

UNWRITTEN RULES OF “INSTAGRAMMABLE” TRAVEL AS A STATUS SYMBOL: VISUAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS AMONG YOUNG MIDDLE-CLASS ADULTS

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Abstract

It is a well-known fact that consumers demonstrate their status through displaying their consumption and one of the key areas of consumption used to display status is travel. While traditional markers of travel status emphasized destinations, today's status is more often conveyed through particular, often intangible, elements included in how the travel experience is shared. The display of these more intangible and immaterial aspects of travel consumption has developed vis-a-vis the proliferation of social media, which has allowed displaying the manner of travel in more detail but has also changed what status travel means. Our research aims to investigate this evolving nature of travel as a status symbol, particularly focusing on how social media have reshaped the perception of status travel for the young adult middle class consumers. Using visual analysis, we examine 508 travel-related Instagram posts from nine Czech young adult informants who belong to the emerging cosmopolitan class, focusing on the themes and visual strategies used to communicate social status. The analysis identifies four key characteristics essential for “Instagrammable” status travel: immersion in local or authentic culture, absence of crowds, unfamiliar or non-domestic landscapes and active participation in unique experiences. Our findings show that international travel dominates these status displays, with consumers favouring curated posts that emphasize exclusivity and uniqueness. This research highlights how social media have transformed travel into a form of experiential consumption, where the manner of presentation is as important as the travel itself in conveying status.

Implications for Central European audience: Young adult consumers increasingly signal status through curated, visually appealing travel experiences on social media, marking a shift from traditional status symbols to experiential consumption. These consumers prioritize authenticity, cultural immersion and exclusivity, constructing an aspirational identity aligning with global trends. Despite the preference of international travel, local destinations and marketers have a unique opportunity to attract this audience by offering experiences that emphasize these values and appeal to their visually driven social media use. Destinations that can capture these elements can better engage a digitally native, image-conscious demographic valuing travel as a form of self-expression and status.

Keywords: Social media; consumer behaviour; travel; status symbols; Instagram
JEL Classification: E21

Introduction

Research based on satellite data suggests that 80% of travellers visit just 10% of the world's tourism destinations (Leahy, 2023) and these practices often lead to overcrowding, environmental harm and commercialization of once-pristine locations as tourists seek out "Instagrammable" spots to capture photos and videos that will help them conform to the visual trends of Instagram (Dickinson, 2019). The role of social media in this trend is two-fold. Consumers are inspired by their peers' posts on social media to visit specific destinations and they visit destinations because they expect to sufficiently "show off" photos or videos from these places on social media, emphasizing the growing role of social media in shaping both travel decisions and self-presentation (American Express Travel, 2023).

As the world of travel is expected to recover from the effect of the pandemic in 2024 in full, reaching 97% of pre-pandemic levels of international tourist arrivals in the first quarter of 2024 (UN Tourism, 2024), studying the mechanisms behind growing overtourism in certain areas has become increasingly urgent. It is clear that social media have been playing a significant role in these mechanisms.

Firstly, the emergence of social media has allowed for new and broader means of self-presentation through creating and maintaining profiles online (Beneito-Montagut, 2020; DeAndrea & Walther, 2011). As consumers seek to showcase their lifestyle and social status, social media have provided a powerful medium for them to curate and present their experiences, including travel, to a wide audience. Social media have changed not only how we travel and how we choose the destinations, but also what makes travel a status symbol. In particular, there is the option to share content not only in the post-travel phase, but in the preparation phase or, most commonly, during the experience itself. This possibility of always being connected to the online world and our social circle has given room to presentation of intangible and immaterial aspects of travel with a possibly very broad audience in real time (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Travel has moved from the paradigm of "authentic discovery" to a new "democratic" paradigm of profile-building exercise (Moeller & D'Ambrosio, 2021, p. 2).

Although the link between travel and social class is well established, there is limited research on how everyday consumers, rather than influencers or professionals, shape and present their own travel content on social media in order to project status. We delve into this issue, focusing on and exploring the elements of travel that make it a status symbol for young adult middle-class consumers. Through visual analysis of travel-related Instagram posts of consumers who belong to this group, we aim to understand what intangible constituents make up a representation of travel that conveys status beyond showing a specific destination.

