

American college of Thessaloniki

Research 299

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Research topic:

*How does Instagram and TripAdvisor  
affect Generation Z:*

*The context of tourism and holiday travel*



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### Abstract:

Through an experimental study conducted among Generation Z participants, this paper introduces a comprehensive approach of the impact social media platforms such as TripAdvisor and Instagram has on the specific group regarding their travel decisions and choices. The study also analyzes the participants' involvement in sharing and receiving virtual travel information and content. The stages of before, during and after trip are explained and observed in detail in order to see the changes in behaviour of the attitude. The well developed social media has made it achievable to change the consumers' way of seeking information and making decisions. Decisions nowadays are based not only on word of mouth, but primarily in ratings, reviews, online recommendations and so on. Social media is becoming essential as a marketing tool and acts as a manager of tourist destinations, which directly impacts tourism markets. The role social media plays is crucial and impactful in many aspects of our lives, precisely in areas of social and cultural interaction.

*Key words: TripAdvisor, Instagram, Generation Z, tourism, travel decisions, social media effect, holiday travel*

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### 1) Introduction

#### General overview

The constant transformation of our society and the drastic evolution of technology has led to the development of new ways of communication. All this chain reaction (society-technology-communication) directly affects the consumers behavior. This paper's main focus falls on a specific group of the consumers and that is Generation Z and how Instagram and TripAdvisor affects their holiday planning choices and taste. All of the individuals born between 1995-2010 fall in the category of Generation Z. According to Francis and Hoefel (2018), Gen Z people are considered to be the true digital natives, as they have all been exposed to technology, social media and the internet from a very young age. This indicates that their choices as consumers might be highly or mildly affected by social media. Although there is not much information about Gen Z characteristics, what we know for sure is the environment they are brought in, which is characterized by high technology levels and highly sophisticated computer and media status. (Singh, 2014)

Social media is the contemporary and most modern way of communication between people all over the world. Furthermore, social media has become a beneficial factor for gathering information about consumers taste, knowledge, preferences and so on. Regarding tourism and holidays, the influence social media has in this sector is interpreted as exceptional. It is not hard to believe it, as we can see in everyday life how social media has affected people in many aspects of their lives.

Tourism is an intensive information and knowledge based industry which is profoundly affected by developments in technology, information and communication. In recent times, the tourism promotion and marketing in the travel industry have been changed greatly by social network websites, which are making a major contribution to the travel industry worldwide as well. (Nezakati et al., 2015)

It is evident that social media has affected and affects people in many aspects of their lives (clothes, style, hair, self care, etc), as well as people's choices regarding where they want to spend their holidays or in some other cases where they plan to book for their next trip. According to Fotis(2015), social media has significant importance because even those who are not experts can easily use the interfaces to connect and share with others. Additionally, it supplies online tools that give us the ability to share multimedia contents and most importantly it has eliminated geographical and time constraints like never before.

Gen Z people age range is 10-25 and most of the people in this category are graduating from college or universities and they are gradually becoming part of the workforce. (Francis and Hoefel, 2018) According to Singh's study (2014), studying Generation Z is necessary for the advertisers and marketers to analyze the user habits of the future leading generation. Logically, this information is valuable for the tourism sector and local businesses of a country.

## 2) Review of key literature

All the studies and reports that relate to the topic of this research agree to the fact that in today's society social media is an incredible influencer in consumers choices and life in general.

The literature reviewed assents some common uses of social media throughout the holiday planning process which are pre-trip phase, during trip phase and after trip phase.

Social media is becoming more and more involved in the planning process of people's holidays and trips. Since there is an increasing popularity of Instagram and TripAdvisor and other social media platforms as well, a number of academics came across the outstanding importance of these platforms in the travel planning process. (Sakshi and Pardeep, 2017) Moreover, Nezakati et al. (2015) pre-trip travel planning is a crucial part of the trip experience because in this phase travellers gather all the information needed in order to establish their travel/holiday/trip plan. Fotis ' study (2015) additionally results that online platforms, particularly TripAdvisor plays a major role in the early stage of one's travel plan.

