How to Read Instagram Travel Influencer Photographs:
A Semiotic Analysis of Space and Exclusivity in the Content of Instagram Travel
Influencers

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Abstract

The social media platform Instagram has had a considerable impact on the global tourism industry. Instagram users are increasingly selecting where they will vacation based on photos shared by travel influencers; however, these photos may not present accurate depictions of the destinations portrayed. Research has been done on the use of semiotic techniques in travel photographs and how some of these techniques may be deceptive. However, the literature analyzes but does little to provide recommendations for how to read travel influencer photos that use semiotic techniques to create idealized, unrealistic destination images. My research will address the gap in knowledge regarding how travel influencers use semiotic techniques in their photos and how travellers can best read them. I analyzed 300 photos by a sample of 30 travel influencers to determine trends and insights pertaining to how they utilize two semiotics techniques: space and exclusivity. I will show that travel influencers use these semiotic techniques to emphasize open space and exclusivity in order to present idealized destination images; yet in instances, these destination images may be potentially deceiving. This study uses more realistic images of destinations in order to reframe influencer images within a broader context. This research further provides an understanding as to how travellers need to read potentially deceptive photographs and will conclude with recommendations for new ways in which travellers can more accurately read Instagram travel influencer photos.

Keywords: Instagram, semiotics, social media influencers, travel photography, tourism, destination image

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2012, during the final week of a four-month backpacking trip through Southeast Asia, I went for dinner with another Canadian I had met on a remote Indonesian island between Bali and Lombok. During this beachside dinner, we discussed our travels and shared pictures of memorable moments, when the new acquaintance first brought to my attention that by using the correct combination of hashtags, geolocation tags, and sharing engaging content, certain Instagram users were beginning to profit from their travels or partner with hotels and resorts for free stays by sharing photos on the platform. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this individual provided me with an early introduction to the emerging phenomenon of Instagram travel influencers and the evolving culture of Instagram use concerning tourism. Looking back, I remember being in awe, thinking that someone could travel the world, have fun while making a living from merely adding filters and sharing photos on Instagram.

However, fast-forward to today, the relationship between Instagram, travel, and travel influencers is well-established as there is more travel-related content shared on the platform, with travel influencers having considerable power in shaping how destinations are perceived. This content influences where individuals travel, how destinations market themselves, and how people experience the locations visited. In recent years, when researching or planning travel, I have come across an increasing number of websites and YouTube videos characterized as 'Instagram guides' with individuals sharing photos and listings of photogenic locations, activities, scenic views, restaurants, and coffee shops. In my experience, when viewing these guides or exploring the geolocation tags of where photos were taken, many Instagram users looked to share their experiences in the most visually appealing manner possible, with photos often focusing on a single individual or group, with the locations often displayed as uncrowded, exclusive, or relatively remote. However, during my own personal vacations throughout Europe

and East Asia in recent years, destinations that were presented as aesthetic, 'Instagramable'

spaces often differed from how they were presented online as they were often busier and less

exclusive or photogenic than they were shown in the photos of Instagram travel influencers.

   Since my early introduction to Instagram travel, much about Instagram and how

individuals use the platform has changed. Instagram has seen considerable growth, with the

platform being considered one of the fastest-growing social networks. It is expected that by the

end of 2021, Instagram will have approximately 1.1 billion users, with the number of users

expected to continually grow in future years (Statista, 2021).

   In addition to Instagram, much about how the global population travels has also changed

in recent decades. With the exception of 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism

has become one of the world's fastest-growing industries. The rate at which people embark on

international vacations increased substantially over the two decades prior to the COVID-19

pandemic (World Bank, 2019). While the rise in tourism can result in travellers gaining a better

understanding of foreign cultures or locations, excessive tourism can negatively impact a

destination's physical and anthropogenic environment. This phenomenon of excessive tourism

negatively impacting a destination can be described as overtourism. Overtourism occurs when

tourism exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, or political capacity

thresholds (European Parliament, 2018). This over-capacitation of tourism can result in locals

and tourists coming into conflict, local housing markets becoming unaffordable for locals, and

cultural heritage sites or natural landmarks becoming at risk of destruction or overuse (European

Parliament, 2018). A location may also lose its authenticity and become an unattractive

destination because it becomes overly touristic or overcrowded with travellers (European

Parliament, 2018).