1 Literature Review

In the era of digital communication, consumers participate in impression management through both verbal and nonverbal communication to convey their identities, engaging in what

Goffman (1951, p. 294) describes as frontstage behaviour (performance tailored to an audience) and backstage behaviour (preparation for that performance). As social interactions have increasingly moved online, these dynamics have fundamentally changed, with social media enabling consumers to engage in an unprecedented scale of self-image production and profile-based identity construction (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011; Moeller & D'Ambrosio, 2021).

This identity construction often involves showcasing possessions or experiences, including travel. The relationship between social media and tourism has created a complex dynamic where digital visibility drives the physical presence of tourists in specific places. In this way, social media platforms have contributed to the phenomenon of overtourism, where certain destinations become overwhelmed by visitors seeking to capture and share the same iconic images (Dodds & Butler, 2019). This “Instagram effect” has transformed relatively unknown locations into tourist hotspots, leading to significant challenges for local communities and ecosystems (Gössling & Hall, 2019), which often struggle to manage the influx of visitors, all seeking to recreate the perfect social media moment (Milano et al., 2019). This pattern of social media-induced tourism reflects a broader shift in how travel destinations gain popularity, moving from traditional marketing to social media-driven visibility, where the desire for shareable content shapes tourism flows and concentrates visitors in photogenic locations (Gretzel, 2019).

This shift in the identity construction due to digital visibility has also led to a changing perception of status symbols in contemporary society. Traditional status symbols, particularly luxury goods, are experiencing a significant transformation due to the democratization of luxury (Yeoman, 2011). As luxury items become increasingly accessible to wider audiences, their exclusivity diminishes due to consumers' natural tendency to imitate higher social classes' consumption habits (Kim, 2018; Saatcioglu & Ozane, 2013). This democratization has led to a shift where consumers increasingly demonstrate their status not through physical possessions but through experiences and through sharing these experiences on social media (Siegel & Wang, 2019).

Tourism is an important form of experiential consumption that can be effectively shared on social media as a visual representation of social status (Huang et al., 2010; Scarles, 2009; Wang et al., 2016; Watson & Kopachevsky, 1994). This aligns with Urry and Larsen's (2011) concept of the tourist gaze, where travellers interpret their experiences through social and cultural lenses shaped by circulating images of personal experiences and social comparison. The circulation of these images and social comparison has been further supported by the rise of smartphones and sophisticated camera technology. Together with social media platforms such as Instagram, smartphones have democratized photography and visual content sharing (Abidin, 2016; Schöps et al., 2020). This technological evolution has changed how travel experiences are documented and shared, moving from traditional photo albums to real-time digital sharing that enables immediate status display (Lo & McKercher, 2015).

Social media platforms have fundamentally altered consumers' behaviour, reshaping how individuals perform and present themselves in digital spaces. On Instagram, the tourist gaze is characterized by choreographed, idealized photos that align with visual trends and social expectations (Siegel et al., 2022; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Consumers who take part in this

behaviour, dubbed the “Instagram class”, are connected by shared aesthetics and the aim to create visually sophisticated online profiles (Manovich, 2017). The processes performed in digital spaces are more convenient and natural for younger consumers, who increasingly use these platforms to shape social relationships and control the visual presentation of their online selves. Their travel experiences also often feel more satisfying when validated through positive reactions to shared pictures (Correa et al., 2010; Kim, 2018; Lo & McKercher, 2015; Sedera et al., 2017). With the constant possibility of being connected to the online world and to the social circle, travelling itself has become a real-time status display, as consumers can constantly compare and reevaluate their experiences through social media (Lo & McKercher, 2015).

Due to the interconnectedness of status signalling, travel and social media, consumers often base their travel choices on the potential to collect memorable experiences for their “experiential CV” (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011). This includes choosing luxury destinations to demonstrate wealth or unique locations to establish a particular identity (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018). However, as conspicuous sharing of exotic destination photos becomes widespread, new methods of communicating status are emerging, influenced by cultural values favouring authenticity and sustainability (Berger & Ward, 2010).

Existing research has established clear relationships between travel and status symbols, yet the dynamic nature of status signalling suggests continuing evolution of this form of experiential consumption. Existing research has primarily focused on consumer perception of travel content on social media or professional/influencer adoption of visual trends, leaving a gap in understanding how regular consumers navigate and adapt their content within this landscape. Our study aims to complement existing studies and investigate the nature of travel as a status symbol, specifically examining the elements through which Czech young middle-class consumers communicate their class position through travel-related content on social media platforms. By analysing how the image of status travel is constructed in social media posts, this research contributes to our understanding of the role of travel in contemporary status symbol communication in the digital age.

