

Has Instagram Created Wanderlust:
How Experiential Sharing Is Influencing Happiness

by

Crawford D. Warrick

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the

Professional Communication MA

Program

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

May, 2019.

Has Instagram Created Wanderlust:
How Experiential Sharing Is Influencing Happiness

Crawford D. Warrick

I hereby release this **thesis** to the public. I understand that this **thesis** will be made available from the OhioLINK ETD Center and the Maag Library Circulation Desk for public access. I also authorize the University or other individuals to make copies of this thesis as needed for scholarly research.

Signature:

Crawford D. Warrick, Student

Date

Approvals:

Dr. Adam Earnhardt, Thesis Advisor

Date

Dr. Julia M. Gergits, Committee Member

Date

Dr. Jay L. Gordon, Committee Member

Date

Dr. Salvatore A. Sanders, Dean of Graduate Studies

Date

ABSTRACT

Instagram, a prominent social media site, has created a digital hub for the consumption of visual content. Instagram currently has over 1 billion monthly users with 95 million images and videos uploaded to its site daily. More than half of Instagram users are millennials. Previous research has found that the element most common in social comparison is assimilation. Individuals who have low self-esteem and view content online will want to achieve the same experience that they see posted in the hope of bettering their self-perception. The goal of this study is to determine whether this social comparison is based on inspiration, and if this comparison is healthy for life satisfaction. This study looks at how assimilation through Instagram will increase the individuals' travel inspiration while positively affecting a persons' subjective-vitality. This study examined the variables assimilation, inspiration, subjective vitality, satisfaction with life, and experiential buying tendency. All of these variables were measured with previously used scales. The scales used were modified to fit this study. Research shows that participants who positively assimilate with travel content through Instagram are inspired to travel themselves, and encouraged to travel more in general. The travel content that they engage with inspires them to experience the same location that they see posted online. The study also found that users who are inspired to travel because of Instagram-assimilation report high self-esteem. Though travel inspiration through assimilation alleviated low self-esteem, this research did not strongly confirm that travel assimilation through Instagram will increase life satisfaction.

Keywords: *Instagram, assimilation, self-esteem, inspiration, experiential buying, satisfaction with life.*

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| INSTAGRAM..... | 5 |
| USER-GENERATED CONTENT | 6 |
| INFLUENCERS..... | 8 |
| ASSIMILATION..... | 8 |
| EXPERIENTIAL PURCHASING..... | 10 |
| MILLENNIALS..... | 10 |
| DERIVATION OF HYPOTHESES | 12 |
| METHODS | 13 |
| SAMPLE | 13 |
| PROCEDURE..... | 14 |
| INSTRUMENTATION..... | 14 |
| RESULTS | 17 |
| H1: ENGAGEMENT ENCOURAGES TRAVEL..... | 17 |
| H2: TRAVEL INSPIRATION INCREASE HAPPINESS..... | 18 |
| DISCUSSION | 19 |
| LIMITATIONS..... | 21 |
| FUTURE RESEARCH..... | 22 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 23 |
| REFERENCES..... | 25 |
| APPENDIX 1..... | 27 |
| ALL SCALES WERE MEASURED USING A 4-POINT LIKERT SCALE..... | 27 |

Instagram

Instagram is a mobile application that allows users to showcase their life and experiences with friends by posting pictures on their profile (Beal, 2018). Rivalled only by Facebook, Instagram is the second most popular social networking site in the world with a monthly engagement rate of one billion users (Clarke, 2019). An estimated 95 million photos and videos are uploaded to Instagram every day (2019), while 88% of users exist outside of the United States. With so much content from all over the world uploaded daily, Instagram is one of the best avenues to view and engage with international content that would otherwise be unavailable. Instant access to a culturally diverse archive of content may intrigue the spectator to visit the destinations that they see shared through Instagram.

A study on consumer travel plans and destination interest (Terttunen, 2017) finds that the prime factor in choosing a location is the visual appeal of that destination. Users are attracted to locations that appear attainable and exotic; scenic landscapes and well-photographed places ranked highest in user preference (2017). Terttunen finds that users do not want just one source for reference but multiple references when determining their travel plans. Instagram's extensive user base and international accessibility can provide content from numerous sources, allowing users to discover pictures of new places and activities. Instagram's diversity exposes users to new locations from around the world, allowing users to establish relationships with new travel destinations. If a user finds a particular location intriguing, that destination can be investigated from multiple locations and points of view and not just the view promoted through vacation advertisement.

