

Travel Selfie: A commodification of the tourist experience and culture?

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the development of the travel selfie phenomenon in contemporary media and culture, and its impact on tourist experiences. By discussing key issues surrounding the phenomenon, particularly commodification and social media such as Instagram, this thesis investigates the effects of the travel selfie on tourist experiences, through a qualitative study approach.

By adopting dispositive analysis as a methodology, this study explores how the travel selfie phenomenon evolves from a photographic practice into a modern tourist trend and a travel commodity that has revolutionized the tourist industry.

The results suggest that the travel selfie has evolved from a spontaneous photographic technique into a valuable commodity that empowers modern tourists in different parts of the world. The shared consumption of the travel selfie amongst tourists subvert dominant criticism about the selfie culture by suggesting how the travel selfie inspires and unites tourists through an ability to express themselves individually.

The conclusions emphasize how the travel selfie has expanded amongst tourists and continues to transform the contemporary cultures.

Keywords: travel selfie, modern tourist, tourist experience, commodification, contemporary

1. Introduction

From globetrotter to jetsetter, the tourist comes from varying backgrounds and holds different expectations about their travels, yet the shared fascination and desire to experience a new culture and environment is characteristic of contemporary tourist trends. While traveling rewards the traveler with unique and intangible encounters, photography objectifies the transience associated with authentic tourist experiences. Alongside technological advancements, the use of photography continues to ingrain itself in tourism as the tourist becomes more eager to document, replicate and preserve travel memories into tangible visual images that can be brought home and shared with others (Belk and Yeh, 2011). As photography empowers the individual with a gift of acquisition that is symbolized through the photograph, the once mesmerized traveler evolves into a tourist consumer who is more captivated by capturing his or her experiences (Gretzel, O’Leary and Fesenmaier 2006).

With the introduction and expansion of digital mobile media, particularly the advent of the smartphone, photography becomes more indispensable to the tourist consumer as new photographic practices and communicative platforms influence modern tourist behavior (Sontag, 1977). The selfie phenomenon, more specifically, has inspired the travel selfie culture amongst tourists, as modern tourists make use of the internet and digital affordances to capture images of themselves as part of their travel encounters, and share these experiences with wider audiences. The development of the travel selfie culture revolutionizes earlier tourist behavior and experiences, a transformation that this study is interested in exploring

The desire to include oneself in the destination image is a practice that is characteristic amongst modern tourists, a popular trend that raises questions about the authenticity of tourist experiences (Kim et al., 2016). This skepticism is reinforced by the expansion of the travel selfie into a commodity within contemporary media and culture, exemplified from the production of travel selfie in contemporary media, selfie merchandise and the use of travel selfies as marketing tools in the tourism industry. By questioning how the travel selfie has manifested in contemporary culture, this study is interested in investigating the effects of the travel selfie practice on contemporary tourists.

Contrary to academic research that theorize travel selfies with the destructive and narcissistic qualities associated with the selfie culture (Paris and Pietschnig, 2015; Lyu, 2016; Kim et al., 2016), this qualitative study is interested in assessing the significance of the travel selfie within a specific community that is representative of contemporary culture. By asking Instagram users who have used the travel selfie hashtag, #travelsselfie, this study gathers meaningful insight about how the travel selfie is perceived amongst modern tourists who take travel selfies and share them on social media.

The aim of this study is to examine the role of the travel selfie in contemporary media and culture, by evaluating its influence(s) on tourist experiences amongst Instagram users. Through an in-depth qualitative study, this thesis begins by identifying how the travel selfie is positioned in YouTube, an example of contemporary media. Thereafter, this study explores the significance and use of the travel selfie amongst Instagram users, a community of individuals that are

representative of modern tourists. Finally, the methods provide insight about the impact of the travel selfie on tourist experiences. This structure is outlined according to the following research questions:

1. In what ways is the travel selfie phenomenon framed in contemporary media?
2. How is the travel selfie interpreted by Instagram users and what do they use it for?
3. What effects do the expansion of the travel selfie have on tourist experiences?

2. Context

In this section, key concepts are defined, and background information is given to provide a more holistic understanding to this study. At the end of this section, the research questions are outlined to focus and guide this research process.

2.1 Definition of the travel selfie

While the travel selfie is popular amongst tourists, it is relatively new and commonly associated with its origins, the selfie revolution (Paris and Pietschnig, 2015). The act of taking a 'selfie' is familiar in everyday language, evident from The Chainsmokers' hit pop song that commercialized the catchphrase, "but first let me take a selfie", showing how this photographic practice only gained discursive significance recently. According to 'Selfie' named by Oxford Dictionaries as word of 2013', this photographic trend is defined as "[a] photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media" (Oxford Dictionaries, BBC News 2013). Drawing on the characteristics of the selfie phenomenon, the travel selfie is practiced amongst tourists during their travels.

2.2 The rise of the travel selfie

Although the travel selfie is described as a contemporary practice amongst tourists today, the creation of the selfie dates back to the early 20th century. According to Symcox (2013), an American chemist, Robert Cornelius, was the first man to produce a self-portrait image in 1839 during research about the "daguerreotype process", a photographic technique.

In line with this photographic experiment, it is suggested that the concept of the selfie stick was discovered in 1983 by Minolta, the Japanese camera company. According to Ashcraft (2013) the Minolta Disc-7 camera was designed with "a small convex mirror, which could be used by the photographer to compose a self-portrait". However, the it was only decades later when Canadian entrepreneur, Wayne Fromm, designed and patented the selfie stick in 2005.

The diverse narratives about when and where the selfie originated articulates the ambiguity surrounding this phenomenon. Yet, the appearances of this practice in different societies emphasize a shared and lasting fascination about this photographic technique, a quality that ultimately motivates my interest in this topic.

2.3 The travel selfie controversy

As the travel selfie gains popularity amongst modern tourists, media reports present adverse opinions about the travel selfie and its controversy in contemporary culture. One of the most discussed issue is the narcissistic and destructive effects of the travel selfie (Lombard, 2015; Groundwater, 2015; Cosslett, 2018; Sigala, 2018). Motivated by the desire to capture "the perfect travel selfie", individuals sacrifice their lives in order to capture the image of themselves in extraordinary locations and situations. For example, a recent report revealed that a Cuban tourist vacationing in Greece fell to her death after she "stood as close as possible to the edge of the cliff in order to be able to get the best shot of herself and the famous shipwreck" ("Second tourist killed trying to take a selfie with Zakynthos Shipwreck – Poll", 2017). Although the risk that tourists subject themselves to in order to capture the ideal travel selfie provokes debates in

media, my thesis is intrigued by this tourist behavior and examines this through inquiry and analysis.

The use of the travel selfie on social media, such as Instagram, embodies contradictory viewpoints about the significance of the travel selfie when used as a commodity. On one hand, Instagram users prefer gaining travel tips and information from social media influencers instead of travel brochures because they are motivated by the “genuine expression” of other tourists (Miller, 2017). However, the truthfulness associated with human communication is subverted by the intervention of market forces. For example, Instagram is also employed as a lucrative marketing tool for tourist-related services. Cosslett (2018) describes how Instagram influencers are “paid in brand endorsements and partnerships with luxury travel companies” for taking enviable travel selfies and sharing them on their social media channels. On a similar note, top hotels offer competitive selfie promotions for guests to take idyllic travel selfies of locations that have been identified and share them on social media with specific hashtags (Rosenbloom, 2015). The contrasting symbolism of the travel selfie suggest how this commodity resembles a double-edged sword and questions the authenticity of travel experiences, which is an issue that is explored in this thesis.

Furthermore, real life experiment with the use of the travel selfie questions the meaning of contemporary culture. A recent case reported in Metro highlights how the travel selfie challenges authentic tourist experiences through the manipulation of the images posted on social media. A Dutch student, Zila van den Born, disguised herself as a tourist in South East Asia by “photoshopping” herself into various exotic locations in her make-believe trip. Under the pretense of taking travel selfies, she artificially created a social media travel narrative by digitally framing herself in different destinations. When questioned about her motivations for enacting this scheme, Zila van Born explained that she wanted to show people that “...we filter and manipulate what we show on social media [and] we create an ideal world online which reality can no longer meet” (Goorwich, 2014). Her bold, yet self-reflexive reasoning, emphasizes how tourists who are also social media users, consume and manage travel selfies in their own situations, suggesting how this practice entails conflicting objectives.

In summary, the context traces the development of the travel selfie by highlighting how it relates to the expansion of the selfie culture as well as undesirable perceptions about the use of the travel selfie.

3. Literature review

In order to connect the discussion of the travel selfie within an academic discussion, this section outlines existing research about the travel selfie so that this study can be better positioned within the field of study.

3.1 Contemporary research about the travel selfie

Due to its developing nature, the travel selfie has not been extensively researched or discussed by academics (Paris and Pietschnig, 2015), although existing research about the travel selfie relates to the studies about the selfie trend.

Paris and Pietschnig (2015) examine the relationship between behavioral traits of individuals and their use of travel selfies, deducing that “more agreeable individuals showed more positive attitudes towards taking selfies during travels” (p. 6). Their study is consistent with research about the selfie phenomenon, as narcissism is characterized as a key behavioral predictor behind the selfie phenomenon (Kim et al., 2016), further reiterating how the selfie culture is critically viewed as self-destructive and ultimately disadvantageous for society. More specifically, Lyu (2016) identifies young female tourists as a key demographic when examining how personality traits affect travel selfies. She posits that young women are more susceptible to self-presentation and self-impression as they edit and manipulate the image for social media.

Contrary to the representation of women as victims, the selfie culture is also seen as a constructive space for identity building as minority communities become more visible in their own right, particularly through self-expression in what is becoming an increasingly globalized and digitalized platform like Web 2.0 (Garrod, 2008; More, 2017). While medical expertise warns against selfies, as seen from Jill Weber, who describes that “In [her] experience, girls who repeatedly post selfies struggle with low self-esteem” (Walker, 2013), ethnographic research from wider academic fields provide competing narratives about how selfies empower women. Accounts of young women from traditionally patriarchal societies like South Korea and South Africa, express how selfies reward them with a deeper understanding of self-appreciation, loving and accepting oneself as well as finding meaning in their lives (Nguyen, 2014; Pereira, 2016).

Key factors behind the transformation of the travel selfie image into a social practice amongst contemporary travelers includes its connection to tourist photography and social media, two areas that will be discussed in this chapter.

3.2 The relationship between tourism and photography

The correlation between photography and tourism is discussed by various authors (Markwell, 1997) and they illustrate this relationship by describing how notable scholars contribute to the development of tourist photography. According to Markwell (1997), Bourdieu is identified as a key pioneer in the discourse of photography and tourism as he adopts a structuralist perspective and explores the social role of photography. Markwell (1997) elaborates on this viewpoint by describing how Bourdieu regards taking a photograph as an engagement between the photographer and his or her surroundings, and a means of defining social relations. Similarly, Garrod (2008) describes Urry’s conception of the tourist gaze can be seen “as a means of

understanding how tourism is produced and reproduced as a socially constructed phenomenon” (p. 2).

