.9%
<i>South Africa, China, Hungary, Mexico, Latvia, Switzerland, Australia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vietnam, Ukraine, Georgia, Pakistan, Romania, Belgium, Iceland, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Albania, Bulgaria, Burundi, Canada, Czech Republic, Egypt & Thailand</i>	1–4 per country (Total: 54)	11.3%
<i>Unknown nationality</i>	6	1.3%
Total	476	100%

Appendix C. Crosstabulation calculations.

		Travel purchases					Total
		<i>I did not purchase any traveling tickets on the Internet</i>	<i>1–3 times</i>	<i>4–6 times</i>	<i>7–10 times</i>	<i>More than 10 times</i>	
Age	<i>< 20 years</i>	4 (8.3%)	13 (6.9%)	8 (7.7%)	1 (1.8%)	3 (4.6%)	29 (6.3%)
	<i>21–30 years</i>	28 (58.3%)	126 (67.0%)	73 (70.2%)	44 (80.0%)	43 (66.2%)	314 (68.3%)
	<i>31–40 years</i>	9 (18.8%)	27 (14.4%)	11 (10.6%)	2 (3.6%)	8 (12.3%)	57 (12.4%)
	<i>41–50 years</i>	2 (4.2%)	6 (3.2%)	1 (1.0%)	7 (12.7%)	2 (3.1%)	18 (3.9%)
	<i>51–60 years</i>	0 (0.0%)	11 (5.9%)	7 (6.7%)	1 (1.8%)	8 (12.3%)	27 (5.90%)
	<i>> 61 years</i>	5 (10.4%)	5 (2.7%)	4 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (3.0%)
	<i>I don't want to say</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.5%)	1 (0.2%)
Total		48 (100%)	188 (100%)	104 (100%)	55 (100%)	65 (100%)	460 (100%)
Gender	<i>Female</i>	31 (66.0%)	133 (70.7%)	71 (68.9%)	40 (72.7%)	44 (67.7%)	319 (69.7%)
	<i>Male</i>	15 (31.9%)	54 (28.7%)	31 (30.1%)	15 (27.3%)	19 (29.2%)	134 (29.3%)
	<i>Other</i>	1 (2.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.5%)	2 (0.4%)
	<i>I don't want to say</i>	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.5%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.5%)	3 (0.7%)
Total		47 (100%)	188 (100%)	103 (100%)	55 (100%)	65 (100%)	458 (100%)
Education	<i>Primary school</i>	1 (2.2%)	2 (1.1%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (0.9%)
	<i>High school or equivalent</i>	21 (46.7%)	54 (29.7%)	26 (25.5%)	11 (20.0%)	15 (23.1%)	127 (28.3%)
	<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	16 (35.6%)	84 (46.2%)	46 (45.1%)	24 (43.6%)	31 (47.7%)	201 (44.8%)
	<i>Master's degree</i>	5 (11.1%)	36 (19.8%)	26 (25.5%)	20 (36.4%)	18 (27.7%)	105 (23.4%)
	<i>PhD</i>	2 (4.4%)	6 (3.3%)	3 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.5%)	12 (2.7%)
Total		45 (100%)	182 (100%)	102 (100%)	55 (100%)	65 (100%)	449 (100%)

Appendix D. Collinearity statistics for all constructs.

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Travel Recommendations</i>			1.037	3.129
<i>Travel Preferences</i>		1.096		3.320
<i>Age</i>	1.029	1.130	1.052	1.149
<i>Gender</i>	1.006	1.015	1.011	1.013
<i>Education</i>	1.024	1.036	1.026	1.033
Average VIF	1.020	1.069	1.032	1.929

Appendix E. Collinearity statistics for education.

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)			
	High school or equivalent	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree
<i>Travel Recommendations</i>	3.341	3.166	2.581
<i>Travel Preferences</i>	3.556	3.290	2.752
<i>Age</i>	1.350	1.068	1.142
<i>Gender</i>	1.091	1.031	1.022
Average VIF	12.335	2.139	1.874

Appendix F. Collinearity statistics for gender.

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)		
	Female	Male
<i>Travel Recommendations</i>	2.605	4.321
<i>Travel Preferences</i>	2.791	4.514
<i>Age</i>	1.131	1.179
<i>Education</i>	1.020	1.063
Average VIF	1.887	2.769