While various factors can contribute to the overabundance of tourists within an area, one of the key contributing factors to overtourism is social media (Gretzel, 2019). Social media can influence crowd behaviour by concentrating tourists in particular locations, directing travellers to once unknown sites or landmarks, or drawing a sudden influx of tourists to a region (Gretzel, 2019). Due to social media having considerable power in shaping how a destination is perceived, with these perceptions potentially encouraging individuals to travel to particular destinations, this can attribute to the challenges associated with overtourism. Therefore, there is a need to critically examine how semiotic techniques used within photographs shared on social media can affect destination images.

Researchers have noted that Instagram in particular has had a considerable impact on the global tourism industry as some individuals are basing their travel-related decisions on the content shared by others on the platform, specifically travel influencers. In addition, travel-related content shared on Instagram can have significant power in shaping how destinations are perceived. As travel influencers may have significant power in directing where some Instagram users may travel, there is a need to examine how their use of semiotic techniques related to space and exclusivity can shape how locations are presented, idealized, and misrepresented. Since Instagram travel influencers have an established audience and perceived credibility, they have the ability to shape how individuals view different destinations. These individuals may use semiotic techniques to create imaginative geographies in order to market specific travel destinations or experiences, with there potentially being the risk of these techniques misrepresenting the scenes presented.

Due to these factors, the primary objective of my research is to determine how travel influencers use semiotic techniques related to space and exclusivity to portray idealized

destination images in their photographic content and how tourists can best read these semiotic

techniques to ensure they are not deceived in their travel planning. Therefore, I developed the

research question: **RQ: How can Instagram users best read (using semiotic techniques) the**

images of travel influencers in ways that they are not deceived? By researching how travel

influencers use semiotic techniques to render space and exclusivity in relation to idealized

destination images within their photos on Instagram, this will provide insight into the frequency

at which these semiotic techniques are used, how they may be used to misrepresent destinations,

and how the viewers of travel influencer photographs can best assess how locations are presented

and misrepresented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The text below outlines the methodology and inclusion/exclusion criteria used to discover

and assess which texts would be included in my literature review. The discussion of the literature

that follows looks at how Instagram users may view travel-related content through the tourist

gaze and how Instagram travel influencers may use semiotic techniques to deceptively

communicate space and exclusivity to present idealized destination images.

Literature Review Methodology

To ensure that I undertook a systematic search of all relevant literature related to my

research question, I developed a protocol to best identify the primary databases, indices, and

search terms that I would use. For my search, I used the University of Alberta Library's A to Z

listing of database resources. I decided to use EBSCOhost - Academic Search Complete, EBSCO

Host - Communication & Mass Media Complete, and JSTOR as the primary databases for my

research as they were the most relevant to my area of research. In addition, I also utilized Google

Scholar via the University of Alberta Library to discover and collect information and literature

related to my work. I used search tools within these databases and indices to narrow or expand

the scope of time examined, with my search including older texts related to foundational theories

or subject areas, as well as texts primarily from the past five years pertaining to emergent

subjects such as Instagram travel influencers and influencer travel marketing.

To best search for and discover appropriate literature, I divided my research questions

into three primary components based on my research question and identified applicable search

terms based on these key themes. The first area of literature I examined was specific to semiotic

techniques that are used in relation to space, exclusivity, and travel photography, where I used

search terms such as semiotics, Instagram semiotics, negative space semiotics, spatialization,

space and exclusivity semiotics, Instagramism, semiotics of travel photography, travel

photography or travel photography + social media to best discover literature specific to this

topic. Next, I looked to find literature specific to Instagram travel influencers to determine how

they present destinations; therefore, I used search terms such as Instagram travel, Instagram

travel influencer, social media travel influencer, or social media travel. Lastly, I looked to

discover works specific to destination image, requiring me to use search terms such as Instagram

destination image, social media destination image, travel marketing, influencer travel marketing,

or destination image creation.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To determine which of the found works I would include in my literature review, I

developed an eligibility matrix in Microsoft Excel that included a series of tabs categorized by

the key themes relevant to my research such as (1) destination image and Instagram content, (2)

semiotics and Instagramism, and (3) travel influencers and travel influencer content. Within each

of these tabs, I further outlined a set of criteria used to assess whether the found literature was

appropriate for my review. The evaluation criteria used included (1) type of literature, (2)

whether the work was peer-reviewed, (3) the date published, and (4) the number of times the

work was cited.