While Bourdieu and Urry are acknowledged for their insight on how photography is a productive practice amongst tourists, Sontag (1977) focuses on the objectification of tourist photography through the use of the camera. This is reiterated in her observation that “it seems positively unnatural to travel for pleasure without taking a camera along” (p. 9), emphasizing how the camera defines the tourist. Sontag (1977) also asserts that modern tourists associate photographs with tangible memories and used to validate his or her travel experiences. The emphasis on the material value of the camera and photograph suggests how tourist behavior breeds superficiality and questions the authenticity of the tourist experience.

Nonetheless, recent authors consider tourist photography to be empowering. Crang (1999) emphasizes how travel photographs articulate creative self-expression as the tourist projects a unique perspective in a photograph. This viewpoint is similarly appreciated by Edensor (2000), as he commends the tourist’s ability to create his or her personal travel narrative - by selecting images that portray a desired travel experience. Robinson and Pickard (2009) refer to this process of selection as “framing”, as the tourist strives to encapsulate the idealized shot for the photograph. Although selecting what to include in a travel photograph is myopic from an abstract perspective, Garlick (2010) argues that tourist photography should be recognized for its artistic value, as the post-modernist tourist today is more attracted to “revealing the unseen” (p. 289) in photography.

Now that the relationship between photography and tourism has been established, the next section will shed light on how this photography is used in contemporary culture.

3.3 Tourist photography in contemporary culture

Tourist photography has evolved from a single act of a tourist taking a photograph into a social practice amongst the tourist community, a social custom that Urry (1990) refers and titles “The ‘Consumption’ of Tourism” (p. 23) in his article. While the concept of the tourist gaze will be elaborated further in the theory section, it is significant to note that this gaze is identified as an essential impetus for tourist photography and consumption (Urry, 1990). He asserts that the quest for pleasure motivates the individual to embark on a leisurely journey that is controlled by the “lingering gaze” (p. 27), a look characteristic of modern tourists who seek to possess, produce and reproduce experiences through photography. The focus on what is “visually objectified or captured” (p. 27) in tourist photography is increasingly debated because this pursuit of possessing one’s experience questions the potential for tourists to engage and develop “authentic” connections in their travel destinations.

This limitation is expanded by MacCannell (1973) as he posits that the modern tourist corrupts and exploits local communities because of this desperate pursuit for authenticity. To the individual’s dismay, MacCannell (1973) highlights the irony of the perturbed modern tourist’s quest for meaningful experiences with local communities during their travels as the individual is only met with what is designed to fulfill such tourist expectations, a concept that is referred to as “staged authenticity”. This view of how native communities satisfy tourist expectations in order

to increase tourist consumption indicates how market forces effect tourism and becomes a commodity.

Contrary to MacCannell's critical stance towards commercial influence in tourism and the authenticity that it destroyed from this intervention, Cohen (1988) adopts a more progressive attitude towards market forces. To summarize some of his arguments, Cohen (1988) challenges the assumption that commoditization is destructive by suggesting that original meanings are altered when new meanings are added to old ones. In addition, Cohen (1988) refutes the status quo of "authenticity", presenting this concept as socially constructed and negotiable. By characterizing the pursuit of authenticity as a Western concept, Cohen (1988) explores how other factors such as alienation, social class, or level of intellect determine the level of authenticity that the tourist seeks during his or her travels. The assumption that commoditized culture results in the loss of intrinsic meaning and significance is further challenged by Cohen (1988) as he proposes that commercialization encourages opportunities that should be recognized, particularly in declining cultures.

The focus on how commodification impacts fading communities in less developed countries resonates with Cole (2007) as he investigates how cultural commodification is experienced in a poverty-stricken village in Indonesia. By using an ethnographic study, he reveals how three groups, the state, tourists and the local villagers view the process of commodification and the conflicts of interests that arise from their perspectives and objectives with tourism. While this study explores the relationships between different parties involved in tourist consumption, Wang (1999) defines three approaches to understanding how the authenticity manifests into experiences for tourists. By differentiating between "objective authenticity" (the authenticity of originals), "constructive authenticity" (symbolic authenticity projected onto toured objects by tourists or tourism producers) and "existential authenticity" (an existential state of being that is activated during tourist activities" (p. 352). Thus, commodification has a strong influence in tourism, but its effects are also controlled by consumers, who are part of the tourism industry.

While acknowledging that individual perception is imperative to the impact of commodification in tourism, the next section will explore how social media plays a role in positioning the travel selfie in contemporary culture.

3.4 Travel selfie in social media

Månsson (2011) posits that travel selfies are related to mediatized tourism and the convergence in new media. This is exemplified through the creation of the travel selfie, a media product that is then disseminated on social media and consumed by other tourists and non-tourists. This further reiterated by Lo, Mckercher, Lo, Cheung and Law (2011) as they describe how travel selfies are typically posted on multiple media platforms and intended for a wider audience, projecting an unbiased representation of the tourist destination that is useful from a marketing or advertising standpoint. Kedzior, Allen and Schroeder (2016) describe how selfies support companies in understanding brand development and customer behavior through the visual representations of tourist experiences.

A defining characteristic about the rise of the travel selfie is the sense of empowerment that the tourist gains in light of technological developments. Tussyadiah (2012) explains how geo-based technology liberates the tourist from conventional tourist photography through the instantaneous production of an image that can be shared on social media conveniently at any time. While the tourist enjoys using social media and the speed of technology to take and share their travel selfies, the individual is also controlled by the influence of social media. Kim and Tussyadiah (2013) underscore how tourists seek support from their social network while traveling and this support determines the tourist experience. More specifically, the more compliments, e.g. “likes” on Facebook and Instagram or complimentary comments about the posts, the more positive the experience for the tourist. The received and perceived social support demonstrates how support from social networks is valued in the tourist experience, reiterating behavioral and personality predictors that similarly motivate the individual to take selfies (Paris and Pietschnig, 2015; Kim et al. 2016; Lyu, 2016).

In addition to one’s social media peers, social media conventions such as hashtags forge a stronger connection to social media that further encourages tourists to take “better” travel selfies. Carson and Pennings (2017) examine the significance of the #travelf selfie hashtag by analyzing various Instagram posts, and deduce that the images reflect strong usage of editing features such as filters and angles that enhance ordinary travel photography. On one hand, the obsession with manipulating travel selfies so as to project a desirable image reflects how the individual objectifies his or herself (Lyu, 2016). On the other hand, the increasing connectivity to social media increases the level of competition that the individual is confronted with. The travel selfie phenomenon on social media shifts the focus from collecting photography for oneself into a battle for taking the most extraordinary shots for others to see on social media. This fascination with capturing the unimaginable for social media poses threats to the individual.

In summary, the literature in this chapter sheds light on important issues that bear relevance to this study. It also inspires the theoretical framework that will guide the research process, as seen in the next section.

4. Theoretical framework

In the last section, the literature review sheds light on existing research that outlines key issues that will be discussed in this thesis. In order to establish an epistemological understanding to the various issues, the following theoretical framework informs this study regarding how data is interpreted and used as insight in this research process.

This study starts by acknowledging the empirical value of tourist photography as an aesthetic practice where the tourist engages with his or her travel destination through visually reproducing what he or she sees and experiences (Robinson and Picard, 2010). However, this research recognizes a need for subjective inquiry into the ways in which new photography trends such as the travel selfie are interpreted by the modern tourist and its implications on his or her tourist experience. By exploring the role of the travel selfie in contemporary tourist culture, interpretivism is employed as research paradigm because this research lens recognizes the value of “meaning-making” (Collins, 2010) in the production of knowledge. Contrary to critics’ simplification of the selfie culture that is commonly associated and restricted to narcissistic behavior (Paris and Pietschnig, 2015) or self-objectification amongst young women (Lyu, 2016), this thesis questions such viewpoints by positioning selfie taking within a broader community of individuals that engage in tourism. As such, phenomenology is useful because it values the significance of culturally produced meanings. In the words of Collins (2010):

phenomenologists “seek to distinguish between something that is culturally inherited and, as a result, perhaps one-dimensional, predictable or ‘stale’ and something of human experience that is appositely ‘authentic’, ‘rich’ and ‘fresh’ (p. 39).

To guide the phenomenological inquiry, social constructionism culture shapes the way in which human beings appropriate meaning. Culture, in itself, is hybridized as this study looks at how tourists from different parts of the world interpret and use travel selfies, while maintaining a common distinctiveness that “frames” the travel selfie within a common space, i.e. #travelselkie on Instagram. According to Collins (2010), “culture brings some things into view and endows them with meaning” although she also claims that this process “leads us to ignore other things” (p. 40), a critical aspect to this study. Hence, this thesis evaluates the development of the travel selfie and its impact on tourist experience by referring to the theoretical framework that comprised of uses and gratification theory, the tourist gaze and the concept of commodification.

4.1 Uses and gratification theory

The popularity of the travel selfie amongst tourists derives from the use of contemporary media such as YouTube and Instagram. The attraction towards these forms of media highlights the relevance of uses and gratifications (U&G) theory as it addresses concerns about why certain media types are selected by audiences and its effects upon them (Ruggiero, 2000). In order to establish a clearer understanding of why certain media types are used today, U&G theory will be structured according to its development over time.

U&G theory originates from media effects research in the 1940s that focused on how mass media influences media audiences (Ruggiero, 2000). By characterizing audiences as passive and

dependent on mass media to gratify sociological and psychological needs, U&G theory was focused on individual uses of mass media. The development of this theory in the 1950s became more audience centered. This is explicitly framed by Katz (1959) in his editorial note, who exemplifies the power interplay between media and the media user by shifting the question from “What do the media do to people?” in media effects theories, to “What do people do with the media?” (p. 2) in U&G theory, emphasizing how the media user is acknowledged as a catalyst for media use.

Although more emphasis was placed on the media audience and the gratifications obtained, the focus on gratifications sought was lacking (Ruggiero, 2000). Inspired to explore how gratifications were sought, developments in U&G theory in the 1970s expanded the framework of how to apply U&G theory in a more systematic and methodological manner. This is exemplified by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) as seen from the assumptions that outlined the theory (p. 510-511):

- Audiences are active
- Media audiences connect their gratifications to a particular choice of media
- Media compete with other alternatives to satisfy audiences
- Media audiences have the rational capability to express their respective goals with mass media
- Only audiences can assess the value of media

Attempts at understanding the relationship between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained were investigated by researchers (Ruggiero, 2000). According to Ruggiero’s (2000) reference to Rosengren’s claim, individuals are affected by their personalities and social situations, which in turn provoke different motivations for media use and their eventual gratifications.