Second step of the travelling process is the sharing experience of one's holiday or trip. Electronic word of mouth is brought closer to traditional word of mouth because of the enhanced social media usage, which is a critical information source for travel planning and decision making as well. (Nezakati et al., 2015)

The aftermath of travel consists of not only information sharing (pictures, videos, conversations,etc) but also regarding the experience of tourists, they feel the need to share their level of satisfaction through reviews and ratings on TripAdvisor. Self expression takes place in social media platforms especially in the after trip phase, which consists of comments and ratings, photos and even videos. (Fotis, 2015)

According to Fotis (2015), conducted an empirical study on 150 people on how social media is a great and informative tool for the tourism business; and additionally the result of his study brings four identifications of consumers behaviour: development of wants, generation of feelings, inspiration, actions. Pictures and videos online have a great impact on social media users as people share their everyday life, travelling and reviews and advice that is interesting and relatable to one's social network. Sema's (2013) key findings are positive influences on travel experiences shared behaviour within people are linked with travelling shared experiences on social media. Likewise, community group members who share the same experiences, beliefs and taste have the tendency to influence people engaging on social media. Hyan Yoo and Purifoy (2007) examined

the influence and impact of TripAdvisor on the trip planning process and their findings show how users of their platform analyze and evaluate reviews and how these reviews affect their travel choices and decisions. Shyle and Hysi (2015) found in their study that the majority of people who are the most active on social media are those who belong in the Generation Z and that people more and more are turning to social media and see it as a beneficial information platform for their future trips and holidays. Graphs are also provided and useful for this study. Munar and Jacobsen (2013) revealed in their studies the level of trustworthiness and safety of social media platforms, resulting in TripAdvisor being the most reliable and credible source of information. Commonly, younger tourists invest more time on social media by sharing and monitoring for the best alternatives as in where to spend their holidays, best prices, most visited locations and so on. Regarding the tourism sector, hotels, airlines corporations and travel agencies can highly benefit from this study, since they use the internet as a tracking means of their marketing and communications approaches. Moreover, there might be a way to improve the tourism services in social media from these travel organizations. (Sahin and Sengun, 2015)

In continuation, TripAdvisor is seen as a strong influencer for the economy overall, as its reviews have the power to boost the countries' economies. (Barrie, 2015)

### 3) Purpose of study

The purpose of this study is to depict and analyze how TripAdvisor and Instagram affect consumers behaviour and choices, particularly the consumers of Generation Z. This study will be conducted electronically and it focuses on the perception of the specific target group towards these two very successful online platforms.

The indicated question of this research is how Instagram and TripAdvisor affect consumers of generation Z regarding the tourism sector.

### 4) Research objectives

1. To establish the impact of Instagram and TripAdvisor on Generation Z consumers
2. To detect the influence of these two platforms in the tourism sector and in Generation Z

### 5) Methodology

The study which is going to be conducted is a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods and nature, which appears to be best suited for the particular research. For this purpose, short interviews will be conducted in order to understand the effects of social media platforms (Instagram and TripAdvisor specifically) on consumers regarding their holidays choices. Additionally, the question regarding the influence of social media will be spread in various subquestions. Along with the interviews, a survey will be sent to the participants and that will serve as an interpretation of a quantitative search, shown in numbers, figures and graphs. As mentioned above, there will be a number of people interviewed through an online questionnaire. The answers are going to be collected and analysed later on in this study. The answers provided in the survey and interviews are going to serve for evaluation and interpretation, in order to give a contribution to the tourism sector and to the businesses as well, in order to show managers, marketers, hotel and airlines owners why their online reputation should be taken into consideration and how can they benefit the most from social media platforms. The limitations of this approach lie on the grounds that the researcher is examining a small sample and this might not create a 100% accurate verification of the question of topic and the conclusion would be based solely on the small number of participants.