Overall, I looked to utilize textbooks, books, and academic journal articles as my primary

sources of literature. I favoured peer-reviewed work in my eligibility matrix and looked to

include well-cited books and textbooks for literature on key theories and topic areas. For the

foundational areas of my research (i.e. semiotics, the presentation of space in photography,

destination image, tourism, and social media), I included and favoured the works that were the

most frequently cited; however, I did not weigh the number of citations as heavily in regards to

recent literature related to Instagram travel influencers as this is still an emerging area of

research. Due to the recency of the phenomenon of Instagram travel influencers, I primarily

looked to use literature from the past five years because this work provided the most up-to-date

and relevant information on this topic. Nevertheless, when I assessed cornerstone literature

specific to theoretical frameworks or phenomena such as semiotics of tourism photography, I

looked to use literature that went back several decades written by notable scholars as this

provided necessary context to better understand foundational theories and the evolution of travel

photography and the role the internet and social media has had in shaping its development.

Therefore, I looked to utilize a balance between foundational literature and recent works to best

understand the landscape in which my research would fit into.

Once I determined the works that I would analyze for my literature review, I used a

filtering tool in my Excel workbook to show the works that met the outlined eligibility criteria.

Building upon the appropriate works identified, I added additional columns to categorize and

analyze the literature. The categories that I looked to utilize to best analyze the work included (1)

theoretical framework, (2) methodology, (3) participants and sample size, (4) potential biases and limitations, (5) relation to other texts, and (6) key quotes and themes. From this assessment and analysis, I categorized my literature review into the following categories: Instagram and Instagram Travel Influencers; Instagram Photo Composition, Photo Manipulation and Instagramism; Semiotics and Communicating Travel Experiences via Photography; the Tourist Gaze; Semiotics and Destination Image Formation; and Semiotics, Space, and Exclusivity.

Discussion of the Literature

The discussion of the literature will first look at the platform functionalities of Instagram and the role of travel influencers on the platform. Next, I discuss forms of Instagram photo composition and how photos may be manipulated before examining the role of semiotics in communicating travel experiences via photography. Specifically, I will discuss the tourist gaze, the role of semiotics in destination image formation, how Instagram may be used to shape destination image, and the role of semiotic techniques used in relation to space and exclusivity.

Instagram and Instagram Travel Influencers

Instagram is an "inherently image-centric" social media platform that "was created for the purpose of viewing and sharing photographs" (Caple, 2020, p.153). For the purpose of my research, I will focus on a subpopulation of Instagram users known as Instagram travel influencers. These individuals are micro-celebrities that post content related to travel, frequently vacationing around the globe while sharing photos and videos highlighting their experiences (Baruah, 2017). Travel influencers can have a large impact on the travel industry as many brands, hotels, airlines, and tourism associations have recognized the potential of utilizing influencer marketing and partnering with these influencers to advertise goods, services, and experiences. The content shared by travel influencers can present a myriad of travel destinations and

experiences, in turn making these destinations more well-known and more accessible to their followers, with many individuals basing their travel decisions and personal goals on the content shared by travel influencers (Terttunen, 2017). The findings related to the role of user-generated content, especially that of travel influencers in how individuals select vacation destinations and plan travel, is supported by Hanifah (2019), Parsons (2017), as well as Shuqair and Cragg (2017). Travel influencers also have significant power in "increas[ing] awareness of lesser-known places, [and] spark[ing] interest in a destination and inspir[ing] travellers" (Barbe et al., 2020, p.595). However, since Instagram enables users to utilize "post-processing techniques such as filtering, cropping, [or] blurring" as these "image manipulation functional[ities are] made available inside the Instagram application" (Zappavigna, 2016, p.3), there is a need to assess how Instagram images can be manipulated and may misrepresent the realities presented. Therefore, specific to my research related to Instagram travel influencers, there is a need to critically examine how these individuals may use Instagram functionalities and semiotic techniques to present and misrepresent the destinations shown.