However, continued research on U&G theory in the 80s and 90s began to question the assumptions of the framework that U&G theory operated upon (Ruggiero, 2000). In particular, the concept of “active audiences” was widely debated and “audience activity” became a more appropriate concept to examine how audience activity and audience involvement motivated specific forms of communication at different periods of time (Ruggiero, 2000).

In line with closer understanding of audience behavior, the expansion of digital technology and arrival of new media rewards audiences with more control over how, what and when they wanted to use the media of their choice. Interactivity encouraged endless possibilities of user interaction and interchangeability between user engagement and participation that further enabled audiences to customize their media use to specific requirements (Ha and James, 1998). In addition, demassification allowed the user to choose from a wider variety of media options to engage in interpersonal communication that suits specific needs (Ruggiero, 2000). Lastly, asynchronicity rewards the media user with ample opportunities to send and receive messages conveniently (Williams et al., 1988). While digital affordances empower media users with exclusive control over their media choice and use, the construct of the web encourages social networking, as media users are keener to develop online relationships (Ruggiero, 2000).

Thus, U&G theory is useful to this study because it underscores the changing relationship between media and media audiences. This is a relevant element to this study that focuses on Instagram, a selected new media platform that is used for sharing travel selfies.

4.2 The tourist gaze

Earlier critics such as Sontag (1977) discuss the significance of photography by focusing on the image produced and the acquisitive power associated with the collection of photographs. This is reinforced through her comparison of photograph collections to “trophies”, as tourists become distracted with “converting experience into an image” (p. 6). Conversely, Urry’s concept of the tourist gaze focuses on what motivates the visual process of the tourist and its implications on photography (Urry and Larsen, 2011). The development of the visual gaze in “The Tourist Gaze 3.0” is reflective of how Urry’s original conception of the tourist gaze adapts over the years according to changing contexts and tourism theory (Urry and Larsen, 2011).

Although the tourist gaze acknowledges Sontag’s claim about the authority of the image produced (Urry and Larsen, 2011), the process is described as a more complex progression of events and factors that motivates how the tourist sees what to capture when he or she takes the photograph. By applying this concept to the development of the travel selfie, more attention is placed on how the modern tourist consumes the travel selfie in contemporary culture. In order to elaborate on this concept, this study summarizes the main assumptions surrounding the tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p. 4-5)

1. Tourism is a modern and leisurely activity
2. The tourist gaze requires the individual to travel from his or her everyday space to a new place
3. Tourist destinations are temporary
4. The tourist gaze rewards the individual with relaxed and gratifying feelings
5. The tourist gaze attracts the masses
6. The gaze occurs in a place that the tourist has imagined and longed for, commonly composed by media and non-tourist practices
7. The gaze focuses on the natural surroundings and disconnects the tourist from his or her everyday conditions. The lingering gaze is visually objectified or captured through photographs and this material manifestation allows the gaze to be produced and reproduced infinitely
8. The gaze is created through signs and symbolic representations
9. Tourist experts aim to reproduce new objects of the tourist gaze. These objects are subject to hierarchy, competition, capitalistic interests, class differences, generational trends, gender and changing social attractions

While the tourist gaze is characterized as visual consumption, Urry and Larsen (2011) distinguish the characteristics of the gaze by referring to different social contexts that shape the type of tourist gaze produced. For example, the romantic gaze is associated with private and intimate experiences, the collective gaze is created when crowds of tourists come together in search of amusement (Urry and Larsen, 2011). Although various types of gazes are identified in the book,

finds the “mediatised gaze” most relevant and applicable to my study. According to Urry and Larsen (2011), it is defined as a “collective gaze where particular sites famous for their ‘mediated’ nature are viewed” (Urry and Larsen, 2011, p. 20). Moreover, the “mediatised gaze” also relates to U&G theory as the tourist, is also a media consumer, and therefore influenced by his or her media choices when traveling.

Apart from media influences, the tourist gaze is also described as a product of contemporary experience (Urry and Larsen, 2011). This is particularly reflective of postmodernist culture, as products of this social context are “mechanically, electronically and digitally reproduced and distributed” (p. 98). While technological advancement strongly influences contemporary practices in postmodernist culture, Urry and Larsen (2011) also refer to Bourdieu’s cultural economy as tourists are more motivated by building social relations when developing the “visual, of the gaze” (p. 100) This is exemplified through the tourist’s fascination with the popularized image of the “landscape”, as the gaze on this feature is “a human way of visually forming, through cultivated eyes, skillful techniques and technologies of representing, a physical environment” (p. 110). The possessive and constructed process of the tourist gaze is reiterated by Urry and Larsen’s (2011) reference to Andrew’s (1989) claim about how the tourist gaze on the landscape represents “what the viewer has selected from the land, edited and modified in accordance with certain conventional ideas about what constitutes a ‘good view’” (p. 110). Thus, the tourist gaze identifies specific cultural objects that are perceived to fulfill the desired tourist experience.

Lastly, the shift from traditional photography to digital photography effects the way in which vision and the tourist gaze is constructed (Urry and Larsen, 2011). In contrast to the tourist gaze that is “constructed discursively and materially through images and performances of photography, and vice versa” (p. 155), digital photography exists in a virtual space, contemporary, produced and consumed instantly through a screen. The tourist gaze is therefore subjected and filtered through digital affordances, and ultimately reproduced for and by multiple viewers (Urry and Larsen, 2011).

Thus, the tourist gaze is reflective of the varied conditions and influences that shape the way in which the tourist perceives the object that the gaze is casted upon. The value of the object is clarified in the next section through the concept of commodification.

4.3 Concept of ‘commodification’

The commodification of tourist culture is a key issue when exploring tourist consumption and its impact on local cultures at travel destinations (MacCannell, 1973). However, the concept of commodification requires clarification as this “action or process of treating something as a mere commodity” (English Oxford Living Dictionaries) preempts the significance of a ‘commodity’ in order for one to appreciate the transformation.

According to Heinrich’s (2012) interpretations of Karl Marx’s *Das Capital*, a ‘commodity’ is a “typical form of wealth” (p. 39) that is ultimately “intended for exchange” (p. 40). The function of a commodity in capitalistic cultures is motivated by economic interests and generating profits which is derived from two concepts; ‘use value’ and ‘exchange value’. The ‘use value’ is measured by how useful the object is, and the ‘exchange value’ is determined by how much it is worth in

the social context that it exists in (Heinrich, 2012). While Marx adopts a matter-of-fact attitude towards the way in which commodities are quantified, Appadurai (1994) is more critical about the complexities in determining how commodities are worth and therefore requires a framework that “define[s] the exchangeability of things in any particular social and historical context” (p. 83). He elaborates on this by distinguishing between common commodities that have assigned monetary values, that influence the exchange process, and “intracultural exchanges where, despite a vast universe of shared understandings, a specific exchange is based on deeply divergent perceptions of the value of the objects being exchanged” (p. 83). By comparing both types of commodities, it is apparent that the second form is more dependent on social practices and interaction.

While commodification is dependent on social interaction, Marx also posits that commodification in advancing societies blurs the boundaries between authentic social human relationships and materialistic affairs, a situation that he refers to as ‘commodity fetish’ (Heinrich, 2012, p. 71). Marx’s critique on the capitalistic intrusion is contextualized within an era that was dominated by capitalistic production in a neglectful culture where emphasis is placed on the end product. However, Billig (1999) argues that late capitalism is centered around ‘consumer capitalism’ that provokes a shared obliviousness about the processes of production because contemporary culture is too obsessed with consumerism and its ability to satisfy personal gratification. Bearing in mind that Billig (1999) approaches the ‘commodity fetish’ from a psychological perspective, he attributes the contemporary consumer behavior with repression as individuals are too distracted with social trends that focus on the material value of commodities rather than appreciating the complete value of the commodity.

In order to connect the concept of commodification with this thesis, Iqani and Schroeder (2016) propose that selfies are commodities within consumer culture that promotes “consumer gratification” (p. 411). They posit that the selfie trend showcases how individuals transform traditional notions of self-portraits into mass commodities as the selfies are produced independently and shared freely on social media, a system that challenges Marx’s concepts of ‘use value’ and ‘exchange value’. Instead, Iqani and Schroeder (2016) suggest that this selfie culture empowers self-expression and the influence of “consumerist mediation” (p. 411) to transform images of the self into commodities.

In summary, the theoretical framework supports the various dimensions of the travel selfie that this study will investigate. More specifically, U&G theory clarifies how contemporary media is selected by tourists. The tourist gaze then relates to contemporary motivations for traveling and ways of seeing objects during travels. Lastly, the concept of commodification sheds light on how tourist experiences are valued and measured in terms of its authenticity.

5. Methodology

Deciding between a quantitative or qualitative methodology is one of the most basic steps towards conducting purposeful research that would produce meaningful data (Brennen, 2012). While quantitative research involves scientific and measurable methods, qualitative research is described as “interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical” (Brennen, 2012, p. 4) because it focuses on making sense of human experiences and relationships. This comparison clarifies my motivation for using qualitative methodology because the nature of my study revolves around the use of travel selfies, a social practice, within a specific community of individuals, i.e. modern tourists who use social media such as Instagram.

Drawing on the abundance of quantitative literature and research from various disciplines that are included in Chapter 3, qualitative research enhances existing quantitative studies by providing more nuanced arguments. Therefore, this approach will contribute towards a more balanced perspective towards about the development of the travel selfie practice and its implications on contemporary culture.

At this stage, it is critical as a researcher to clarify the author’s stance on the subject of this research, and the research paradigm that motivates the research that is conducted. While acknowledging the author's personal experience and opinions of the travel selfie, the author considers her involvement as insight that shapes the potential of this study. This approach is described by Collins (2010) as an alternative to self-reflexivity because the researcher’s input is reflective of:

the unique interaction of the researcher and the research subjects, with the perhaps limited generalizability of the research findings, as a result. (p. 80)

While my active position within this research plays a key role in the process, the research philosophy also guides and informs the way in which methods are carried out and analyzed. According to Collins (2010), an Interpretivist philosophical perspective, subjectivity and shared experiences are just as social constructionism focuses on how meaning is developed through social relations and settings. The combination of the two ideologies complement this study of the travel selfie because image itself is motivated by individual feelings, while its use is widely practiced amongst communities. Thus, the methodology employed is not only relevant to this study, but it will support the use of the author’s research method, as will be elaborated in the next section.

5.1 Research method

With a qualitative approach, the process of establishing layers of meaning and knowledge is crucial. Ritchie (2003) proposes that the type of research and nature of the data in this research affects the selection of method. While the study is consistent with contextual research (Ritchie, 2003), a type of research that focuses on exploring how a phenomenon exists in contemporary culture, I find that my research questions support her understanding of the nature of data. This view is supported by Brennan (2012) as he posits that the “types of questions” (Brennan, 2012, p. 21) ultimately frame the study.