Terttunen found that 45% of the studies sampled used Instagram for destination inspiration, while 90% allowed the content they saw to influence their travel plans (2017)

User-Generated Content

Instagram's design focuses on ease of use and mobility. Instagram was the first social media application built to function solely on mobile devices, and with the rising popularity of life-sharing content, this is a large lure. Though images on Instagram can be edited, altered, or enhanced, the image is still a product of user-generated content (UGC). User-generated content is content generated online by the users of a platform online (Moens, Li, & Chua, 2014). Two factors had the most robust mean score in influencing a persons' perception when looking at the effects of UGC and the impact that content has on destination interest (DI): sightseeing and activities (Shuqair, Cragg, 2017). These two factors, along with the Terttunen research (users find well-photographed, scenic locations appealing) suggests an internal ambition among users to seek out and experience the locations for themselves.

User-generated content on Instagram can also better communicate the functional characteristics of a destination (Shuqair, Cragg, 2017). Seeing a locational image through UGC may create a genuinely palpable idea of a destination, versus seeing that same locational image promoted through corporately driven content. Seeing a friend's edited picture of a hike or selfie atop a scenic vista may eliminate the commercial feel of a destination, making it appear exciting, interesting, and attainable.

Instagram's Explore page can be useful in promoting an unknown or unpopular location into a high-traffic tourist destination (Fatanti, Suyadnya, 2015). The Explore page is a collaboration of content specific to a theme or event that "has a group of

categories at the top of the screen to help you find the type of content you enjoy most” (Siu, 2018). Instagram offers a travel tab under the Explore page consisting of millions of tagged images and videos all generated by Instagram users from around the world. The travel tab is possible through geo-tagging and hashtags. Geo-tagging, the process of adding geographical information to a form of media content (Rouse, 2013), makes it easier for users to gather information on a destination before visiting. If a non-commercial location is geo-tagged by numerous people or influential accounts, it will make that destination more prevalent on the Explore page. A hashtag can be used to search for something specific or categorize social media content around a particular topic (MacArthur, 2018). Hashtags can highlight a point of interest, popular restaurants, and favored activities that are specific to a location. Travel hashtags can link similar experiences at a location with others, as well as introduce new places to users who follow that specific hashtag thread. Hashtags are searchable and abundant, so if a user is intrigued by a location’s hashtag, that user can further their travel investigation by following those tags to engage with more content.

The hashtag #Yosemite has been used over two million times on Instagram according to two economists for the National Parks Service, Catherine Cullinane Thomas and Lynne Koontz. Yosemite National Park has seen a similar growth in financial earnings (Thomas, Koontz, 2017). In the year 2009, the Yosemite National Park had a recorded 3,866,970 visitors (Janiskee, 2010). Fast forward seven years, and that number jumps by almost two million (2017). The state park’s hashtag can reach a vast number of users and allow them to explore the location by clicking on the hashtag to see who else has used it, as well as various locations within (and around) the tagged location. This practical use

could help new park-goers navigate through the park and engage with the content, while actively taking part in the content being distributed when they tag their own photos with the #Yosemite hashtag. This finding, along with Fatanti & Suyadnya, may indicate a trend in image recognition: the more popular a location becomes, the more it will appear on a user's Instagram feed, thus increasing its interest towards the viewer.

Influencers

Though a recent phenomenon, Instagram influencers have become a prominent force in brand exposure and saturation. Social media influencers signify a new, independent endorser who can shape an audience's attitude through social networking sites (Freberg, McGaughey, Graham, Freberg, 2010). These influencers range in audience appeal: micro influencers require a following between 2,000 – 100,000 (Barker, 2017) and a macro influencer with a following of 100,000 and more. These individuals make money by showcasing restaurants, products, resorts, and artistry while creating brand awareness. This type of exposure is vital for locational awareness and public interest. According to *National Geographic*, Wanaka's Lake Ringedalsvatnet—a prominent point of interest in Odda, Norway—has seen a spike in attractional growth. In 2010, the Trolltunga overlook saw only 800 visitors, in 2016 Trolltunga had approximately 80,000 (Miller, 2017). Wanaka attributed this tourism rise to exposure through social media. In 2015, the town of Wanaka hosted Instagram influencers for a few months to digitally promote the city and scenic attractions. The result was the most significant tourism growth in the country at a 14% increase (Miller, 2017).