*Type of method: quantitative and qualitative*

Questions	Purpose:
What is your age?	To distinguish Generation Z individuals from other generations

How often do you go on trips/holidays per year?	To check the level of social media usage
Do you use TripAdvisor or another platform for booking hotels, flights, etc?	TripAdvisor level of usage
Are these platforms more useful than the traditional way of booking through travel agencies?	Compare traditional and modern ways of booking
Explanation of the above mentioned answer	Participants opinion
Do you think social media affects your preferences when it comes to where to spend the holidays/go for a trip?	Participants opinion
Which platform specifically affects your choices?  Do you update your online social network(s) while traveling?	Participants opinion
During or after your trips, do you share photos or videos from them in your online social network(s)?	Participants opinion
Which part do you like/are more interested about TripAdvisor's webpage?	Participants opinion
Do you follow travel pages on Instagram?	Participants opinion

What attracts you more on Instagram regarding places to visit?	Participants opinion
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*Sample: Profile of the interviewed*

The individuals interviewed were mostly aged 18 to 25 years old males and females. Since this research focuses on Gen Z, the questionnaire included mostly the Gen Z age range. We included in this study a few individuals of a different age range than the one mentioned above for the reason of comparing and analyzing the choices and reasoning between Gen Z and other generations as well. All of the individuals have been cleverly chosen by the researcher. In order to make procedures faster, the individuals chosen for the study have used at least once Tripadvisor or Instagram.

## 6) Analysis

Taking into consideration the various responses from the conducted interviews, it is understood that there are different stages individuals experience when it comes to making a decision on their holiday travel.

The dreaming stage is the first stage, which is the stage prior to the general decision to pursue a holiday trip. This is an essential stage and the importance of the dreaming stage lies on the grounds that it provides a comprehensive consumer behaviour perspective.

Deducted from the study, the majority of the individuals (62.5%) go on holidays once to two times a year, meanwhile the rest of them (37.5%) travel 3 or more times per year. With this information, we realize Generation Z are mostly busy and occupied throughout the year with their jobs and/or studies, taking into account their age which ranges from 18 to 25 years old.

Booking in advance is the best option as some of the individuals answered "I need to book in advance in order to find the best and most affordable options...at this age the budget is still tight and our pockets are not as full as we want them to be." This statement gives the impression that prior to taking an act or a decision when it comes to

booking and travelling, individuals take into account some basic and essential factors. These factors are time and personal budget, which play a major role in decision making. Moreover, when asked which is the most useful platform or source when it comes to booking hotels and/or flights, the majority of the answers from the individuals were given in favor to TripAdvisor.

According to the survey, individuals are more prone to examine on TripAdvisor the below from most to least observed:

- 1) Reviews
- 2) Top place to visit
- 3) Top recommendations and Ratings (50% each)
- 4) Flights
- 5) Vacation rentals

Even though TripAdvisor might be known as the most reliable platform for booking, there were also some other preferences stated by the participants. Some of them stated that Booking.com is a great solution and it consists of a great range of services, such as good hotel deals, apartments for rent, flights, car rentals, taxi bookings and there is also an "Attraction" section where users can see the tourists attractions of the city they plan to go to. Others prefer using Skyscanner, Hopper and Kayak, which are similar to the above mentioned platforms and offer almost the same range of services. One participant said that sometimes he uses three or four of these platforms in order to compare prices and availability. "This helps me search more in depth and choose the best option before finally booking, because different platforms offer different prices and deals," the individual stated. "Also it is a relief that I can use them from my mobile as well," he continued.

The second stage consists of the pre-trip phase, which provides us with generic decisions for holiday trips as well. The analysis for the pre trip stage displays its characteristics:

- 1) How participants of the travel party collaborate with the platforms
- 2) Social media serve as self expression for travelling purposes
- 3) Social media supports inputs for holiday decision-making intends

It is understood that with a wide range of platforms and online websites, at times it might be a complex procedure, but it results considerably efficient and useful, as it contributes and helps people make the right decision regarding their holiday trips.

As we move on to the usefulness of the platforms, participants believe the above mentioned are way more useful than the traditional way of booking through travel agencies. Participants commented that more convenient and easier to use through mobiles and laptops and serve as a better comparison means. Furthermore, the options provided are infinite so everybody can find what they are looking for. "It makes things easier for you and you get more options to choose from rather than just using a regular agency. I also feel like you get the option to design your trip better according to your budget," one of the participants said. One other said these platforms are easier to access, no matter where you are or when you log on.