While the first research question uncovers the way in which the travel selfie is “framed” in contemporary media, I find that my investigation should focus on “naturally-occurring data” (Ritchie et al., 2013) that embodies the travel selfie phenomenon so that themes identified will provide more meaningful insight to the next method.

The last two research questions target a specific audience, “tourists” and “Instagram users”, which is more consistent with “generating data” (Ritchie et al., 2013). In this case, the data needs to be processed and interpreted by the target group in question so that the specific first-hand meaning is established.

Bearing this in mind, this study reviewed a variety of research methods and concludes that dispositive analysis is a useful methodology that allows the application of a theoretical research approach (i.e. dispositive analysis) as well as a practical research approach (i.e. interviews). While the research approaches are conducted in different ways, the research method is supported by a stable methodological framework that allows me to flexibly apply them to two types of research approaches. This will be clarified in the next section.

5.2 Dispositive analysis

A method inspired from Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis, dispositive analysis explores the assumption of “language as social practice” in critical discourse analysis (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Contrary to critical discourse analysis approaches that focus on the text as the main unit of language, Jäger and Maier’s (2009) approach to dispositive analysis analyzes how other elements, such as non-discursive practices and manifestations, contribute to a more holistic understanding of a discourse. According to Fairclough and Wodak’s (1997) description of Fairclough and his earlier overemphasis on linguistic analysis, recent critics have identified new approaches that support the framework.

One such critic is Caborn (2007) as he conceptualizes dispositive analysis according to three concepts, heterogeneity, semiology and power. While the three concepts provide useful insight to dispositive analysis, this study finds the concept of heterogeneity most applicable as it highlights the interconnectedness and plurality of meaning-making when knowledge is produced. She refers to Foucault’s assertion that the dispositive is a “decidedly heterogeneous ensemble” (p. 114) and provides examples cited by Foucault:

discourses, institutions, architectural structures, prescriptive decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral or philanthropic propositions, in short: words, but also what it not expressed in words. (Caborn, 2007, p. 114)

The variety of dispositive exemplified by Foucault articulates his refusal to limit non-discursive practices to any specific category, but to provide alternatives to different “discursive formations” (Caborn, 2007, p. 114). This strategy, according to Caborn (2007), is reflective of Foucault as it does not simply express that researchers should go outside the discourse, but he shows them how, by outlining the possibilities. The production of knowledge is also a combination of

meanings established from the various elements and a process that cannot be confined to any one dispositive (Caborn, 2007).

In order to summarize the approach, the simplified model below in Figure 1, describes a triangular process of how language, action and materializations form knowledge in the dispositive.



Figure 1. Adapted model from Jäger's "Dispositives" (Wodak and Meyer, 2001, p. 57)

In order to explain the model above and identify how this process is operationalized, this study applies Caborn's (2007) operationalization of the method. This process involves three categories, 1,2 and 3. Category 1 involves an application of discourse analysis as language is identified as the object of analysis. Category 2 takes into account how language is used and applied in social settings, i.e. person or thing performing the action. Last but not least, Category 3 draws attention to the way in which material objects are formed, i.e. the product (Caborn, 2007).

Thus, this methodology will shape the way in which the research study is designed in the following section.

5.3 Research design

Based on the nature of this study and the methodology that this research follows; the research design is organized into two stages. Stage 1 begins with application of dispositive analysis to a sample of YouTube videos and Stage 2 follows with interviews conducted amongst Instagram users.

5.3.1 Stage 1: Research approach to dispositive analysis

While my study explores contemporary media and culture, I find that it is necessary to focus on how one media type contributes to the topic and satisfies the scope and feasibility of a thesis such as this. As such, determining a media discourse was required before proceeding with the sampling and data collection.

5.3.1.1 Determining a media discourse – YouTube videos

With reference to my first research question that examines how the travel selfie is framed in contemporary media, choosing a media source was based on its relevance to current contexts. In addition, it is also ideal that the source contains discursive practices, non-discursive practices and manifestations (Jäger, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). By choosing a source according to that criteria, dispositive analysis can be carried out effectively. Due to the fact that travel selfies are discussed and produced on various digital media platforms, this search process needed to be narrowed down further. Inspired by Zila van den Born’s video of her fake holiday, visual media proved to be a useful format for illustrating the production of travel selfies. After browsing through various media sources that provide visual media, YouTube, proved to be one of the most popular video-sharing platforms that not only illustrate the travel selfie, but how it is used as a commodity. With that said, this thesis acknowledges the existence of other media platforms that provide comparable value, although YouTube proves to be most convenient for this thesis as well as the sampling method employed for this research.

5.3.1.2 Sampling of YouTube videos

After identifying YouTube as the chosen media platform for data collection, gathering sufficient data for a sample was necessary. Adapting Tracy’s (2012) sampling plan, this method adopts a convenience sample because it is “convenient, easy, and relatively inexpensive to access” (p. 135). This relatively flexible form of sampling is useful when determining which keywords are used and this was performed using a trial and error method. I began testing different keywords such as “travel selfie”, “travel selfie videos” and “how to take travel selfies” to find out what type of videos would surface. Ultimately, the keyword “how to take travel selfies” was used on 1 March 1, 2018. In comparison to the other keywords which provided with more search outcomes, this keyword was identified as the videos contained the most relevant content. As the videos revolve around travel selfie production and use of the travel selfie, this media content was clearly relatable to the travel selfie phenomenon. After sorting the results according to their relevance and focusing on videos over the past five years (2013–2015), a preliminary scan of the titles and description of the first 30 videos was conducted so as to confirm their relevance. Next, I eliminated videos that did not focus on travel selfies per se as well as similar videos uploaded by the same publisher. Finally, the first ten videos that surfaced on the list were selected as the final sample as this size proved to be most manageable based on the demands of this project.

Table 1. Sample of YouTube videos

Title:	Publisher:	Date published on YouTube:
1. Travel Tips: How to Take the Best Selfie Ever	Sonia Travels	11 September 2014
2. How to take solo travel photos (Tutorial)	Brooke Saward	16 March 2014

3. How to take your own Travel photos	THE BOLD BRUNETTE by Christina Galbato	30 October 2017
4. How to take an epic Selfie w/ Axel Chacon – Epic Selfie Guy	Alex Chacon	25 June 2015
5. How to take The Best Travel + Instagram Photos / Mo Explores	Mo Explores	21 March 2016
6. Travel Tip 101: How to take The Perfect Selfie when Solo Traveling	Bunny Plays Here	5 September 2017
7. How to Take Your Own Solo Travel Pics	Amanda Round the Globe	1 August 2016
8. How to take Incredible Travel Photos!!!	Fun For Louis	1 October 2016
9. How to Take Your Own Pictures when You're Travelling Alone	Uncle Zuan	20 December 2016
10. How to Use a Go Pro to Get Awesome Travel Photos – My Life's A Travel Movie	Alyssa Ramos	18 January 2016

5.3.1.3 Operationalization of dispositive analysis on YouTube videos

Once the sample of YouTube videos was collected, time was spent with reviewing the content and taking down notes. Then, dispositive analysis was applied so that meaningful data could be collected. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

5.3.1.4 Summary of stage 1

Once the data was organized according to the steps described above, the findings (which are presented in the next section) were used to identify key frames for the next research method. The frames identified include:

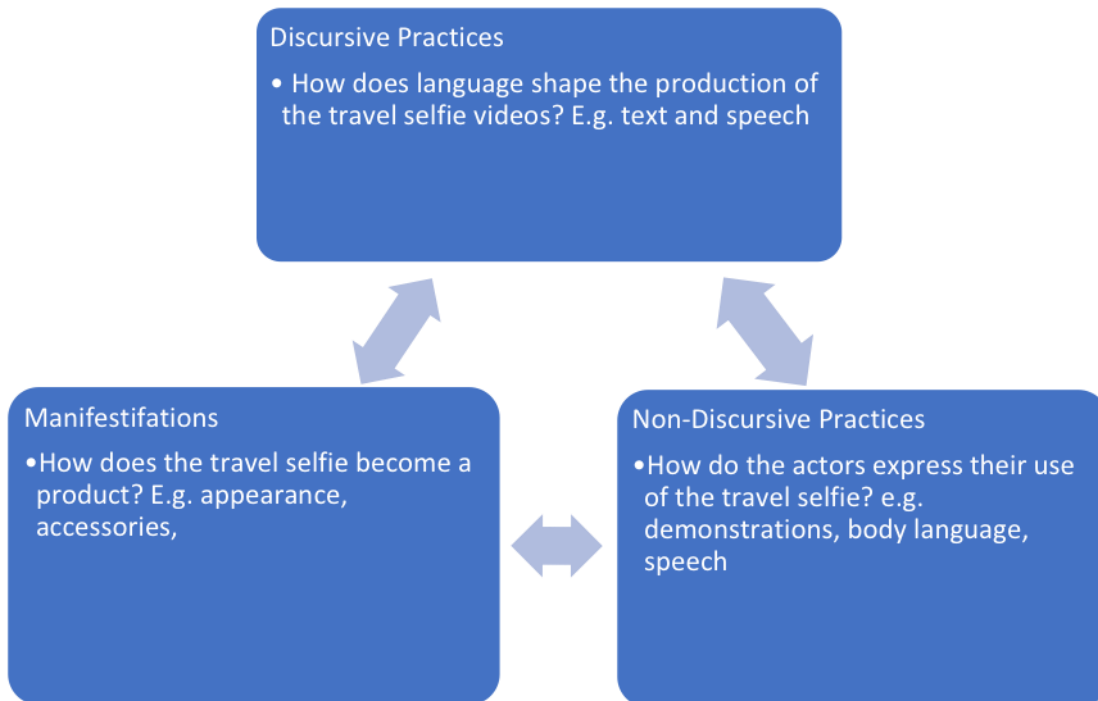


Figure 2. Dispositive analysis model applied to YouTube videos

- A. Relationship between tourist and photography
- B. Production of the travel selfie: Techniques
- C. Travel selfie as a commodity
- D. Use of the travel selfie image

Drawing on the interpretivist and phenomenological philosophical approaches that guide this thesis (Collins, 2010), the data from this research method is valued as new knowledge that contributes to the subsequent stages of this research.

5.3.2 Stage 2: Interview research approach

This stage is directed at exploring the last two research questions, particularly examining how Instagram users interpret and use travel selfies and the impact of the travel selfie expansion on tourist experiences. By focusing on interviews, my research is able to establish new meaning from individuals that are part of the Instagram community, and representative of modern tourists as they embrace contemporary practices and adapt to the culture. This not only contributes to a more nuanced and meaningful discussion, but it also resonates with the methodology used for this study as the Instagram users are users of the object in this study. i.e. travel selfies. The next sections justify the choice of using interviews as a research approach, Instagram as the social media channel, Instagram users as target audience for my interviews, the sampling procedures, and conducting the interviews.