Assimilation

The assimilation effect occurs when an upward social comparison leads to self-motivation inspired by the belief that the focal observer can gain the same success as the

comparison party (Liu, Wu, & Li, 2018). This study looks at the motivation for aspirational tourism in millennials and how these motives correspond with experience sharing on social networking sites. The variable shown to have the strongest motivation was the assimilation effect; this was among individuals who felt that they were socially comparable to the friends that they follow. Liu, *et al.*, state that because this social comparison exists, it can create an emotional experience of benign envy amongst people with low trait self-esteem. Benign envy increased destination visit intent among individuals who viewed similar friends experiencing vacations. Benign envy is a psychological result of an upward self-comparison made towards someone known or popular (Meier & Schäfer, 2018). Meier & Schäfer (2018) also found correlating evidence between social-comparison and inspiration on Instagram. Similar to Liu *et al.*, this upward comparison is due to benign envy.

Increased inspiration on Instagram was related to a rise of positive-affect. This increase in inspiration can drive followers to seek out new and interesting activities by following accounts specific to their interest. Meier and Schäfer feel that this occurrence of SNS self-comparison is more prevalent on Instagram because its functionality is simple and its interface is based solely on visual content. This research suggests that users will seek out accounts that incorporate UGC based around particular interest.

Experiential purchasing

Instagram has allowed users to turn the image of an experience into a digital component of currency to increase their portrayed self-worth. Experiential purchases are those that obtain an experience rather than a material object (Schmidkonz, 2018). Experiential purchasing means rather than spending money on something like a car, phone, or piece of art, individuals will spend their money on travel tickets, hotels, scenic tours, and new experiences (Dunn, Wilson, Gilbert, 2015). The study in question asks, ‘what about experiential purchasing is better than materialistic’, and the answer was the sensation of anticipation. Findings state that the anticipatory factor that plays a part in waiting for an experience outweighs the anticipation when purchasing a physical thing. Individuals anticipating a trip or vacation will experience more excitement and happiness than they will in waiting for something material. “Experiential purchases (money spent on doing) tend to provide more enduring happiness than material purchases (money spent on having)” (Kumar, Killingsworth, Gilovich, 2014, pg.1). The idea of buying a physical item is viewed as edgier and more related to status (2014), which can increase a person’s level of impatience.

Millennials

Invoking inspiration to travel abroad and explore new locations is easier than ever with engaging applications like Instagram. Because the millennial generation—born between 1980&1995 (Buckley, 2015)—is so heavily engrossed in social networking sites (SNS), they are more prone than other generational groups to social comparison, thus more likely to feel envy when exposed to a friends’ social media post (Liu, Wu, Li, 2018). Millennials account for 62% of Instagram users. (Page, Worth, 2018.) A survey

conducted by Resonance (2017) finds that 10% of U.S. millennials plan to travel increasingly in the future. This survey found millennials to be the most likely generation to budget their income around travel, as well as attributing more importance to experiences than they do toward materialistic drives (2017). 84% of millennials are influenced to make a purchase based on user-generated content (Pemberton, 2016).

The Boston Consulting Group researched the competitive dynamics in generational travel. According to Barton, Haywood, Jhunjhunwala, & Bhatia (2013), millennials are more likely to value diversity, embrace a global perspective, and are more inclined to experience new things. The Boston Consulting Group attributes this to the millennial generation's social nature. This research encourages travel companies to market group rates and activities because millennials are more likely than non-millennials to travel with friends or organized groups. Millennials are also projected to consist of half of all business flight purchases by 2020 (Barton *et al.*).

MDG Advertising conducted a case study to monitor travel interest and found that the millennial generation was more likely to travel in the next 12 months than other age groups. Millennials were 23% more likely to go overseas to visit a destination of interest while also being more likely to take longer vacations (extending over two weeks) that incorporate activities and camping rather than staying in a hotel. These findings relate well with the results of the 2018 North American Camping report that there has been an increase in camping households in the United States, six million since 2014 (KOA, 2018). The results also found that millennials account for 40% of the new camping traffic. Instagram may attribute to this rise based on a larger user base, aesthetic design, importance of scenic photos, and social exposure.

A survey looking at the booking behaviors of millennials found that 61% of millennials were influenced to travel somewhere based on its potential for Instagram-friendly photos (Haines, 2018). The two prime factors of this were the ability to share beautiful or important holiday experiences with friends and being influenced by scenic posts favored by social media influences. 34% of respondents booked a holiday get-away based on the content they saw on social media while 29% of respondents said they would forgo the destination if they were unable to post videos or pictures about it (2018).