Social media platforms affect travellers decisions highly, as they themselves admit in one of the questions asked throughout the questionnaire. This probably happens because social media is perceived as a means of inspiration. People in general are highly affected by their friends and peers' posts and pictures online, which triggers them to follow their plans more or less, since they trust them and believe in their experiences. Furthermore, hotel companies and airlines are easily reachable as all of them have a booking widget or engine on different social media (Instagram, Facebook, etc). According to the survey, the social media platform which mostly affects travel choices is Instagram, the participants claim. TripAdvisor holds the second place according to the survey.

This can be justified by one word: Content. The incredible part of Instagram or any other social media platform is the marvelous volume of information that flows from a part of the world to the other. Instagram is splendid as a holiday planning tool. Geotagging by definition from the Dictionary.com, is "a piece of data embedded in a digital media file to indicate geographical information about the subject, usually latitude and longitude". The Geotagging tool is very common nowadays in social sites, as you can add the geographical identification data along with your photos and videos.

What we can deduce from this is that Instagram is the dominant social media which affects traveler's decision making process as people choose locations based on hashtags and likes.

TripAdvisor is a latter tool used by the participants just after they have developed ideas regarding the place and time of their future travel.

The third stage of the travelling is during the trip phase. The functions of social media platforms for this stage are:

- 1) They serve as communication platforms and allow participants to keep in touch with their virtual contacts
- 2) Participants find them as entertaining platforms

70.8% of the participants admitted that they update their social media accounts while they travel. Nowadays we live in the Information Age and people share more information as they are provided with more resources than ever, reaching out to a bigger public at a highly fast pace. Sharing photos and videos online gives the individuals a sense of self fulfillment, define themselves to others as in showing the things they are interested in and they try to transfer exciting content to other people. Additionally, more than half of the individuals confirmed that following Instagram pages which are related to travelling are helpful and serve as a means of exploration and information gathering regarding their travel plans.

Having many special and attractive features, the most appealing one seems to be the Explore page on Instagram. Although the Explore page is unique and specifically built for every Instagram user, users usually encounter pictures and videos of hotels, resorts and package deals from cities from all around the world.

In addition, the participants stated that they also are attracted and influenced by their friends' posts and stories (24 hour pictures/videos), as well as from their favorite celebrities' content on Instagram.

Since Instagram connects individuals with a wide audience and sources, it is highly likely for everyone to be affected by the content other people share online. Especially Gen Z individuals which are considered as digital natives are known for using social

media platforms extensively, so they are more prone to be affected by online content in general and in the context of tourism and travel as well.

The fourth stage is the after trip phase. Similar to the other stages, participants use social media heavily as a platform of self expression regarding their trips. As mentioned above, self-expression occurs primarily in Instagram and TripAdvisor. Essentially, participants express themselves on Instagram through photos, videos and stories. The most indicative result is the one that shows a greater number of participants engage in during and after trip photo and video sharing (75%) than they do in the pre trip stage. Interesting finding in this stage from the survey turns out to be how participants decide to share their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction from their travel experience.

TripAdvisor seems like the perfect platform for the individuals to share their reviews and impressions. Firstly, they are highly likely to write reviews on TripAdvisor's page and share their experience. Participants tend to write a review depending on their emotional state. In case they had an extraordinary and remarkable experience, they would definitely congratulate the services of the hotel/resort/airline with a good five star review in TripAdvisor. On the contrary, the participants would express their resentment and vent on their reviews about the poor quality of service they were provided.

## 8) Conclusions

Social media marketing has become an inseparable part of techniques of traditional marketing. The tourism industry has acknowledged the necessity to adapt and adjust over the past years in order to meet its clientele demands and desires. Nonetheless, as the virtual platforms change and evolve every now and then, the tourism industry also needs to catch up the pace and stay up to date.

The study shows how social media platforms are used throughout all phases of the holiday travelling process (dreaming, before, during and after holidays). The study demonstrates that social media platforms are used heavily especially in the after trip phase, as participants like to share their experiences through photos and videos with their friends, peers and other travellers. This might be associated with Generation Z individuals' high level of participation and engagement in social media. Moreover, the use of social media during the trip phase was observed, and the reasoning behind it is

that participants use social media not only as a way of self expression, but also to further stay connected with their relatives and friends.