5.3.2.1 Interview structure

Using analysis of the data from the earlier method, this method attempts to use the key issues discussed and present them to the target audience using qualitative interviews, so that meanings from this target audience will provide insight to this discussion.

Qualitative interview is a research method that makes use of conversation to “engage” with human issues (Brinkmann, 2013). The use of “conversation” is a natural tool when relating with humans because we communicate through conversation in our everyday lives. However, this line of inquiry is organized to obtain specific information and therefore referred to as “professional interaction” (Kvale & Flick, 2007, p.7). Based on this understanding, interview is deployed strategically as a research method.

The advantage of interviewing is not only reinforced by its conversational roots, but its ability to engage in discourse naturally. Tracy (2012) describes how the interaction between the researcher and interviewee “provides opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation via a path that is organic, adaptive, and oftentimes energizing” (p. 132). Through this shared participation in the interview process, the type of data collected is as important as the way in which knowledge was generated (Tracy, 2012). Another value with using interviews is the way in which it reinforces and problematizes other data (Tracy, 2012). This quality is particularly relevant to the choice of this research tool and organizing it as the second method, as this structure allows for a more meaningful engagement and analysis of data.

Like other research methods, semi-structured interviews are planned and requires a process of preparation. While various approaches to interview designs are available, this thesis complies with Tracy’s approach as the stages are systematically and purposefully organized using a qualitative inquiry. In summary, Tracy (2012) encourages the researcher to critically think about his or her own research study and choose between different interview design approaches accordingly.

According to Tracy (2012), the first step in this process is devising a sampling plan that allows the researcher to establish “who” this study focuses upon. Next, the structure of the interview i.e. structured or less structured determines “how” information is acquired from the sample interview respondents identified. Then, the type of interview (which is decided upon based on the earlier factors) characterizes the nature of the questions and flow of conversation in the interview. Lastly, the stance of the interviewer presents a framework of assumptions that clarify how the interview data is evaluated and analyzed in the findings section.

Thus, qualitative interviews connect the data collected in the earlier dispositive analysis with individuals who are relevant to the travel selfie phenomenon. This will be illustrated in greater detail in the next section, which outlines how the methods are operationalized in this thesis.

5.3.2.2 Selecting Instagram

One of the first steps towards proceeding with this method is identifying the target audience and selecting a sample for the method to be carried out. After reviewing social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and examining the role of the travel selfie in them, Instagram proved to be most appropriate because this platform focused on how the Instagram

user portrayed the travel selfie image and stimulated discourse with other Instagram users about the subject through the various features Instagram contains. The combination of representing the travel selfie and connecting the image to the wider practice that is exemplified through user interaction proved that this social media channel was most relevant to the context of this study.

5.3.2.3 Identifying interview respondents – Instagram users

After identifying Instagram as the medium for this study, finding images of travel selfies, and observing the travel selfie trend on Instagram, it became apparent that the search process using hashtags was an effective approach. After testing different hashtags as keywords, #travels selfie was used as the keyword hashtag, as it was most accurate in terms of the pictures that were generated.

After preliminary searches on Instagram for relevant images that fit the definition of the travel selfie, study continued with #travels selfie, as it generated the most number of data, 31 866 posts, that were focused on selfies taken by tourists during their travels. Although this search route yielded abundant data, a more systematic sorting approach was required so that a suitable sample could be obtained. Due to limitations of Instagram algorithms that prevent Instagram users from manually sorting the order of the posts, since Instagram recently decided to “show users the photos it thinks they want to see rather than those most recently posted” (McGoogan, 201), I browsed through the posts that appeared at the top of my search on that day (9 March 2017, 1pm) and began selecting a sample in that order.

5.3.2.4 Interview sampling plan

In order to proceed with this study, a sample strategy proved necessary to ensure that the research is purposeful. Due to the nature of the data in its predetermined order, convenience sampling proved to be the most useful strategy for this study. While the use of the hashtag, #travels selfie, was effective in providing me with various images that were categorized under this social media trend, a criterion was needed to select images that were reflective of travel selfies. The criteria devised is based on the definition of a selfie “[a] photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media” (Oxford Dictionaries), taken while the photographer is traveling.

- photograph must show the photographer taking the shot themselves (or with the support of selfie accessories)
- photograph should portray elements of traveling (e.g. landmark, local community, transport)
- the photographer should take up a dominant space in the photograph

Once the above criterion was established, 30 travel selfies were gathered from the range provided, and contact was made with the users who posted these pictures. Due to the regulations of Instagram, the respective users had to be “followed” to be able to send a personal message to the users via their Instagram accounts. This technicality also provided information about the Instagram user that came in handy when establishing contact.

Once the respective Instagram user of interest was “followed”, a message was sent via Instagram Message to the respective user. The message was framed as a short pitch, beginning with a brief introduction about myself, complimenting their interpretation of the travel selfie and its relevance to this thesis' research on the travel selfie, before finally expressing interest in interviewing them. Due to the limit in characters for messages in Instagram, the pitch was kept concise to as to appeal to their interest before revealing more details about the project and the interview (see Appendix 1).

A total of 63 Instagram users were reached out to over a period of three weeks. Due to uncertainty about the response rate, the goal was to appeal to as many relevant users as possible, so as to obtain between 10 – 12 respondents for the interviews. Of the 63 users that were approached online, 20 users expressed interest. While my follow up conversations emphasized a preference for personal interviews via Skype, an approach that I considered to be more useful for semi structure interviews, not all users were available or comfortable with this arrangement. As such, email interviews were used as an alternative approach because it proved to be most convenient and reliable for verifying information. Unfortunately, unforeseen circumstances reduced the final sample to 9 interview respondents. Six users took part in the email interviews and three users were interviewed in person via Skype, as seen in the table below. It is important to clarify that in spite of the unanimous consent by the respondents to go on record for this study, this investigation involved a close examination of their Instagram accounts. To respect the privacy of respondents and ethical considerations, pseudonyms are used for the respondents.

Table 2. Interview respondents' profiles

Name:	Age	Nationality:	Occupation:
1. Kathy	Late 20s	Australian	Blogger
2. Holly	Mid 20s	New Zealander	Administration
3. Diana	Early 20s	Indonesia	Airport Ground Handling Staff
4. Amelie & Jack	Mid 20s	UK- English	Previously: PR & Social Media Manager, Retail Manager
5. Mickey	20s	Indian	University Student

6. Anna	30s	Indian	Software Engineer
7. Billy	Late 20s	Australian	Administration & Student
8. William	Early 30s	American	Pharmacist
9. Jeffrey	Late 30s	Egyptian/Italian/American	IT

5.3.2.5 Planning the interviews

Once the sample was confirmed, preparing the interviews was necessary so that they could be carried out effectively. Deciding on a semi-structured interview was strategic because this less structured approach enabled the use of the same data analysis method as before, to frame the interview guide. In order to establish how travel selfies are perceived by Instagram users, asking the target audience directly will benefit my thesis with firsthand insight about this discourse.

The relatively unrestricted setup with semi-structured interviews demands key focus on the type of interview questions and the way in which they flow, highlighting the importance of constructing an effective interview guide. One of the first steps in this stage included implementing the four themes identified in the summary of the dispositive analysis as a framework and including questions that were inspired from the YouTube videos. While the interview guide (refer Appendix 2) provides an outline with the different themes, the interviews were planned to be conducted with some flexibility to include prompt questions and/or follow up questions to clarify where needed.

Towards the end of the preparation, it was critical for me to examine my role in this research and how I may have consciously or subconsciously affected the interview process. Bearing in mind that I started off this thesis with a skeptical attitude to the travel selfie, I channel this sense of uncertainty towards a determination to finding out the effects of the travel selfie by asking more questions.

5.3.2.6 Conducting the interviews

Due to the fact that six individuals preferred email interviews and three opted for Skype interviews, conducting the interviews required two formats.

The email interviews did not require me to actively participate, as the interview guide (Appendix 2) was sent as soon as the respondent agreed to it. While this set-up allowed me to focus on scheduling my time for the Skype interviews, the email interviews demanded more follow ups.

For example, reminding the respondents to complete the interviews, or clarifying questions that they encountered while answering the questions. Although this was time consuming, the provided data was first-hand and in a text format, and therefore did not require transcription as compared to the Skype interviews.

Scheduling the Skype interviews required patience from both me and the respondents as all of them were living outside of Sweden and in different time zones. Once the interview date and time was fixed, unforeseen circumstances had to be managed, e.g. poor internet connection, last minute delays etc. Once the technicalities were resolved and the interviews began, it was important for me to introduce myself and my project as well as to develop a comfortable tone and atmosphere so that the interviews could be carried out comfortably.

5.3.2.7 Operationalizing dispositive analysis methodology on interviews

Once all the interviews were collected and Skype interviews were transcribed into texts, the dispositive analysis model was operationalized to the data.

6. Ethics

Once data was collected and gathered, reflection and ethical consideration was applied to the study so as to ensure objectivity and consistency. This stage is crucial before analysis is performed because ethical issues may affect the way in which data is valued and interpreted.

Drawing on insight from Collins (2010), text and visual research require a suitable ethical approach so that data is approached purposefully. While she proposes various approaches, my thesis aligns with the non-consequentialist approach, which states that attention is devoted only to “the end product of that action and not the consequences of it” (p.83). This framework is implemented because of the topic of the travel selfie and the increasing controversy that dominates media, that results in more critical views about this phenomenon. While I have acknowledged my skeptical views in the beginning, I was committed to raising questions about controversial issues surrounding the travel selfie and directing them to the individuals they supposedly affect. With that mindset, it was important for me to stay focused on the outcome of the research and not get distracted by other conflicting knowledge.

The next aspect worth of ethical consideration is the use of interviews in this research. According to Ritchie (2003), the relationship between the researcher and respondent is shaped in line with the research study. As such, negotiating access is a fundamental element that allows for data to be gathered in a fair manner. This is particularly relevant to the choice of using Instagram as a social media context. In order to explore the #travelselfie hashtag, I made a conscious decision to use her personal Instagram account instead of creating a research user account.

In spite of the risk of subjecting myself to invasion of my personal privacy, this decision was motivated by my personal interest in this research and a tactic that I presumed would be advantageous when I approached the Instagram users, i.e. “followed” them on Instagram. Due to not having prior relations with the users, as they were sorted according to Instagram’s algorithms (McGoogan, 2011), I found that using my personal account would motivate this research and initiating contact with the users. This was reinforced with an Instagram message that was formulated as a pitch, with the purpose of seeking their interest and willingness to participate in the interviews.

Informed consent was also an important stage for me and this was expressed either in text (as seen in the interview guide) for the email interviews and articulated verbally during Skype interviews. This procedure was appreciated by several of the respondents although only one respondent exercised the right to go “off record” during the interview.