Derivation of Hypotheses

Previous research has looked at the influx in airtime travel and the generational demographics that travel the most. Where the research lacks detail is explaining why millennials and younger generations are traveling for personal gain or appearance. Considering the research conducted by Liu, Wu, Li (2018), younger generations are more prone to self-comparison with their peers, so seeing a friends travel experience in real-time through interesting pictures and videos may cause the viewer to want to assimilate. This assimilation could stem from inspiration or subjective self-vitality, and because of these cognitive effects, it may be worth asking if the rise in travel is due in part to the success of Instagram's User-generated platform. The travel survey conducted by Resonance (2017) found that the millennial generation was more likely to budget their income around travel expenses. This, too, could possibly be attributed to assimilation.

Concerning Liu, *et al.*'s research on assimilation, Meier & Schäfer (2018) looked at the positive affect-states that arise from this form of assimilation. The positive affect most prevalent was benign envy. Their research found correlating evidence between self-

comparison and inspiration, yet it did not look at perceived sense of satisfaction or increase in self-esteem.

Being a traveling millennial myself, and a happy one at that, it is important for me to understand if this trend in travel is promoting better wellbeing. Are my traveling habits due to the inspiration I garnish from Instagram and the experiences I am encouraged to have by viewing travel content on Instagram.

H1: User engagement with travel content through Instagram will positively correlate with the Millennial travel intent.

H2: Users who are inspired to travel more because of Instagram will positively correlate with their perception of life happiness and positive affect.

Methods

Sample.

Participant characteristics. This study was conducted using two sampling techniques: Purposive sampling and convenient sampling. Purposive sampling is an act of restricting participation to participants who account for the population which is being examined (Bernard, 2002). Participants who are between the ages of 18-34 and have access to the internet were accepted. Convenience sampling focuses on a target population that meets a criterion: accessibility, availability, geographical location, or just the ability to participate (Dörnyei, 2007). This survey was distributed among fellow faculty members and social networking sites. The first demographic question required the participants to be of a certain age, thus excluding six responses of the initial 288 responses. Not all participants actively took part in the survey which resulted in an exclusion of 24 other participants,

giving me a total of (N=258) responses. There was a total of 95 (32.9%) male participants and 192 (66.8%) female and one participant (.35%) who listed Other. Of these participants, 92.7% reported using Instagram, and 7.6% did not report using Instagram.

Procedure

An online survey created through Survey Monkey was used to scale five variables for this study: assimilation, subjective vitality, inspiration, satisfaction with life (SWL), and experiential buying tendency. This survey was distributed through faculty members and social networking sites. Faculty members emailed the survey link to their students to offer extra credit for completion, and social networking users took the survey by choice. The beginning of the survey required participants to read and agree to the terms listed in the consent form before starting the survey. A 4-point Likert scale was used to measure assimilation effect, subjective vitality, inspiration, satisfaction with life (SWL), and experiential buying. The decision to use a 4-point Likert scale instead of a traditional 5-point model was made because the content of the questions asked may lead participants to choose the 'neutral' decision, rather than selecting an option more closely related to their genuine feeling. Eliminating the option for a neutral response allowed participants to select an option that mirrored positive or negative feelings.

Instrumentation

Multiple choice questions were used to describe the participants characteristics. A 4-point Likert scale was used to measure assimilation effect, subjective vitality, inspiration, satisfaction with life (SWL), and experiential buying. Response options for this Likert scale ranged from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The scales used for this study can be found in **Appendix 1**. The scales used in this study derive from past scales

used in other research. None of these scales were altered in a way that changed the variable they were designed to predict. Instead, these scales were changed to reflect the variables in relation to Instagram.

Assimilation. Assimilation was measured using a 4-point Likert scale. The scale used to measure assimilation was initially used by Lange, J., & Crusius, J. (2015) and modified for this study. Five questions used looked for benign envy on Instagram ($\alpha = .7$, $M=2.8$, $SD=.48$; eg., “I aspire to visit the scenic locations that I see other people experiencing through Instagram”).