The main objective of this research was to show how TripAdvisor and Instagram affect Generation Z individuals regarding their travel choices and decision making. The survey conducted on data collected on a symbolic sample of Gen Z participants answers the question of the research successfully. These two platforms remain as the most trusted and dependable by the participants regarding their travel decisions.

The research conducted is a stronger affirmation and validation of the significance of online platforms in promoting destinations and tourism overall. Managers and hotel owners, in order to develop their positioning in the market, can surely benefit from this study and further enhance their efforts in improving, broadening and taking advantage of today's online technologies.

One result of this study demonstrates how much Generation Z individuals value TripAdvisor as a platform where they can rely on and help them make the right decision and choose the best deal regarding their budget, time and personal preferences. A special beneficial demographic for travel marketers is presented with the "Reviews" section which helps marketers all in all study and understand the customers wants and needs in detail.

Another finding is the nature of the particular sample, Generation Z customers. The "digital natives" like to plan ahead in time due to their hectic schedule, become truly involved in the travel process and are available for travel related information at any time of interest. The content generated in social media platforms helps them better comprehend and evaluate their options and choices. They are greatly affected by other people's reviews and also acknowledge the relevance and significance of the information given by travel service experts. This group in particular observes social media platforms on a daily basis and spends hours monitoring them and this results in Generation Z individuals exposure to a bigger persuasion by marketers. In furtherance of remaining prevalent amidst Generation Z, marketers are demanded to re assess their marketing strategies as there is an increasing level of social media platforms usage and reputation.

## 9) Evaluation of research and Recommendations

The perspective chosen in this research might provide further insights and initiate further research on social media being a provider of considerable social stimuli. The limitations lie in terms of the outcomes being not entirely specific because of a small sample and size of people. However, the results and outcomes of this study can be used additionally in the future for more thorough, expanded and voluminous research and studies. Moreover, concerning this study, the relationship between Gen Z individuals choices regarding their holiday trips and the effect social media has on their choices seems to be of a symbiotic nature and dependent on one another. This serves as an indicative sign of the importance of the platforms and new technologies, which seem to be truly beneficial for the tourism sector.

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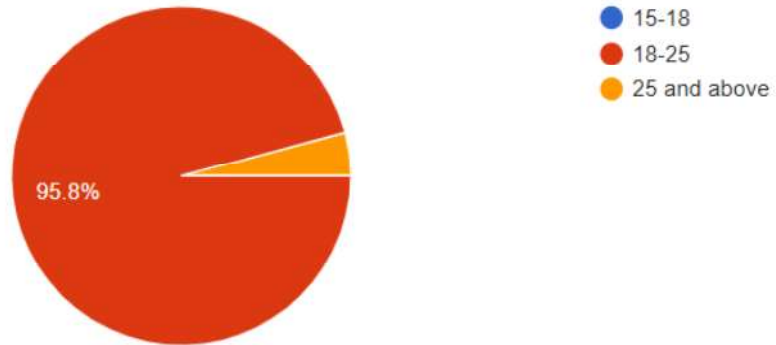
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## **Appendix**

Below you will find the questions of the survey expressed in graphs and tables. Answers from interviews are given briefly as well.

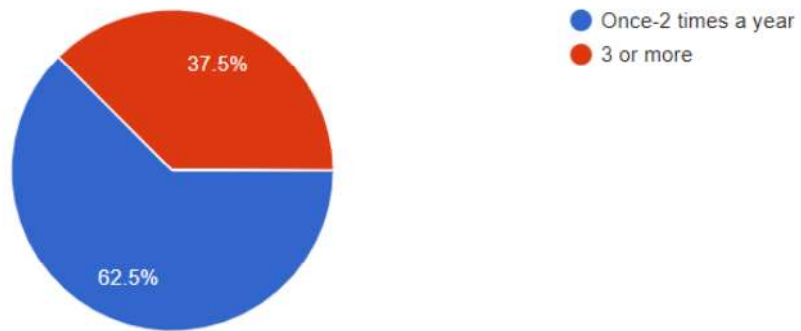
### What is your age?