2 Methodology

In order to answer our research question and uncover how status travel is constructed in social media posts, we conducted a visual analysis of Instagram posts of young adults. A total of 508 posts displaying travel were collected from 9 informants, who were selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. The informants were chosen based on their belonging to the emerging cosmopolitan class in the Czech Republic (Koci et al., 2019). We chose to focus on this group because these young adult consumers are financially independent, typically well-educated, often fluent in multiple languages and utilize technology extensively for communication and information access.

Since the young adult consumers have grown up with the internet, they can be considered a “digitally native” generation, being the first ones to use network-based communication, e.g., on social media effectively and on an unprecedented scale (Milkman, 2017). They are therefore used to communication being something instant, constantly available and without geographical boundaries (Rainer & Rainer, 2011).

Growing up and coming of age alongside the advent of social media, young adult consumers are uniquely positioned to use social media as one of the prominent means of self-presentation and social connection, making it a central part of their lives. Their high engagement with social media and skills in using visual platforms to build and share their online identities is why these informants are particularly suited to our research.

We analyse posts from Instagram, as it is currently one of the leading visual platforms and is significantly present among young adults. Consumers in the age group of 25–34 make up over 30% of users of Instagram in total worldwide and 27% of users in the Czech Republic (Kliment, 2023; Zote, 2024). Instagram is also a highly visually oriented platform, motivating users to communicate their lifestyle online through content such as photos or videos.

Another criterium for the choice of informants was active usage of Instagram, i.e., spending time on the platform every day, although not necessarily posting every day. This suggests that the informants are active receivers and observers of the trends, topics and norms that occur on the platform, be it in their circle of friends or in general.

The data were collected from users' profiles after obtaining their permission; examples of posts were modified in Photoshop to ensure the anonymity of participants. In order to extract meaning from the images, visual analysis was employed to analyse the visual elements present in an explorative and systematic way (Krippendorff, 2013). Such analysis has been used in similar research as a qualitative technique appropriate for exploring phenomena in mass media (McKenna et al., 2017; Rose, 2016).

Inductive coding was carried out, in order for the narrative to emerge from the encountered content. The images were coded in terms of both the various basic elements they contained and the more abstract higher-order categories and the combination of elements provided. The data were then analysed iteratively in a process, in which the individuated elements were considered for each image separately, for each group of images and compared cross-sectionally. During the first round of coding, two main categories were identified –travel abroad and domestic travel. After identifying all the content that could be related to travel from the informants' posts published in the past 12 months, the analysis then proceeded with coding each piece of content in more detail.

After the initial coding of all 508 pieces of content, the MAXQDA tool “Code Relationship Browser” was used to get an overview of the themes that intersected the most with the two main categories: domestic travel and travel abroad.

MAXQDA tools were also used to export both main categories in order to identify and spot recurring themes and motives that can help understand the content in detail.

3 Results and Discussion

Our visual analysis of 508 Instagram posts provides insights into how travel experiences are curated and displayed as status symbols on social media. The initial coding revealed a clear preference for international travel, with only 89 posts depicting domestic travel experiences, suggesting that for the young adult consumers of the emerging cosmopolitan class, international travel remains the preferred mode of status display.

We identified four key characteristics essential for travel to be deemed “Instagrammable” status travel. These are immersion in local or authentic culture, absence or lack of people, unfamiliar or non-domestic landscapes and active participation. These characteristics demonstrate consumers' cultural literacy and the awareness of the implicit visual codes that define the “appropriate” representation of travel within their aspired status group. The specific visual cues for these categories will be described in detail in the following text. These elements are consistently seen in both domestic and international travel.

Immersion in local/authentic culture. The first characteristic emerging from our analysis is the emphasis on authentic cultural experiences through immersion in local culture. This immersion manifests in various forms, such as getting a henna tattoo, riding a camel or drinking coffee in a local café. What distinguishes these posts is their clear differentiation from everyday mundane activities at home. Food and drink photos are particularly notable in this category, being carefully composed to emphasize the foreignness of the experience through non-domestic backdrops or specific cuisines. These visual representations serve as proof of engaging with the culture rather than mere observation, suggesting a deeper level of engagement with the destination.

Absence or lack of people. The second characteristic involves the deliberate absence or minimal presence of people, creating an impression of exclusive, non-touristic experiences. Our analysis reveals a consistent effort to avoid crowds or tourist masses in the frame, emphasizing the uniqueness of the experience and the traveller's ability to discover less frequented locations. This careful composition suggests a deliberate strategy to differentiate these experiences from mass tourism, positioning them as more authentic and exclusive encounters with the destination.