Based on the Interpretivist philosophy that focuses attention on how meaning is formed, the ethical considerations reassured my use of the various methods.

7. Findings and analysis

In this chapter, the data gathered from the findings were analyzed according to Stages 1 and 2. While this procedure may be arguably limiting in terms of identifying patterns across the data that can contribute to added meaning, I find that my position as a researcher became crucial to the way in which data was analyzed. Due to the fact that the YouTube videos were collected and reviewed first, I was already influenced by the content, and interpretations that were formulated. My opinions were then influenced after interviews were conducted, a process that undeniably effects the analysis of the data. Based on this self-reflexive position, this section provides the analysis from dispositive analysis of the YouTube videos in Stage 1 followed by an analysis of the Interview data in Stage 2.

7.1 Findings and analysis of Stage 1- YouTube videos

In this section, four key themes are identified as valuable to this study. The findings and analysis are integrated in each theme so that meaningful interpretations are brought to light.

7.1.1 Persuasion through the travel selfie

One of the most striking observations about the videos is the way in which the videos are structured to satisfy an audience need (Katz et al, 1973). In this case, YouTube users who want to know more about taking better travel selfies. A closer analysis of the way in which language is used to first categorize the videos and then used actively in the videos emphasize a commitment towards fulfilling gratifications sought by the audience and enhancing these gratifications by ensuring that the gratifications obtained are surpassed (Katz et al, 1973).

The categorization of the videos reveals a common trend towards presenting the videos as informative and learning material that viewers would gain knowledge from. This is exemplified through the use of textual descriptions such as “how to”, a conjunctive phrase used in all of the videos, that invite audiences’ engagement. Drawing on one of the assumptions in U&G theory, “Audiences are active”, I find that the use and positioning of “how to” at the beginning of the titles highlights how functional grammar (Halliday, 1994) engages the attention of the audience – by informing them about what they can do with the information presented, thus framing the videos as productive knowledge for the audience.

By developing an assertive approach, the videos strive to create a lasting impression in order to win over audiences. For example, three of the videos, (1, 5 and 6) use the superlatives “the best” or “the perfect” that grab the attention of audiences on first impression, thus suggesting how the videos seek to satisfy the desires of audiences incomparably. While the use of such persuasive language appears to be futile, as several videos are framed in the same way, the speakers in the videos handle the competitive nature of the travel selfie trend by maintaining an approachable tone and establishing personal relationships with the audience. This is portrayed through the use of greetings and the common appeal made by the speakers to their audiences to “subscribe” to their videos or channels, suggesting how a committed agreement and user loyalty is established.

Thus, the travel selfie is portrayed as a skill and knowledge that media can share with media user. However, media competition emphasizes how narrators use persuasive strategies to maintain viewership amongst its audiences.

7.1.2 Authentication and Pluralization of The Tourist Gaze

Bearing in mind that the YouTube videos are tutorials that focus on how to take travel selfies, the content of the videos, whether practical or theoretical suggest how users should employ different techniques to capture ideal shots, thus suggesting how the tourist gaze is designed and manipulated to produce travel selfies.

The practical approach adopted in Videos 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9 blur the boundaries between the media producer and tourist, which in turn effects the authenticity of the tourist gaze and experience depicted. This is exemplified in the videos as the narrators are filmed in a travel destination, suggesting how this film production engages YouTube viewers in a more intimate way as it appears as if the viewer is part of the “production” of the travel selfie. For example, in Video 3, Christina Galbato acts out the process of taking travel selfies and brings the viewer along on the journey, clarifying her thought processes such as informing viewers why she chose to shoot early during sunrise. On a similar note, Louis in Video 8 brings the viewer along on his vacation to the Maldives and includes footage of his girlfriend. On one hand, the videos relate with the staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) as the visual production is socially constructed as the narrators are enjoying a vacation and inspired by the beauty of their natural surroundings (Urry and Larsen, 2011). On the other hand, the narrators are tourist experts who aim to reproduce new objects of the tourist gaze as the production of the travel selfie is designed for media audiences, thus questioning the authenticity of their tourist gaze that is projected for media audiences.

In contrast, Videos 1, 2, 5, and 10 portray the narrators as tourist experts and media producers within contemporary settings. This technique projects a pluralistic tourist gaze that can be applied to different media audiences. Drawing on the assumption that “only audiences can assess the value of media” in U&G theory (Katz et al, 1973), this approach is more focused on the travel selfie process and techniques, rather than attracting the media user with the content. In the theoretical approach, the narrators are explicitly part of the postmodernist culture and project a gaze that is “mechanically, electronically and digitally reproduced and distributed” (Urry and Larsen, 2001, p. 98). For example, the use of introductory captions in Video 1 and opening scenes in video 4, suggest how the videos are composed for a specific purpose. In Video 5, the narrator maintains eye contact with the viewer as the camera focuses only on the narrator’s face and upper body. While this may appear to be engaging, the camera technique restricts the viewer’s attention to her speech and content. The theoretical approach to the production of the travel selfie is reliant on digital affordances as a means of communicating with the audiences, thus reiterating what Urry and Larsen (2011) assert about the tourist gaze being filtered by modern digital photography and pluralized for the different audiences.

Hence, the approach adopted to present travel selfies to media audiences is a strategical decision as the construction of the tourist gaze motivates the way in which audiences engage with the respective media content.

7.1.3 The money-making travel selfie commodity

The videos portray various ways in which different individuals create travel selfies by deploying marketing approaches. For example, Alex Chacon, a renowned celebrity within the travel, health and fitness and social media sector, is the narrator in Video 4. Similarly, Video 1 is narrated by Sonia Gils, an influential travel vlogger and media celebrity, suggesting how celebrity profiles are used to gain the attention of media audiences. By theorizing the travel selfie videos in the concept of commodification, it is apparent that commercialized elements such as celebrity image and product endorsements like “Canon G7X, Fujifilm X-T2, DJI Mavic Pro” in Video 3, underscore the way in which the ‘exchange value’ (Heinrich, 2012) of the tutorials dominate in this consumerist culture.

While the videos portray the narrators as spokespersons for the respective products and potentially get compensated for their role in product advertisements. This is exemplified by how Alex Chacon in Video 4 writes, “Big thanks to LG for the great phone!” in the description of the video. His dedication towards commercialism resonates with stronger consumerist patterns. One such pattern that is applicable to the tutorials is the shared engagement, which can also be interpreted as ‘commodity fetish’ (Heinrich, 2012). The overwhelming appeal to satisfying commercial interests is reflective of the way in which the narrators promote branding and its ability to satisfy the audiences’ needs (Billig, 1999). This is clearly exemplified in Video 1, as Sonia Gill systematically connects the functions of the products with what the viewer needs, suggesting how the tutorials challenge artistic notions of freedom and self-expression associated with taking travel selfies, by confining the viewers to capitalistic authority.

Although the tutorials align themselves with product endorsements and the consumerist culture, the videos also recognize the limitations of travel selfie equipment by shedding light on alternative techniques that enable the production of travel selfies. For example, the narrator in Video 6 explicitly describes how she “travels with a tripod and two self-timers but sometimes it still doesn’t work out though” (BunnyPlaysHere, 2017). This admission suggests how the narrator acknowledges the imperfections of travel selfie commodities. Moreover, Video 6 is unique in its content, as it encourages and inspires viewers to use their natural surroundings, instead of a tripod, to take travel selfies.

Nonetheless, the power of capitalist forces appears to dominate the way in which travel selfies are positioned to the viewers. This is reflective in the abundant use of product links at the end of the videos, which are directed at the audiences. For example, Video 6 includes this message in the producer’s video description: (Amanda Round the Globe, 2016):

Note: the links above are affiliate links. This means that I get some kind of benefit from you using them. You do not pay extra for this, it's just the link that I was given to promote. It is also a really kind way to support me.

Based on the message above, it is apparent that the narrator is capitalizing on the support of her viewers, an approach that is consistent with Appadurai's (1994) categorization of commodity exchange that embodies contrasting appreciation for the value of objects. In applying this perspective to Video 6, the narrator takes advantage of the support from viewers, by providing product links that direct viewers to purchase the products from a specific website, in exchange for her to gain personal profit. While she is transparent regarding her motivations, the approach also suggests how this tutorial is symbolic of a community of individuals, who share a common interest in travel selfies and photography. Bearing in mind that the viewers do not pay to watch the tutorials and get tips for taking travel selfies, using the links can be seen as a favor or gifting (Appadurai, 1994). In this situation, developing social relations is prioritized, which in turn resonates with Urry and Larsen's (2011) reference to Bourdieu's cultural capital. Thus, the commodification of the travel selfie inspires cultural capital for tourists as they support one another and develop creative photographic practices.

7.1.4 Summary of findings and analysis of YouTube videos

Based on the findings and analysis of YouTube videos, travel selfies are processed through media and commercial workings that influence how travel selfies are positioned to media audiences. This process is useful for the next research approach as I compare how the travel selfie is valued by Instagram users.

7.2 Findings and analysis of interviews

In this section, the analysis from the interviews is organized into three key themes that bear relevance to this study.

7.2.1 Objectification of the travel selfie

The travel selfies project a desire to express oneself. A popular focus amongst the respondents is to highlight popular "landmarks" (Diana, Anna) or "scenery" (Mickey) that form the "background" (Jeffrey, Amelie & Jack, William) of the travel destination that they are in. The focus on the natural environment resonate with Urry and Larsen's (2011) claim about how tourists are captivated with the "landscape" as it is "a human way of visually forming, through cultivated eyes, skillful techniques and technologies of representing, a physical environment" (p. 110). This is exemplified by William, Anna and Kathy, as they describe how they seek to "capture" the environment in the travel destination, a word choice that provokes a possessive use of the camera (Sontag, 1977) in order to select an ideal image of the environment (Urry and Larsen, 2011).

Although tourist consumer behavior illustrates how control is displaced, the power interplay develops when local people in travel destinations are included. While the respondents acknowledge that local inhabitants are "important" (Diana), their perceptions of the local people reiterate the Western perception of authenticity (Cohen, 1988). For example, Mickey refers to local people as "tribe people" and Diana describes how she wants to "introduce them", showing how the individuals associate their roles as tourists to be superior as they have the potential liberate them through photography. However, the fact that both Mickey and Diana come from less developed home countries, their impressions about the local people challenges Western

notion as social class and education take precedence in the way the respondents value local people in their travel destinations. On the other hand, Western tourists express their intrigue about the local people, although their approaches reveal a level of self-reflexivity that challenges Western narrow-mindedness. For example, Kathy, a travel blogger, always requests for permission before taking travel selfies with local people and Billy does not take travel selfies “with strangers or the bartender” as he associates this act with being “tokenistic”. The attentiveness expressed by the respondents suggest that the tourists are aware about the exploitive behavior of Western tourist consumption (MacCannell, 1973) and its effects on local communities.