Inspiration. Inspiration was measured using a 4-point Likert scale. The scale used to determine inspiration was modified from Thrash, T. M., & Elliot, A. J. (2003). The modified version of this scale focused on how often participants felt inspiration to travel when engaging with beautiful photos and travel accounts on Instagram. These questions were modified to relate specifically to Instagram ($\alpha=.84$, $M=3.0$, $SD=.56$; eg., “Pictures of a vacation or trip posted by my friends through Instagram inspires me to travel more. How often does this happen?”).

Vitality and satisfaction with life. Vitality and satisfaction with life were measured using two different 4-point Likert scales. The first scale is Ryan and Frederick (1997) Subjective Vitality scale that measures psychological well-being and self-esteem. The questions of this scale were not modified; however, the initial prompt of the scale was changed ($\alpha=.88$, $M=2.9$, $SD=.48$; eg., “When participating in, posting, or viewing scenic images of travel destinations on Instagram, I...”).

Satisfaction with life was measured using Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985) Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). None of the original questions

were altered. The value system attributed to the questions was changed. The original scale operated on a 7-point Likert scale which required the researchers to compute the total score of each participant. For this survey, the 7-point model was removed and replaced with a 4-point scale and weighted on the average response of the participant, rather than their accumulated total. This change was done to agree with the structure of this survey ($\alpha=.84$, $M=2.8$, $SD=.60$; eg., “So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.”)

Value of experiential purchasing. The value of experiential purchase was measured using a 4-point Likert scale and was modified from previous research conducted by Howell, R., Pchelin, P., & Iyer, R. (2011). Of the original four items on the scale, only three were used for this study. These elements focused on whether or no people preferred to buy an experience rather than a physical item when seeking happiness or having excess in disposable income ($\alpha=.72$, $M=2.9$, $SD=.60$; eg., “In general, when I have extra money I am likely to buy a life experience.”).

Results

H1: Engagement encourages Travel.

A bivariate correlation was run to determine the linear relationship between the variables (assimilation, inspiration, and value of experiential purchasing).

Assimilation had a strong positive relation with inspiration ($r=.62, p=.00$). This positive correlation shows that users who engage with Instagram's travel posts (content posted by friends and followed accounts) are galvanized to assimilate to the viewed experience. This correlation suggests that users are inspired to travel more in general because of the travel photos they see posted on Instagram.

This correlation was supported through a linear regression finding the predictive relationship between the independent variable, assimilation, and the dependent variable, inspiration. Assimilation explained 39% variance toward travel inspiration ($R^2 = .39, F=160.2, p=.00$). This regression shows that travel assimilate predicts the likelihood of increased travel ($\beta=.621, p=.00$). When users make upward comparisons towards travel content, their level of benign envy will increase, thus inspiring users to assimilate to what they see as valuable.

Experiential buying was positively correlated with inspiration ($r=.42, p=.00$) and assimilation ($r=.39, p=.00$). This significant correlation suggests that users who are inspired to travel may develop a preference for experiential purchasing because they desire to assimilate to experiential value that they find through Instagram.

A regression was then run to determine the predictive relationship between the independent variable (assimilation and inspiration), and the dependent variable, experiential buying tendency. Inspiration explained 18% variance towards experiential buying tendency ($R^2=.18, F=54.5, p=.00$) while assimilation explained 15% variance

toward experiential buying tendency ($R^2=.15$, $F=47$, $p=.00$). This regression can moderately support the notion that increased travel inspiration ($\beta=.42$, $p=.00$), influenced by user assimilation ($\beta=.39$, $p=.00$) leads to a higher preference for experiential purchasing. When Instagram users assimilate to the travel community on Instagram and are inspired to visit and engage with the travel destinations they see, they will find value in experiential purchases.

The findings in both the bivariate correlation and linear regressions support H1 that states users who engage with travel content through Instagram are encouraged to travel themselves. Being that 64% of Instagram users are between 18-34 years old (Worthy, 2018) suggests that millennials and younger generations are more likely than older generations to expose themselves to travel content on Instagram. This exposure and assimilation to Instagram travel photos inspires users to travel.

H2: Travel Inspiration increase Happiness.

A bivariate correlation was run to determine the linear relationship between the variables (assimilation, inspiration, subjectivity vitality, and satisfaction with life). Inspiration had a positive correlation with assimilation ($r=.62$, $p=.00$), subjective vitality ($r=.62$, $p=.00$), and satisfaction with life ($r=.26$, $p=.00$).