Figure 1 | Example of immersion in local culture, source: Modified Instagram Post, Anonymous Participant #1, collected 2024

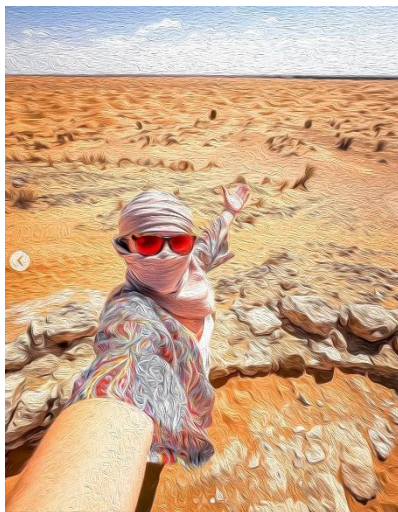


Figure 2 | Example of absence of people, source: Modified Instagram Post, Anonymous Participant #2, collected 2024



Unfamiliar or non-domestic landscapes. Thirdly, the visuals centre around the portrayal of unfamiliar or non-domestic landscapes, demonstrating a strong preference for scenes that clearly differentiate from the familiar domestic environment. Natural elements dominate the content, followed by architectural features. Wide shots are frequently employed to provide necessary hints for location identification and international travel content offers great variety in visual cues, including architectural details and foreign decor, both giving the photos the context necessary for the viewer to be able to correctly locate the sight without the need to check the geo tag (a feature that Instagram offers its users for sharing the location of their

photo or video). Whether domestic or foreign, travel content is characterized by the depiction of good weather, blue skies and idealistic portrayal of the scenery. This attention to environmental context serves to authenticate the non-domestic nature of the experience while simultaneously highlighting its aesthetic value.

Active participation. The last characteristic emphasizes active participation, reflecting the importance of engaging experience at destinations, rather than passive presence. This engagement manifests through physical activities, cultural involvement and novel experiences unique to the destination, such as hiking, attending events, visiting wellness centres, doing sports or reading. For example, beach-related content rarely shows simple relaxation; instead, it typically includes reading, water activities or cultural elements, combined with carefully framed shots that exclude other tourists. This active participation appears to be a crucial element in elevating travel experiences to status symbols, distinguishing them from mass tourism.

Figure 3 | Example of unfamiliar landscapes, source: Modified Instagram Post, Anonymous Participant #3, collected 2024



Figure 4 | Example of active participation, source: Modified Instagram Post, Anonymous Participant #4, collected 2024



The analysis also revealed additional patterns in how travellers document their presence in the destination that should not go unnoticed. For both domestic and international travel, the prevalence of selfies or portraits taken either by others or with a self-timer is largely a question of personal preference. Some informants publish mostly selfies, while others choose to publish portraits of themselves, alone or with others they know (friends, family, people they met during travels). Those publishing portraits more frequently tend to display a more curated, visually appealing profile with high-quality pictures.

An interesting trend emerges in the depiction of body parts, such as feet in the sand on a beach or in the sea, or hands holding food or drink, without showing faces. This subtle form of presence maintains focus on the scenery or activity while indicating the traveller's involvement, creating a different way of showing the presence of the author without taking a selfie or having a picture taken. The main focus stays on the item or the scenery, while sending a signal to the viewer that the author was there, setting it apart from impersonal online photos taken from a similar point of view by others.

Specific travel experiences, such as the Camino de Santiago route, were also present in the sample, demonstrating how these characteristics can be combined through distinctive markers and personal narratives that showcase both iconic landmarks and individual experiences.

For all content related to travel, material possessions rarely feature in photos or videos. When included, they typically appear as contextual elements. Cars, books, watches or clothing appear to support the narrative of active engagement or cultural immersion, i.e., being on the road, reading a book, running or being active. Similarly, food and beverage posts, while common, must include distinct visual cues to identify the location, such as a name or a logo of the restaurant or cafés or characteristic decor, reinforcing the emphasis on authentic cultural experiences.

These findings demonstrate how the visual representation of travel on Instagram has evolved beyond simple destination-based status signalling. Instead, it has developed into a sophisticated system of visual codes that emphasize authenticity, exclusivity, distinctiveness and active engagement. The consistency of these characteristics across both international and domestic travel content suggests their fundamental importance in contemporary travel-based status signalling among young adult middle-class consumers.