Contrary to earlier research that imply how travel selfies are narcissistic (Paris and Pietschnig, 2015), the respondents articulate how over-emphasis on appearances are less significant. For example, Amelie instinctively giggles after responding that she looks at herself first after taking a travel selfie and Holly states that she “does not want to sound to [sic] pretentious” when she identifies her face as the most important element of the travel selfie. The reactions from Amelie and Holly, two young women in their mid-20s, challenge studies suggesting that young women are more likely to be more interested in self-objectification (Lyu, 2016). Instead, a sense of self-consciousness is predominant amongst the female respondents, and it is translated into an artistic expression. For example, Anna asserts how “your face needs to communicate something” as “expressions and eye contact is [sic]important for travel selfies to be creative” and Kathy actively challenges her shy personality by being a travel blogger and “putting [her]self out there posting selfies”. In short, the female tourists not only defy negative stereotypes about young women who use travel selfies, but their travel selfie practices suggest how they develop a more inspiring voice in society.

Although the respondents include their faces or themselves in their travel selfies, the respondents are more interested in how their social media followers interpret their experiences by illustrating a visual narrative on social media. On one hand, the travel selfie image comprises of specific elements that invite an abstract interpretation, yet the respondents shift the focus onto rhetorical features in the narratives. For example, Anna wants users to focus on her Instagram captions, which function as “clues” for Instagram to make out her experiences. Moreover, Anna’s use of social media features such as the Instagram caption descriptions, support Carson and Penning’s (2017) argument that self-representation in the travel selfie involves more than just focusing on the individual, as it involves utilizing different techniques to adapt the aesthetics of the image so that it complements the style and narrative that the individual wants to portray on social media.

Nonetheless, the individualistic approach to constructing a visual narrative is undermined by the respondents’ vulnerability when they asked about how they handle feedback from other social media users. This is exemplified from the overwhelming consensus that they are happy when their travel selfies are “liked” by other social media users or when they receive compliments. While some respondents attempt to justify their emotions by rationalizing:

Anna: It’s nice but I don’t let it get to my head

Holly: It's definitely a boost to my confidence ... I'm sure we all like to be liked in one way or another, we're human! But I also try not to take it too seriously, it is social media after all so it's important to stay grounded

Amelie and Jack: It's always nice to get compliments, a bit of an ego-boost but we try not to take them too seriously

William: I like the likes, I do not need/want the comments

The comments above suggest how the respondents trivialize compliments from social media users so as to portray themselves as confident individuals who are not easily distracted by the charm of social media. The social media 'charm' is reiterated by Kim and Tussyalidah (2012) who claim that contemporary tourists depend on their social media network to validate their traveling experiences as their traveling experiences become more positive when their posts receive more "likes" on social media. On the other hand, their attitudes resonate with insistence to remain objective, suggesting how the respondents exercise self-reflexivity and are not victims of social media, a unique quality of modern tourists in contemporary culture.

7.2.2 Expanding the travel selfie practice into subjective tourist approaches

Drawing on the importance of taking photographs when traveling, the travel selfie resembles a form of tourist photography that allows the individuals to bring out emotion in their subjects. While the interviews suggest that travel selfies attempt to objectify the natural surroundings, the respondents use different techniques to bring out an emotional quality or subjectivity in their respective objects.

The YouTube videos in the earlier method suggest a variety of angles, camera positions and other techniques that individuals learn so that they can take the "best" (Video 5), "perfect" (Video 6) and "incredible" (Video 8) travel selfies. However, the respondents appear to be more interested in how their face communicates an emotion for the image. While most of the respondents find that looking at the camera suggests that they are more "engaged in the process" (Billy) and allows them to convey a more "natural" (Holly) experience. The concerted effort to look at the camera also indicates how individuals seek to control and manipulate the emotion they want to convey in the image. Conversely, Holly rationalizes that she looks at the camera when taking a travel selfie because looking away "feels more staged". This viewpoint however challenges a suggestion provided by the narrator in Video 5, who instead advises her viewers to look away from the camera because it portrays a more playful and less invasive tone for social media users who attempt to imagine themselves in those scenes. The contrasting attitudes towards the positioning of the face with respect to the camera suggests how facial expressions and poses in travel selfies communicate different impressions to others, thus differing from the intended reaction of the person taking the travel selfie.

On the other hand, the commitment towards stylizing travel selfies to achieve reactions from social media users depends on the traveling circumstances of the individuals. Drawing on the technical expertise provided by the narrators in the YouTube videos, three of the respondents

appear to share similar attention to procedural techniques so that they achieve the travel selfies that they want. This is exemplified in the comments below:

Kathy: Usually with a selfie stick and I look to the side or look away and let my hair flick to show a bit of movement

William: Normally it is the camera held up in the air, pointed slightly down

Amelie and Jack: The sun should always be behind the camera when taking the shot

The emphasis on specific stylistics resonates with the fact that those respondents were traveling when the interviews were conducted and considered Instagram as an important tool for them to gain inspiration for their travel photography, as well as inspire others through their images. For instance, William, Kathy, Amelie and Jack were traveling during the interview and acknowledge their dependence on Instagram as an important tool to be inspired and inspire others through creative travel photographs. This resonates with Urry and Larsen's (2011) claim about how photography contributes to cultural capital, a way of developing social relations rather than focusing on personal gain.

7.2.3 The function of the travel selfie

The interviews reveal a general awareness about how travel selfie accessories enhance the quality of the travel selfie image; the respondents express different "use value" (Heinrich, 2012) for these commodities. Cost and convenience are identified as two factors that motivate the way in which the respondents value the commodities. Mickey explicitly states that Go Pro cameras are "very costly" so he opts for cheaper or free alternatives such as "selfie sticks", or he takes the shots with his hands. While "use value" is valued in terms of price for Mickey, Amelie and Jack associate usefulness with convenience. They own a Go Pro, extendable selfie sticks and a tripod, and find that this equipment comes in handy when they are traveling because they can take the pictures themselves, without having to ask others to help them, or be disappointed when the photos taken by others do not meet their expectations.

The way in which the travel selfie commodity is valued differently resonates with what Urry and Larsen (2011) describe about contemporary practices in postmodernist cultures. The use of the travel selfie amongst the respondents fulfill unique needs and expectations of the individual. This is articulated by Billy as he distinguishes between spontaneous travel selfies taken by individuals and those who "are trying to start a business or blog or something that they're paid to do", suggesting how monetary compensation makes it more acceptable for travel selfies and its accessories to be appreciated as a commodity. This attitude of being rewarded is similarly shared by Holly who associates the need for travel selfie products when individuals seek to create "the perfect travel selfies for social media to get more followers". In this case, the desire for social return is more consistent with Appadurai's framework (1994) about intracultural exchanges as the individual who posts the travel selfie is rewarded by acceptance from the #travels selfie community.

Therefore, the function of the travel selfie is unique to the individual and his or her desired experience, which in turn influences the way in which the travel selfie commodity is valued by tourists.

7.2.4 Summary of findings and analysis of Interviews

The use and value of the travel selfie is interpreted differently amongst the various Instagram users, although the collective use of the #travelf selfie hashtag on Instagram underscore a common bond and sense of belonging to an online community. The results from the Interview also suggest that the commodification of the travel selfie is recognized, while appreciated differently by the individuals. The findings from both stages will be used to gather insight according to the objectives of this study in the next chapter.

8. Discussion

In Chapter 7, my thesis connects the analysis from the findings in both research methods to shed light on the research questions that guide this study. In doing so, I will show how knowledge is acquired from this research process.

8.1 Mediatized travel selfie – negotiating between creativity and capitalism

Contrary to research that associate travel selfie behavior with narcissistic personalities (Paris and Pietschnig, 2015, Sung et al, 2016; Lyu, 2016), this study arguably suggests that travel selfies are motivated by creative efforts at integrating travel experiences with self-expression. The emphasis on creativity is exemplified through the variety of instinctive techniques adopted by the interview respondents. For example, Holly who found a stick that she used as a tripod, and Anna described her manmade “ad-hoc selfie stand” using stones. These examples further resonate with the tutorial YouTube videos that provide travelers with tips on how to be creative with their travel selfies while on vacation. This is exemplified in Video 7 as Amanda provides a “professional course on how to take your own Instagram worthy travel pictures (without a tripod and without asking strangers who don't know how to work a camera)” (YouTube video description, Amanda Round the Globe, 2016). Thus, the techniques highlight how the individuals use and rely on their natural environments to create a travel selfie spontaneously.

Nonetheless, the travel selfie derives from a unique and intimate tourist experience that challenge the influence of media in contemporary culture. Drawing on Urry and Larsen’s (2011) description of the mediated tourism and the “mediatised gaze” that encourages the tourist gaze upon mediated objects, my interviews with the respondents suggest that modern tourists are more inspired to contribute rather than merely accept media influences. For example, Amelie and Jack express how they select “colorful” and “extraordinary” travel selfies for their social media because they inspire “more engagement”. This desire resonates with Dinhopl and Gretzel’s (2015) claim that contemporary tourist photography has shifted the focus from capturing the extraordinary to developing social relationships. It also relates to U&G theory (Katz et al. 1973) that suggests how media today shifts the power from media to the media audience with new media and the increase of interactivity (Ha and James, 1998; Ruggiero, 2000). Thus, the travel selfie is not just a product of media influences, but a way for individuals to revolutionize the mediatized environment.

While the travel selfie is inspired by individual creativity, the expansion of the travel selfie commodity is designed to satisfy social media expectation rather than the individual. This is exemplified through the consistent titles across the YouTube tutorials that are categorized as “how-to videos” on the subject of taking travel selfies. This communicative approach aligns with commercial tactics that highlight how YouTube, a mainstream media, manages competition so as to gratify different audience needs (Katz et al, 1973) as well as the demands of social media today. The use of commercial influence challenges traditional perceptions that suggest it is destructive and corruptive (Greenwood, 1977). Instead, the use of such features allows travel selfies to exist on media such as YouTube where media users can access and learn more about this

photographic practice without any cost incurred. The focus on creativity and developing the travel selfie for social media is reflective of Urry and Larsen's (2011) claim about Bourdieu's cultural capital, as the travel selfie promotes social relations through its creative appeal.

8.2 Emancipation of the travel selfie

The travel selfie culture is defined by branding and product endorsement, a relationship that underscores how the travel selfie trend is subject to market forces. The tutorials are not only created by their respective narrators, but they are also affiliated with the narrators' media channels. For example, Video 1 is part of Sonia Travel and Video 3 is part of the channel THE BOLD BRUNETTE by Christina Galbato, suggesting how the videos are "branded" by their narrators who impart their social media influence into the tutorial content. This can be understood as a media strategy to attract audiences as well as maintain viewership. For example, there exists an option for viewers to "subscribe" to the channels, a feature that Sonia Gils in Video 1 promotes repeatedly during the tutorial. On one hand, her active appeal to viewers reflects her enthusiasm about her YouTube channel and efforts to persuade audiences to continue with her channel, given the competition that exists in the media industry (Katz et al, 1973). On the other hand, the use of "subscription", a commercial monetary tactic, resonates with the "commodity fetish" (Heinrich, 2012). This is illustrated through the way in which Sonia Gils shifts between her role as a passionate travel photographer who genuinely wants to share her expertise with others into a strategic businesswoman who is captivated by the capitalistic appeal. By suggesting that the YouTube videos serve economic interests and are a part of the materialistic market industry, the travel selfie is projected as a commodity for media users.