A regression determined the predictive relationship between the independent variable (assimilation and inspiration) and the dependent variables (subjective vitality and satisfaction with life). Inspiration explained 38% variance toward subjective vitality ($R^2=.38$, $F=159$, $p=.00$) and .07% variance toward satisfaction with life ($R^2=.07$, $p=.00$). Assimilation explained 22% variance toward subjective vitality ($R^2=.22$, $F=71$, $p=.00$) and .04% variance toward satisfaction with life ($R^2=.041$, $F=11$, $p=.00$) H2 is moderately supported. Though inspiration ($\beta=.62$, $p=.00$) and assimilation ($\beta=.47$, $p=.00$) were

significant predictors of subjective vitality, they were not strongly significant with satisfaction with life; inspiration ($\beta = .26, p = .00$), assimilation ($\beta = .20, p = .00$). Results relevant to satisfaction with life were too weak to suggest that an individual's happiness will increase through travel inspiration or assimilation on Instagram. It is significant, however, that users who are inspired to travel because of the content they assimilate to on Instagram report high vitality, indicating self-actualization and high self-esteem. When engaging with Instagram's travel content, users feel a sense of wanderlust, encouraging users to actively taking part in the content being distributed, thus solidifying their self-subjective vitality. Millennials reported attributing more value to experiences instead of material objects (Resonance, 2017) and report being the most likely generation to budget their income around travel experiences.

Discussion

Social networking has taken many forms in the past twenty years, and more recent applications such as Instagram have been able to hone their approach to content that users actively want to engage with. Having over 1 billion active users (Clarke, 2019) and an upload rate of 95 million pictures and videos each day (2019), Instagram is one of the prime locations to find aesthetic content. It is not surprising that more than 60% of users are millennials when considering the research by Liu, *et al.* (2018) which found social compassion to be most prevalent amongst younger social networking users. Applications like Instagram allow users to cast an image of themselves that they feel accurately represents them or appeals to a theme that they aspire to be part of.

Having support for both hypotheses may indicate that younger generations prefer to purchase experiences and may find more self-value in these endeavors. H1 found assimilate to travel content on Instagram through positive upward comparison led to an

increase in wanderlust. Users who take part in Instagram's travel community by engaging with images (liking, commenting) and following accounts related to traveling are inspired to seek that experience themselves. For all of this to happen, however, the user must first route their trip. The routing process, along with the experience itself supports the correlation between experiential buying, assimilation, and inspiration. Previous research states that millennials value experiences more than objects, and this study found Instagram to be a component to this statistic. Millennial users are inspired to travel because of the content they assimilate to while engaging with Instagram. The process of assimilation leads the user wanting the same experiences they find validating within their realm of value (Instagram's travel community). This upward comparison creates positive self-value for traveling and exploring which may indicate that experiences are more valuable than objects. The money spent on an experience can prove to be more worthwhile to millennials than material items. This could suggest that users who assimilate to the travel content on Instagram use their own experiences as self-validating currency, thus, assimilating them further into the traveling community and affirming their membership.

H2 did well in understanding the relationship between assimilation, inspiration, subjective vitality, and satisfaction with life. Though all of these variables showed high to moderate correlations, it was not a strong predictor that users who assimilate and inspire to travel content on Instagram have higher life satisfaction. This weak prediction may be due to outside elements affecting an individual's life, not just the variables seeking to predict life satisfaction. It was strongly supported that users had higher self-esteem and self-actualization while participating in travel content on Instagram. Users who seek to

engage with Instagram's travel community actively do so because it increases their state of positive affect, which makes obtaining an experience more fulfilling to their sense of self. This finding also suggests that users who assimilate to travel content do so because of benign envy, which Liu *et al.*, related to low-trait self-esteem. However, this study finds that users who do assimilate because of low-trait self-esteem reported high self-esteem when engaging with travel content on Instagram or having been inspired to travel for themselves. Though satisfaction with life was not strongly significant, it is still important to note that users who traveled more, engage with travel content, and share their own travel experiences felt more satisfied with themselves, thus eliminating the low-self-esteem that first inspired the assimilation. Users are gaining higher self-esteem while engaging with travel content and traveling themselves, and because of this internal sensation they are encouraged to continue traveling to maintain that wellbeing.

Limitations

Though this study received ample responses, the content involved would be more strongly supported if the sample size were increased. The results of this study may vary in strength if more participants from regions outside of where this study was conducted were involved. This research would also benefit if the study was conducted through a longitudinal model. When considering overall life satisfaction, it is insufficient to only prompt participants with the option to account for their life satisfaction once. There are a variety of elements that may be outside of the participants control that will determine their happiness. Only asking the participant once if they are happy may not indicate their overall life satisfaction. Involving a follow-up portion of this study which inquiries about the participants life satisfaction a second time may yield a more significant account for

whether that individual is satisfied with their life overall, and if Instagram has helped or hindered that happiness.