3.1 Discussion

Our analysis reveals a complex relationship between social media, status signalling and travel experiences among Czech young adult middle-class consumers. The findings show the important role of digital platforms in the demonstration of status and how new unwritten rules of the communication of belonging to a certain class or signalling status have been created with the proliferation of social media, leading to new forms of social distinction demonstrated through carefully curated travel content. Where once status could be primarily communicated through material possessions and luxury consumption, our research shows that today's young cosmopolitan consumers have developed sophisticated strategies for conveying social position through experiential content that emphasizes authenticity and cultural immersion, rather than mere economic capital.

The research strongly supports the existing literature on visibility as an integral part of consumption for conveying status (Berger & Heath, 2007; Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004). Social media have significantly amplified this dynamic, transforming experiences into key status symbols, especially in the realm of travel.

Our analysis also demonstrates how social media have transformed traditional impression management practices. While Goffman's (1951) original framework distinguishes between frontstage performance (in this case the actual travel experience shared on social media) and backstage preparation (the effort put into creating the perfect shot in this scenario), our findings suggest that on Instagram these elements are merging into a continuous performance. The careful curation of travel content – selecting specific moments without crowds, waiting for ideal lighting conditions, choosing particular angles to highlight cultural immersion and deliberately framing landscapes to fit the preferred aesthetics – has become part of the visible, frontstage performance.

We suggest this based on the data showing the consistent aesthetic presentation of both international and domestic travel experiences, where even seemingly spontaneous moments reveal careful composition and adherence to platform-specific visual codes. The fact that the analysis shows a clear pattern in how experiences are presented – prioritizing authentic cultural encounters, avoiding tourist crowds and emphasizing active participation – suggests that these young cosmopolitan consumers are highly aware of and actively engaging in a new form of social performance, one where the distinction between experiencing a moment and presenting it has become increasingly intertwined.

Experiences, as immaterial and intangible forms of consumption, have become the most valued commodities in the world of Instagram travel. Be it locally or abroad, being photographed, filmed or creating content during an activity is one of the most prevalent scenarios for published content. This observation reflects the shift from physical possessions to experiences as markers of social standing (Siegel & Wang, 2019; Watson & Kopachevsky, 1994).

Interestingly, our findings show that the demonstration of the ability to pay has also evolved from material goods to more subtle, experience-based cues (Memushi, 2013). In both domestic and international travel content, rather than showcasing traditional status symbols such as watches, cars, clothing or electronics, consumers in our sample consistently highlight experiences. These range from cultural immersion in foreign settings to participation in unique local activities, where the exclusivity or sophistication is subtly conveyed through the setting rather than overt displays of wealth (Wilson et al., 2012).

A particularly notable finding relates to the perception of adventure and discomfort functioning as status symbols. Moving away from the conventional association of luxury and comfort with status, consumers now often showcase endurance and adventure, even emphasizing elements of discomfort, to portray self-sufficiency. Physical challenges such as completing the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage are presented as status-worthy experiences, emphasizing the higher value placed on unique experiences and the ability to step away from the familiar, over mere demonstrations of wealth (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011).

These experiences, however, still communicate a certain privilege. The time, resources and knowledge needed to take significant time off work to embark on this journey of physical endurance and discomfort, being able to support themselves abroad for a longer period of time, navigating foreign languages and cultures, all without reliance on providers such as travel agencies, all imply the consumer's capabilities and social standing.

Our findings align with the concept of the “tourist gaze” (Urry & Larsen, 2011). The images and videos already present on the platform serve as a foundation for social comparison, which consumers then use to frame and curate their own travel experiences in an “Instagrammable” way to conform to the current desired aesthetics. This process creates a self-reinforcing cycle of visual content creation and consumption.

The importance of curating visuals that align with the desired aesthetic standards further highlights how social media have blurred the lines between performance and reality in tourism (Siegel et al., 2022). Our analysis revealed a consistent pattern in how young cosmopolitan consumers capture their travel experiences, emphasizing unfamiliar landscapes, documenting cultural immersion and notably, maintaining an absence of other tourists or crowds. This careful curation aligns with Scarles' (2009) view of visual consumption in tourism, where the captured image becomes as significant as the experience itself. These choices in content creation are not random but represent deliberate strategies for distinguishing oneself from the ordinary tourist and enhancing one's online persona (Manovich, 2017). The predominance of these specific visual elements in our sample of 508 posts reflects a broader shift where consumers actively seek and document experiences that are unique, immersive and visually appealing, utilizing social media to curate and communicate these moments. The idea of building an “experiential CV” (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011) through shared experiences appears central to how these young adult consumers navigate their self-presentation online.