Instagram Photo Composition, Photo Manipulation and Instagramism

Manovich (2016b) notes there are "three popular types of photos shared by people on Instagram," categorizing them as "casual, professional, and designed" (p.5). First, Manovich (2016b) suggests that casual images are used to informally capture experiences and situations, with these photos not being edited to "control contrast, colours, and composition" (p.5). Second, he indicates that professional images are those that are created by individuals who are "aware of the rules of professional photography" with these photographers "try[ing] to follow these rules, conventions, and techniques" (Manovich, 2016b, p.5-6). Last, he characterizes designed photos as photos that capture a particular lifestyle or personality arbitrarily, with these photos using the

"visual language of contemporary design" (Manovich, 2016a, p.99). Manovich (2016a) suggests that designed images contain a similar set of photographic elements that are intentionally used in the creation of content for Instagram, including increased brightness, increased contrast, increased saturation, decreased saturation, presenting a large proportion of light areas with a small proportion of dark areas, white backgrounds, negative spaces (i.e. open space), or detailed textures (p.102). Zamora (2018) builds on this notion of designed photos, in that environments may be presented "in a way that regardless [of] its organic nature it becomes geometrical and grid-like, a characteristic opposed to a naturalistic way of portrait nature, the city or everyday life" (p.524) with "any situation [being able to] have an Instagramism look, [and] any subject can be Instagramized" (p.525).

Manovich (2016a) developed the term Instagramism to best refer to the "aesthetics of designed photos on Instagram" (p.119) and to describe how content designed for Instagram tends to "focus on mood and atmosphere rather than representation or communication of emotions" (p.119). Cara (2020) further summarizes Manovich's Instagramism as "Instagram's artistic (and expressive) manifestation, focusing on the sensitivity and the artistic quality of images, which are not necessarily produced by traditional expressions, but that result in the manifestation of the sublime aesthetic" (p.335) that are primarily related to "sensibility," "attitude" and "tonality" (p.335). These Instagram photos may "resonate with more personal, authentic experiences that chronicle the world in a way that resists the time and place represented by larger impersonal corporate documentation efforts" (Hochman & Manovich, 2013, para. 19). As Instagramism and designed photos on Instagram may look to use a specific set of semiotic techniques, particularly those related to negative space and contrasting textures and dimensions, these techniques may be used to misrepresent destinations, making them appear more aesthetically pleasing than they

appear when visited. Since Instagram photo composition and photo editing can be used to

present designed photos that highlight idealized locations, there is a need to examine the role

semiotic techniques have in presenting and misrepresenting destinations shown.

Semiotics and Communicating Travel Experiences via Photography

How individuals present and misrepresent their travel experiences through photography is

firmly rooted in semiotics; and to understand how these photographic messages are created and

used, I will use semiotic theory. Semiotics is the study of cultural signs, symbols, and how they

relate to communications. Barthes (1977) applied these theories to photographs, highlighting

various elements one may examine when 'reading' photographs and how photographs may have

both denoted (what objective elements are within a photo) and connoted (what one thinks of a

photo) meanings. Therefore, by applying semiotic theory, it will provide me with a set of

questions for understanding and re-reading the signs and symbols in the travel photos of travel

influencers on Instagram.

Thurlow and Jaworski (2011) note that tourism discourse is "semiotic in nature" (p.3).

These semiotics scholars go on to show that the significance or cultural capital created by

individuals travelling is "reliant on linguistic/discursive exchanges between tourists and hosts,

and between tourists and other tourists," noting that "the tourist imagination and tourist practices

are always heavily (in)formed by - and prefigured in - the heavily mediatized representations of

television holiday programmes, travel brochures, newspaper travelogues, postcards, guidebooks

and so on" (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011, p.3). Thurlow and Jaworski (2011) note that tourists'

"ways of communicating about a place - are clearly powerful in shaping the meaning of the

place" and that how tourists communicate may constitute relationships and identities of power,

reproduce dominate systems of beliefs, and reinforce social structures of inequality or power

(p.6). Larsen (2006) further adds, "contemporary tourism is intrinsically constructed culturally, socially and materially through images and performances of photography, and vice versa" (p.241) and that "the tourism industry invests enormously in photographic images to choreograph desirable 'place myths', desiring bodies and photogenic places" (p.241). The semiotics within travel photography have significant power in shaping tourism discourse. By examining how Instagram travel influencers use semiotic techniques related to space and exclusivity to present idealized destinations, this will provide insight as to how these individuals can present and misrepresent locations.