Future research

Future research should consider focusing more heavily on understanding the participants overall life satisfaction by incorporating outside elements of their life, not just Instagram. This would require an approach that does not just look at the internal components of their life, but the environmental elements as well. To accurately determine whether this travel trend is positively affecting the user's life would benefit research in communication, marketing, and psychology focused fields. Future research should also include a control group of participants that do not use Instagram. By incorporating a control group, the results related to Instagram may be more firmly conformed or rejected. The only way to determine if Instagram helps individuals' life satisfaction would require research to compare the results of Instagram users with the results of nonusers.

Looking for the specific engagement methods that influence the user's self-esteem can help understand whether users actualize the content through sharing it or if they garnish that feeling from the travel experience alone. Instagram could prove to be a useful tool in helping individuals find more positive vitality within themselves and shine light on what sort of experiences draw what specific affect states.

Conducting this study through a longitudinal model would allow researchers to gain insight on life satisfaction that could vary based on the participants mood, income, and personal disposition while taking the survey. Future research could also develop a control group of users that are designated to only subscribe to travel accounts for a certain period of time and then have their life satisfaction compared to a random sample. There could

also be a follow-up investigation into the user's profiles that ranked high life satisfaction and vitality. Researches could look through the content that users are sharing, liking, and following. By cultivating what content is being engaged with on Instagram may indicate why users report high levels of life satisfaction. What images and videos do they like the most? Do these users

Conclusion

Since the adoption of Instagram, social networking has become a force not comparable to anything seen before. Previous research has examined some of the trends in Instagram usage but has neglected to look at the potential the platform has for encouraging happiness. This quantitative analysis was able to take a unique approach at understanding why millennials are influenced to traveling more, while also being able to take a deeper look into the affect-states caused by these experiential endeavors.

It was hypothesized that positive assimilation toward travel photos posted on Instagram would lead encourage the millennial generation to travel. This was found to be true because of the inspiration scale and the results showing the upward comparison being made. It was also found that participants found more satisfaction through experiential purchasing rather than materialistic. Millennials find more value in an expense that will give them a photo-worthy experience because they are inspired by the content that they see posted online. Though there was no control group to counter the Instagram users, the results of this study did find that millennials who find value in Instagram users, the results of this study did find that millennials who find value in Instagram-influenced travel report higher self-esteem.

It was also hypothesized that users who participate in travel experiences would find more satisfaction with themselves and their lives as a whole. Subjective vitality was present among those who found inspiration on Instagram due to assimilation. The initial

assimilation being the result of low self-esteem could potentially be the stepping stone needed for some individuals to find satisfaction within themselves. Though the results of the regression were too low to state that users who travel have a better perception of their life, the results of this study did suggest that this could be the case if examined further. The regression did show a positive relation among the variables which is a good start to understanding what elements can influence a person's life satisfaction.

Instagram is one of many social media applications that is growing in user base while better framing their design to fit the needs of the user. Understanding the positive impact of these social networking sites is just as important as understanding their drawbacks. Applications like Instagram could be used to understand what makes an individual feel valued and what that value is attributed to. like the quote from *The Travels of Ibn Battutah* "Traveling—it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller," Instagram is exposing users to the wild and wonderful world around them and is encouraging them to explore what they see for themselves, and share that story with their friends and family.

References

- Barker, S. (2017) Using Micro-Influencers to Successfully Promote Your Brand. *Forbes*.
- Buckley, P. (2015) A new understanding of Millennials: Generational differences reexamined. *Deloitte insights*.
- Clark, T. (2019) 22+ Instagram Stats That Marketers Can't Ignore This Year. *Hootsuite*.
- Fatanti, M., Suyadnya, W. (2015) Beyond User Gaze: How Instagram Creates Tourism Destination Brand? *ScienceDirect*.
- Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., Freberg, L. (2010) Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *ScienceDirect*.
- Retrieved from:
- Haines, G. (2018) A third of millennials say posting pictures on social media is as important as the holiday itself. *The Telegraph*.
- Janiskee, B. (2010) By the Numbers: Yosemite National Park Visitor Use. *National Parks Traveler*.
- Liu, H. Wu, L. Li, X. (2018) Social Media Envy: How Experience Sharing on Social Networking Sites Drives Millennials' Aspirational Tourism Consumption. *Journal of Travel Research*.
- Miller, C. (2017). How Instagram Is Changing Travel. *National Geographic*.
- Moens, M., Li, J., Chua, T. (2014) Mining User Generated Content. *Chapman & Hall/CRC. Social Media and Social computing Series*.
- Rouse, M. (2013) Geotagging. *Techtarget*.
- Schmidkonz, C. (2018) Material vs. Experiential Purchases: Individual Difference Moderators