24 responses



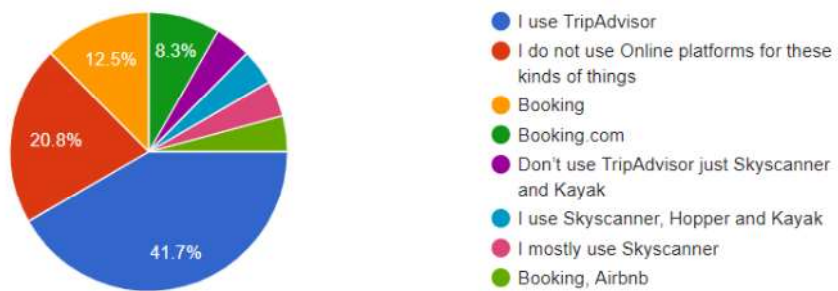
### How often do you go on trips/holidays per year?

24 responses



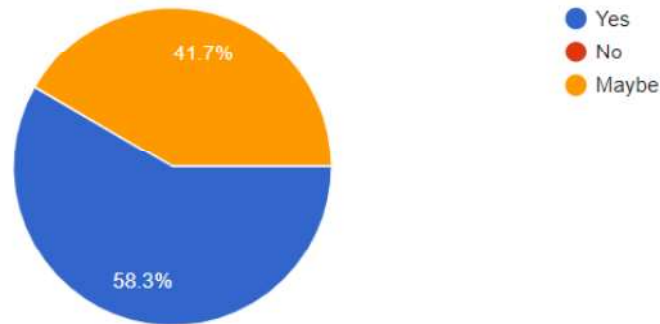
### Do you use TripAdvisor or another platform for booking hotels, flights, etc?

24 responses



Are these platforms more useful than the traditional way of booking through travel agencies?

24 responses



When asked how do participants feel about the platforms in comparison to the traditional way of booking, they answered this way:

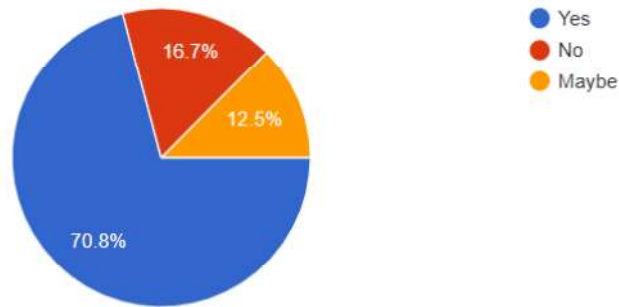
- Sometimes it might be cheaper to actually call the hotel and check the price. But first I check TripAdvisor, see which hotel I like and then I call and compare the prices
- It's more accessible
- Faster, easier, cheaper
- I don't know
- Sometimes it is useful.
- I think there is better way but I'm not sure
- It depends, sometimes there are cases of better assistance from travel agencies and sometimes the platforms are better in providing specific booking information.
- It makes things easier for you and you get more options to choose from rather than just using a regular agency. I also feel like you get the option to design your trip better according to your budget
- Can compare effectively
- Sometimes, yes it is
- Faster and easier
- I haven't used TripAdvisor so I can't really understand the difference
- it is useful because it offers a variety of choices and it is convenient
- More convenient
- Platforms are easier to use and provide more options
- Easy to use, interactive
- It's more convenient, user friendly and easy to use
- I like booking flights by myself because I have ability to look for tickets on different dates and nearby airports
- Because there is less time used for reserving and booking of hotels and trips, and also less costly
- You get the exact same service in the comfort of your home. Easily accessible 24/7.
- I like the variety of options

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- There may be platforms that aren't as professional as TripAdvisors but offer options for people that are looking for something more unique and in their budget
- The whole procedure is much easier and faster.

Do you think social media affects your preferences when it comes to where to spend the holidays/go for a trip?

24 responses



Which platform specifically affects your choices?