The Tourist Gaze

The semiotic techniques used to emphasize space and exclusivity may inspire individuals to view tourist destinations with an imaginative, inspired lens. John Urry (1990) notes the role that organizations and professionals may have in how tourists perceive a location, noting that tourists may 'gaze' at a location. Urry (1990) theorized that the "tourist gaze" is "central to the consumption of tourist services" as tourists may "look individual or collectively upon aspects of landscape or townscape which are distinctive, which signify an experience which contrasts with everyday" (p.26). He further notes a series of factors in which tourists may 'gaze,' including that "places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is an anticipation through day-dreaming and fantasy" with "film, newspapers, T.V., magazines, records and videos" serving as sources of inspiration (p.26). Furthermore, the 'gaze' is "constructed through signs" with "tourism involving the collection of such signs" (i.e. traditional signs and symbols tourists may associate with particular locations) (p.27). Urry & Larsen (2011) later revisits his notion of the tourist gaze, noting that tourism has become "a search for the photogenic" (p.178), with there being a "strategy for the accumulation of photos" (p.178).

Baruah (2017) discusses the 'tourist gaze' in relation to new digital technologies, Instagram, and the content produced by travel influencers, highlighting that the production and consumption of the 'tourist gaze' have primarily focused on tourists' perceptions of destinations and their local communities. He argues that 'gazing' takes place between tourists themselves as well, in particular Instagram users and travel influencers (Baruah, 2017, p.20). By undertaking an online ethnography, tracking and analyzing the content of 20 travel influencers over two months, he found that these travel influencers had diverse ways of creating travel-related content, with travel influencers having varied ways of interacting with space and 'gazing' at environments to create narratives particular to their niche-areas on the platform (i.e. adventure, fashion, food) (Baruah, 2017, p.47-48). His study also highlights how different types of travel influencers use space accordingly to either capture their environments or highlight particular products. He also notes that the content shared by influencers can lead to other travellers seeking destinations in order to recreate and post influencer photos or experiences, as a form of conspicuous consumption (Baruah, 2017, p.48). However, as the tourist gaze is an interpretive stance taken by tourists when viewing travel photography, individuals may not be informed by an understanding of the semiotic techniques that may misrepresent a destination. Therefore, there is a need for a critical foundation of questions that Instagram users may ask themselves in order to gaze at destinations presented by travel influencers in a realistic manner. It is necessary for individuals to reflect on the semiotic techniques related to space and exclusivity used to encourage the tourist gaze and to assess whether the destination images shown are truly representative.

Semiotics and Destination Image Formation

Semiotic techniques have a considerable role in shaping how destinations are imagined and perceived. Kim & Chen (2016) summarize and define destination image as "a continuous

mental process by which one holds a set of impressions, emotional thoughts, beliefs, and

prejudices regarding a destination due to information obtained from different channels" (p.1). Qu

et al. (2011) add that "in the tourism literature, it is widely acknowledged that [the] overall

image of a destination is influenced by cognitive and affective evaluations" (p.467), where

"cognitive evaluation refers to beliefs and knowledge about an object whereas affective

evaluation refers to feelings about the object" (p.467). Baloglu and McClearly (1999) developed

a model detailing how a destination image is formed, highlighting that destination image

formation is a combination of personal factors (i.e. psychological or social inputs) and stimulus

factors (i.e. information sources or previous experiences) (p.870). For my research, I am

particularly interested in the role information inputs have in destination image formation. Beerli

& Martin (2004) note that information sources can influence the formation, perception, and

evaluation of a destination image (p.661). Beerli & Martin (2004) add that information sources

"refer to the amount and diverse nature of information sources to which individuals are exposed,

including destination information acquired as a result of having visited the place" (p.661). The

scholars go on to further list a series of factors that may influence destination images such as

natural resources, general infrastructure, tourist infrastructure, tourist leisure and recreation,

culture, history, art, political and economic factors, the natural environment, the social

environment, and the overall atmosphere of a place (Beerli & Martin, 2004, p.659). Frias et al.