of the Experiential Advantage and Their Influence on Consumer Happiness.

Munich Business School.

Shuqair, S., Cragg, P. (2017) The immediate impact of Instagram Posts on Changing the Viewers perception towards Travel Destinations. *Asia Pacific Institute of Advanced Research.*

Siu, D. (2018) Instagram is using AI in its redesign to tailor content for you under the explore section. *Mashable.*

Terttunen, A. (2017). The influence of Instagram on consumers' travel planning and destination choice. *Haaga-Helia.*

Thomas, C., Koontz, L. (2017) 2017 National Park visitor spending effects: Economic contributions to local communities, states, and the Nation. *USGS.*

Appendix 1

All scales were measured using a 4-point Likert scale.

Assimilation

When I envy others Instagram experiences, I focus on how I can become equally successful in the future.

If I notice that, if other people are traveling more, I try to travel more.

Seeing others travel experiences motivates me to seek-out future trips.

I aspire to visit the scenic locations that I see other people experiencing through Instagram.

If someone has superior qualities, achievements, or possessions, I try to attain them for myself.

Subjective Vitality

When participating in, posting, or viewing scenic images of travel destinations on Instagram, I...

“I feel alive and vital”

“I don't feel very energetic” (reversed)

“Sometimes I feel so excited I just want to burst”

“I have energy and spirit”

“I look forward to the potential experience”

“I nearly always feel alert and awake”

“I feel energized”

Inspiration

1. I feel experiential inspiration when looking at photos on Instagram
How often does this happen? Never-1 2 3 4 -very often

2. Pictures of a vacation or trip posted by my friends through Instagram inspires me to travel more
How often does this happen? Never-1 2 3 4 -very often

3. I am inspired to look-up and learn about travel destinations that I like on Instagram
How often does this happen? Never-1 2 3 4 -very often

4. When I see an experiential photo posted by a friend or a travel account, I feel inspired to just travel in general and not necessarily to that specific location
How often does this happen? Never-1 2 3 4 -very often.

Experiential Buying Tendency

For the following, please indicate which fits you better.

1. Some people generally spend their money on a lot of different life experiences (e.g., eating out, going to a concert, traveling, etc.). They go about enjoying their life by taking part in daily activities they personally encounter and live through. To what extent does this characterization describe you?
2. In general, when I have extra money, I am likely to buy a life experience instead of a material item.
3. When I want to be happy, I am more likely to spend my money on activities and events than a physical item.

Satisfaction with Life

In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

The conditions of my life are excellent.

I am satisfied with my life.

So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.

If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Download Full screen Hide email

(No subject)



Karen H Larwin
Fri 5/17/19 7:12 PM

Dear Investigators,

Your protocol entitled Instagram, User Generated Content and Experiential Encouragement has been reviewed. You are not asking for identifying information; all participants will be 18 years or older. The questionnaires will not put the participants at risk. Your protocol therefore meets the guidelines of an exempt protocol.

The research project meets the expectations of 45 CFR 46.104(b)(2) and is therefore approved. You may begin immediately. Please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to report immediately to the IRB and/or any adverse events that occur. Please reference your protocol number 127-19 in all correspondence with this protocol.

Good luck!

Karen

Karen H. Larwin, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and YSU IRB Chair
Counseling, School Psychology, & Educational Leadership
Beeghly College of Education
Youngstown State University
One University Plaza
Youngstown, Ohio 44555-0001

"If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." -Einstein

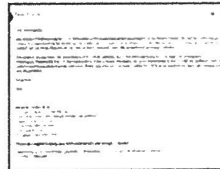
Leadership is not about titles, positions or flowcharts. It is about one life influencing another."
— John C. Maxwell

WW

Warrick Warrick

Today, 5:47 PM

Warrick Warrick



Download Save to OneDrive - Youngstown State University