Furthermore, our visual analysis reveals distinct patterns in how travel-related posts contribute to a broader narrative of identity and social belonging, aligning with Sirgy & Su's (2000) theory of self-concept. The consistency in how our informants present their travel experiences – prioritizing authentic cultural encounters while avoiding tourist crowds – suggests that travel has shifted from mere “authentic discovery” to a more sophisticated exercise in profile-building, where the act of sharing curated moments becomes integral to identity construction (Moeller & D'Ambrosio, 2021). What emerges from our data is that travel, as portrayed on social media, is less about the destination and more about the identity that it allows individuals to project – one that is cultured, adventurous and aspirational. The ability to document and share these curated moments in real time has added a new dimension to how status is displayed and consumed in the digital age.

Conclusion

This research contributes to our understanding of the evolving dynamics of travel as a status symbol in the age of social media, particularly among middle-class consumers. By examining travel-related content on Instagram, it highlights the crucial role of experiences, visual representation and the role of social media platforms such as Instagram in shaping status display behaviour in the digital age. Our findings demonstrate how experiences have taken

centre stage as status markers, superseding material possessions in how individuals curate and showcase their identity online.

A critical contribution of this research is the identification of four essential elements that shape status-driven travel content for young adult cosmopolitan consumers: immersion in local or authentic culture, absence of crowds, unfamiliar or non-domestic landscapes and active participation. These findings reflect a broader shift in consumer behaviour, where authenticity and individuality are prioritized in the creation of a social identity.

The findings also highlight the role of travel as a form of self-expression, where the portrayal of unique experiences, a sense of adventure, an active lifestyle and culinary explorations are highly valued. Moreover, the requirement for good weather, picturesque skies and idealized shots of locations underscores the importance of visual aesthetics in travel content, aligning with previous research focusing on the visual experience as an integral part of tourism.

Interestingly, the ability to demonstrate affluence or status is predominantly conveyed through experiences rather than material possessions. Pictures from restaurants, popular cafés or aesthetically pleasing shots of food and beverages are used to showcase the ability to pay, while the occurrence of physical possessions such as watches, cars or electronics is rare in the analysed sample.

The implications for future research are twofold. As social media platforms continue to evolve, future research could investigate how newer technologies or newer platforms further influence travel behaviour and the depiction of status through travel on these platforms. Secondly, it would also be valuable to explore how different social groups, age groups or different cultures adapt to these trends and whether their approach to travel as a status symbol differs from the young adult cosmopolitan class.

For marketers, this research provides valuable insights into how brands can better align their offerings with the values of young adult consumers who belong to the emerging cosmopolitan class. By understanding the key characteristics that make travel content worth sharing as a way to signal status, such as authenticity, cultural immersion and aesthetic appeal, marketers can craft experiences that resonate more deeply with their target audience. Brands in the travel and hospitality industries should recognize the importance of creating visually compelling and “Instagrammable” experiences that offer more than just a service but become part of the consumer's identity and social narrative. Furthermore, marketers should pay close attention to the role of subtlety in status signalling, as overt displays of luxury may no longer resonate with consumers seeking more genuine, experience-based representations of status.

Limitations and Future Research

Our research faces several limitations that should be acknowledged. While we analysed over 500 pieces on content, the research was limited to nine respondents representing the emerging cosmopolitan class. A broader sample of consumers with different focus or a slightly different lifestyle might reveal additional nuances in how travel content is shared on Instagram. Acknowledging this limitation, this is the future direction of our research.

In this research, we focused solely on the content of photos and videos published by informants, i.e., the part of content that is published for and aimed at followers or the general public. Our focus on the visual content alone, without analysing captions, reactions and surrounding conversations, leaves room for a deeper understanding of online persona creation.

That is why the research will be followed up with interviews with the informants whose content has been analysed, as well as with an analysis of the captions, reactions and conversations around the published content, as this adds another layer to online persona creation.

The research would benefit from expansion to include different social groups and cultural contexts, examining how various demographics adapt to these trends and whether their approach to travel as a status symbol differs from that of the young adult cosmopolitan class. As social media platforms continue to evolve, future studies could also explore how newer technologies and platforms influence travel behaviour and status display, providing a more comprehensive understanding of this dynamic phenomenon.

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