(2008) note the role of the internet in providing access to information that may shape destination

image, noting that "one of the factors widely considered as a potential influence on the formation

of pre-visit destination image is the information consulted and the information sources used by

the tourist" (p.165). Therefore, dependent on the Instagram travel influencer content that

individuals may be exposed to, this may shape how individuals perceive a destination.

Furthermore, if individuals misinterpret or are deceived by the semiotic techniques used in the photos shared by Instagram travel influencers, they may not accurately perceive the locations shown.

Kuhzady and Ghasemi (2019) examined how content on Instagram is used to shape well-defined destination images in the minds of prospective tourists. While the scholars note that destination image consists of various attributes such as existing beliefs, images, and ideas of a location, their research looked at how Instagram, in particular, can influence how a destination is perceived. Their study looked at the characteristics of the projected images of Portugal shared on the platform by @visitportugal, undertaking a qualitative content analysis of 1306 pictures (Kuhzady and Ghasemi, 2019, p.216). It was found that the destination image of a location is influenced by the type of content and information viewers receive, with the kind of content shared (i.e. nature, food, culture) creating imaginative geographies, with destination marketing organizations being able to leverage the use of Instagram photos to present a particular destination image.

Iglesias-Sanchez, Correia, Jambrino-Maldonado & de las Heras-Pedrosa (2020) also examined the role of Instagram as a medium for shaping destination image, in relation to vacation destinations in Spain and Portugal, with their study examining content shared and hashtags used in connection to particular tourist destinations. They found that travel destinations may utilize content generated by tourists, with these images created by tourists often reproducing perceived destination images previously presented by destination marketing organizations or other Instagram users, further motivating travellers to capture their own versions of such photographs. Fatanti and Suyadnya (2015) noted a similar trend in Indonesia, with destination marketing organizations in Bali and Malang using Instagram to promote these destinations while

using content to create and solidify destination images, highlighting that certain features within

the platform (i.e. hashtag or geo-location tags) could be used in the discovery and promotion of

particular destinations and experiences. Nixon, Popova, Önder (2017) also found that properly

using Instagram content can positively shape destination image, with their research looking at the

geographic locations of Jordan and Costa Rica. Similarly, Bernkopf and Nixon (2019) note a

similar phenomenon in regards to Mexico City. As imagery available on Instagram can

significantly shape how destinations are perceived, and due to travel influencers having growing

power in shaping travel-related decision making, there is a need to assess how semiotic

techniques related to space and exclusivity are used and whether the destination imagery created

through such techniques are representative or deceptive.

Semiotics, Space, and Exclusivity

For my research, the semiotic techniques that I am interested in examining are those

related to space and exclusivity. To better understand the relationship between semiotics and

space, I reviewed Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space,* in which he critiques and builds

upon Roland Barthe's theory of general semiology. Lefebvre (1991) suggests that space is a

social construct. Therefore, others suggest that space may have more "communicative or

discursive conceptualizations" (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p.6). Lefebvre theorized that space

consists of a triad of three conceptual elements related to the social construction of space,

including "spatial practice," "representations of space," and "representational spaces" (p.33).

These means of spatial production may also be referred to as "perceived," "conceived," and

"lived spaces" (Goonewardina et al., 2008, p.29). In summarizing Lefebvre's theory,

Goonewardina et al. (2008) suggest that the parallels between spatial practise, representations of

space, representational space; and perceived, conceived, and lived space identify a "two-fold approach to space: one phenomenological and the other linguistic or semiotic" (p.29).

As my research relates to the semiotics of space, I will primarily focus on the semiotic, linguistic nature of space instead of the phenomenological to better understand how individuals may perceive and conceive the optics of space within influencer content. From a semiotic perspective, conceived space refers to the "mental or represented images of space" (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p.7), perceived space refers to the "material or physical space responsible for economic production and social reproduction," and lived space is the production of "the experiential intersection and/or interaction between both conceived and perceived space" (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p.7-8). All of these three modes of spaces have "linguistic and other semiotic markings which define or organize the meaning of those spatial practices as well as social practices enacted in the spaces" (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p.8).