Nonetheless, the persuasive attempts at convincing individuals to consume travel selfie products in the YouTube videos proves to be futile when Instagram respondents discern and stereotype such commodities as commercialized travel selfies. Although the respondents recognize the professional capabilities of travel selfie equipment such as Go Pro, tripods and selfie sticks, the use of these equipment is more applicable for marketable functions. This is reiterated by Billy who equates the use of accessories with individuals who are "trying to start a business ... or something they're paid to do" suggesting how commoditized travel selfies is purposeful when it's "exchange value" (Heinrich, 2012) is defined in monetary compensation. An example of this is Kathy who works as a travel blogger and owns a significant amount of travel accessories that is presumable used for her work.

While monetary compensation plays a vital role in the consumption of travel selfie products, non-monetary rewards also motivate tourist consumptive behaviors. For example, Kathy justifies the value of travel selfie accessories for those who want "perfect travel selfies for social media so that [they] can get more followers", suggesting how media attention is gratifying and supports consumptive patterns. On a similar note, Kathy's occupation as travel blogger and Amelia and Jack's mission to travel the world and document their journeys on social media motivate their consumption of travel selfie products as these two respondents own the most number of accessories out of the respondents in the sample group. In contrast, the travel selfie is representative of a personal memory that seeks to preserve the tourist experience at that point of time and the use of spontaneous set ups. For example, the manmade tripod constructed out of

stones (Anna) and a stick utilized as a tripod (Holly) shows how commodified products inspire tourists to reproduce alternatives when the need arises.

creativity is not only restricted to the technical process of using the camera or taking the shot, as respondents devote significant attention to how they express their travel experiences. The face is identified as the expressive tool for the female respondents, Diana, Amelia, Holly and Anna, suggesting how the expressive element is more prevalent amongst female tourists. This observation challenges Lyu's (2016) study about how female tourists who take and share travel selfies on social media subject themselves to self-objectification due to appearance dissatisfaction and appearance surveillance. In contrast, this study characterizes the women as confident individuals who demonstrate awareness about their ability to express themselves, and the value this adds to the image. For example, Anna allows herself to appear silly by making a "funny face", emphasizing her self-confidence in portraying a certain tone to her image. Diana similarly focuses on her "face expressions" when checking her travel selfies and Holly explains how one's "face also expresses a lot about the environment and destination", suggesting how one's communicative potential adds to the perspective of the image. Although one may argue that the women's desired expressions conceal the authenticity of the image, Amelia clarifies that the look should be "natural" so it does not look like "one is trying too hard", thus reinforcing the importance of maintaining an unpretentious tone in the travel selfies.

8.3 Designing the travel selfie gaze for social media

The travel selfie that is projected on social media is symbolic of travel selfie practices that are more consistent with social expectations rather than personal expression. This resonates with Urry and Larsen's (2011) claim about the socially constructed tourist gaze and the need to meet societal expectations. For example, the respondents distinguish between travel selfies that they choose to share and not share on social media. The desire to present the ideal versions of oneself on social media is articulated by selecting "the best" (Holly, Kathy) versions of themselves on this online platform. Contrary to research that suggest that such attitudes are representative of narcissistic behaviors and self-objectification on social media (Paris & Pietschnig, 2015; Lyu, 2016), I find that the individuals react as postmodernist individuals who strive to compete in an increasingly visible country.

On one hand, the ability for individuals to share images of themselves on social media suggests personal empowerment, but this freedom is also regulated by the online platform. For example, William recognizes how travel selfies can be organized according to "categories" and James explains how images used on Instagram need to be "presentable", reinforcing how the individuals comply with the systems of this social media platform. Similarly, the demands of social media are resonated in the YouTube videos as the narrators are representative of social media and promote techniques to constructing travel selfies that adapt to the culture of social media.

Conversely, the culture of social media is defined by the community of tourists that ultimately determine how travel selfies are portrayed. Social media trends such as #travelselfie not only encourage individuals to share their tourist images but the collection of images on this media

platform subsequently become inspirational content for tourists. This is expressed by Amelia and Jack as they describe how they “researched” social media prior to their travels so that they could learn about existing travel selfies and attempt to capture new and refreshing ones. This is reiterated by Anna as she discusses how the lack of specification for taking travel selfies encourages tourists such as herself to be more creative when taking these shots. However, she also adds that “criteria” will encourage more creativity and variety because people are keen “to explore beyond those limits.”

Criteria on social media is representative of interactivity and user engagement that shape the way in which travel selfies develop and motivate trends. This connects with U&G theory that supports how the active media user is empowered with more control through digital enhancements (Ruggiero, 2000), emphasizing how travel selfies encourage communication between users. Instagram is a distinct social media platform that not only encourages individuals to post pictures but also react to pictures by clicking on a heart that “likes” the image and comment boxes that symbolize different features of communication. While most of the respondents suggest that the compliments provide them with emotional acknowledgement, Anna regards this feedback as constructive feedback that enable her to improve the quality of her images, showing how communication shapes the way in which social media users develop their everyday lives as individuals.

9. Conclusion

This study sheds insight about how the travel selfie phenomenon gains increasing autonomy amongst the tourist community as it continues to develop in contemporary culture. While the act of taking a travel selfie is motivated by a spontaneous and creative impulse, the travel selfie has developed into a popular discursive practice amongst modern tourists and a commodity that is actively marketed in contemporary societies. The expansion of the travel selfie as a commodity and social media trend, #travelfie, reinforces the potential of this phenomenon and its relevance within wider academic as well as interdisciplinary studies.

Contrary to criticism about the narcissistic and destructive selfie culture, the travel selfie is becoming increasingly valuable within different academic disciplines. The use of the travel selfie as a marketing tool for promoting tourist attractions emphasizes how the travel study is applicable within the field of tourism management. In addition, the growth of the travel selfie hashtag (#travelfie) affirms how social media trends inspire and connect communities of practice. In line with the approach of my thesis, I propose that the travel selfie should be studied and assessed across different fields of studies, such as tourism management and media and communications, so that a more holistic understanding of this phenomenon is produced.

While this study explores the impact of the travel selfie on tourist experiences by focusing on a community of Instagram users, further research is necessary to understanding the complexity of tourist experiences. A potential area of interest that could not be discussed extensively in this thesis is the current shift from travel selfie images to travel selfie videos. The ability for tourists to take videos of themselves while traveling suggests how the travel selfie can be interpreted in different visual formations. Moreover, the development of social media platforms such as Instagram's latest feature, "Instagram Stories" encourage the use of travel selfie videos as social media users can differentiate the way in which they produce and share their travel narratives with the public. To investigate this trend, more ethnographic research methods could be employed, such as the use of focus groups amongst Instagram users, so that more meaningful interpretations about the travel selfie and its impact on contemporary tourists can be established.

In summary, the rise of the travel selfie inspires new ways of thinking and expressing oneself through creative use of digital media and contemporary practices.

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11. Appendices

Appendix 1- Instagram Message “Pitch”

Hi,

I hope you're well

My name is Jessica Anthony and I'm a Media and Communications student completing my final Master Thesis Project, about the development of the Travel Selfie.

I came across your recent post with the hashtag, #travelselkie, (which really caught my attention in the way you used it) and I was wondering if you might be interested in doing a short online interview with me? While your willingness to participate will go a long way in helping me with my research, I also thought that it would be a great opportunity for us to chat, feel free to ask me some questions and perhaps get some useful information about how the travel selfie is changing in social media. I'm happy to accommodate to your preferences for the interview, either via Skype or I could provide you with the questions that you can answer in your own time.

I hope to hear from you soon!

Best Regards,

Jessica Anthony

Appendix 2: Interview guide used for both email and Skype interviews

First, I would like to inform you that proceeding with this email and answering the questions below gives me consent to use your feedback STRICTLY for my research within the travel selfie. Your personal information will not be disclosed if you want to remain anonymous.

This interview will take about 15-20 minutes. The questions are divided into 5 sections and they include different areas of focus that are relevant to my research. Please write your answers directly after the questions.

Type of interview: Skype Interview/Email Interview

Personal details (Optional)

Name:

Age:

Nationality:

Occupation:

Your recent travel for pleasure:

Relationship between Tourist and Photography:

- Is photography important to you when you travel? Please explain why.
- When did you first discover the travel selfie? Please describe the experience.
- Do you consider travel selfies a form of photography? Explain.
- In your opinion, is the travel selfie a style of photography or a social trend (or both) ? Why?
- Why do you take travel selfies? Do you like to take them?

Production of the travel selfie: Techniques

- Do you have a specific way e.g. angle, style, that you take your travel selfies?
- When you take a travel selfie, do you look at the camera or away from the camera? Why do you do that?
- Do you use a specific move when you take travel selfies? E.g. Thumbs up, High 5, Peace sign etc. If yes, why do you do that?

- Is the natural environment important when you take your travel selfies? E.g. the scenery, local people, famous landmark. If Yes, how do you include them in your travel selfies?
- How important is lighting to your travel selfies? E.g. daylight, natural light, street lights.
- Are local people important in your travel selfies? Why, or why not?
- What do you look at first when you look at a travel selfie that you have first taken? Do you take many shots until you are satisfied?
- Describe the most important part of your travel selfies. E.g. Your face, People, A famous landmark.
- How creative are your travel selfies? Describe how you think they are creative.
- What do you want others to focus on when they see your travel selfies?

Travel selfie as commodity:

- Have you heard about different accessories that could help you take better travel selfies? E.g. Tripod, Go Pro Hero, extra self timer device, drone.. What do you think about such products?
- Do you bring any accessories besides the camera itself to take your travel selfie? Please give me some examples.
- Is it important to use a product (such as those mentioned above) to take a travel selfie? Please explain your answer.
- How do you stay updated with the latest technology and products for taking travel selfies?
- Do you find any media useful for tips on taking travel selfies?
- Do you follow any Instagram influencers or other social media influencers to improve the quality of your travel selfies?

Use of the travel selfie image:

- Do you share all your travel selfies on social media? If not, how do you select the travel selfies that you share with others?
- Are there specific types of travel selfies that you use and share on Instagram? How are they different?
- Is there a "perfect" travel selfie? What is a "perfect" travel selfie to you?

- Does it make you happy that your Instagram friends "like" your travel selfies or say nice things about your travel selfies?