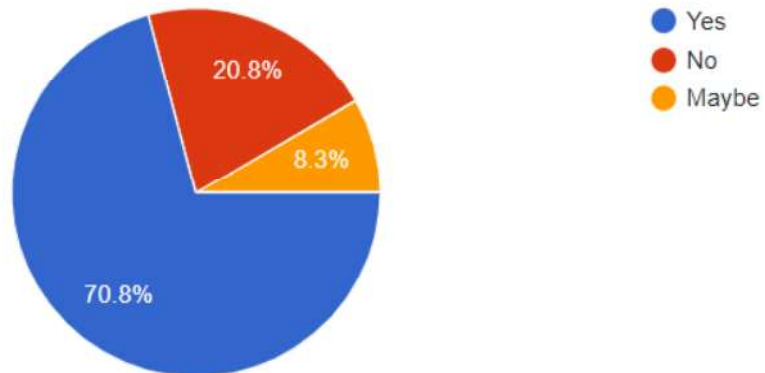
24 responses



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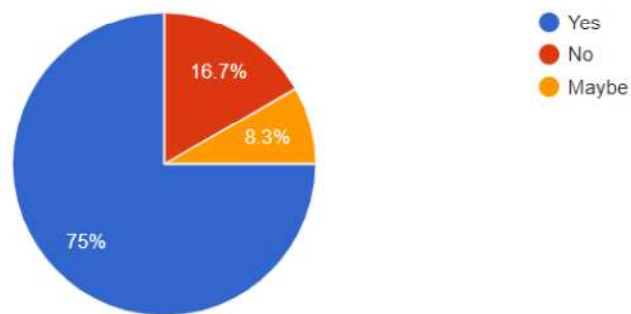
Do you update your online social network(s) while traveling?

24 responses



During or after your trips, do you share photos or videos from them in your online social network(s)?

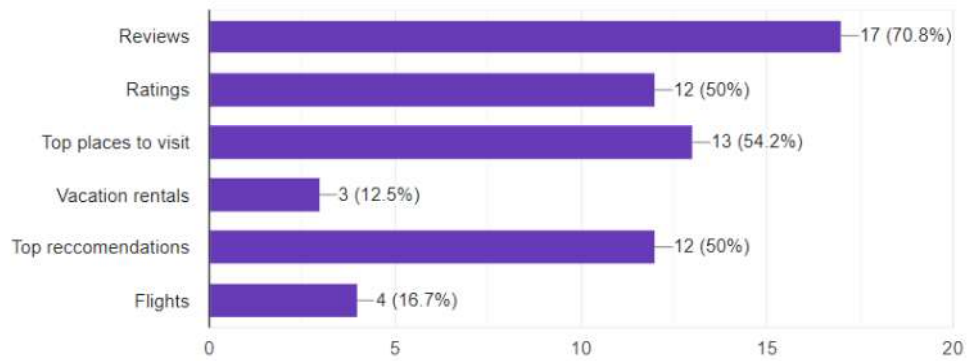
24 responses



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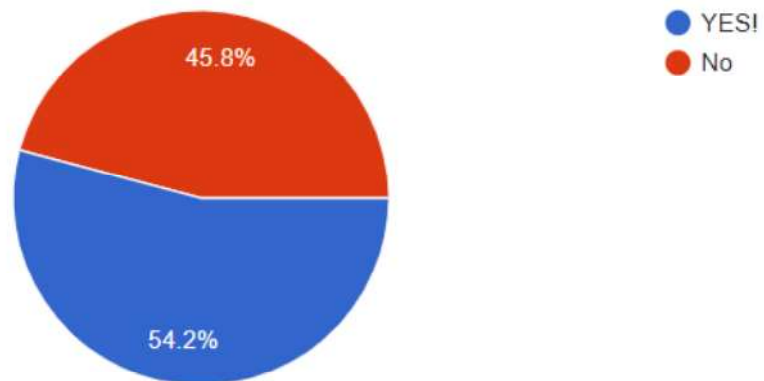
Which part do you like/are more interested about TripAdvisor's webpage?

24 responses



Do you follow travel pages on Instagram?

24 responses



What attracts you more on Instagram regarding places to visit?

24 responses