In addition, it is suggested that technological advances have resulted in there being new ways of "representing, accessing and theorizing space" with "social and material landscapes" (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p.5) becoming "more multimodal and more mediatized than ever before" (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p.5). Kirsch (1995) suggests that "technology plays an increasingly important role in how we create and understand the material world around us," with technological advances facilitating changes to how space is perceived at both global and local scales (p.532). While this text was written in 1995, this may relate to Instagram content, as the technology afforded by the platform facilitates the ability to easily discover and imagine spaces at both a global and localized scale.

Smith (2018) examined how space is being presented in Instagram influencer content, specifically examining the use of neocolonial imagery, where he further discusses the

commodification of tourist destinations, noting that motifs within Instagram photography may create imagery that geographic locations may be possessed or consumed, highlighting the "promontory witness" as one motif that situates a subject within a landscape, portraying exploration and conquest, with these symbols being rooted in colonial symbolism (p.180). He highlights that this motif is used often by Instagram travel influencers, with these individuals indicating an "imagined possession of the land surveyed" (Smith, 2018, p.181), with these geographic locations, devoid of local populations, being commodified once these images have been posted online. Smith (2019) further builds on his theory, using a case study of four "promontory witness" photos that travel influencers shared from Bagan, Myanmar, looking to highlight prevailing qualitative aesthetic norms related to space, "embodied performances," and how these motifs were associated with the neoliberal "branded self" (p.3). In this work, Smith (2019) also highlights Thurlow and Jaworski's findings that the use of "semiotic silence" is used to "note a prevailing emptiness in the landscapes of elite destinations" to present "exclusivity and the rarefied status of the tourist" (Thurlow and Jaworski as cited in Smith, 2019, p.6). Smith (2019) builds on this, examining how "manufacturing emptiness" and emphasizing vacuous space allows tourists to consume a landscape, whereby "hiding" locals from the frame of view devoids a location from its "human and temporal context," in turn reducing space to a "visual commodity" (p.6).

However, while Smith (2019) highlights the use of empty space and examines the motif of a travel influencer situated within a large landscape filled with empty space, this study was limited to the content within four Instagram posts, shared by four different influencers all in the same geographic location. Therefore, a more comprehensive study such as the current investigation, that examines a larger sample of generalized content shared by travel influencers

across an array of geographic locations and semiotic techniques is of benefit. Edensor (2001)

notes a similar idea, suggesting that as leisure and travel are increasingly visually defined by the

"endeavors, times, and spaces" that are "suitably characterized as leisure," touristic spaces are

"continually contested and transformed" (p.61). Due to spaces being continually contested and

transformed, there is a need to broadly examine how travel influencers utilize semiotic

techniques to emphasize vacuous space and manufacture emptiness and devoid locations of local

populations or the negative impacts of overtourism.

Thurlow (2019) also highlight the importance of exploring how tourists interact with

space, as "space is equally, rather than tangentially, important, and we ought always to consider

how people play not just with words but also how they play with and/or exploit space and spatial

resources for communicative effect too" (p.99). As space may be constructed based on power

relations, there is a need to critically examine how influencers emphasize vacuous space to

present deceptive destination imagery, that may differ from how locals or other tourists

experience the spaces shown.

Thurlow and Jaworski (2015) suggest that "space is clearly realized in the ways people

choose to represent it: how they write about it, talk about it, photograph it, advertise it and design

it" (p.13) and that "spaces emerge in the ways people move through them and interact *with* them.

For all the stereotypes of tourists and cameras, and the unquestionable dominance of the visual in

tourism" (p.13). Thurlow and Jaworski (2012) further examined the "discursive construction of

space which determines the observer's 'point of view'" and "objects with symbolic meaning" in

relation to how space is presented regarding luxurious, exclusive travel (p.492). From their

analysis, they noted "seven organizing principles in [the] 'new world of luxury'" that included

"communication barriers, vacuous spaces, visible-invisible labour, recognition, performing

plenty, and (dis)order and neocolonial fantasies," with each of these principles being rooted in the imagery of open spaces and exclusivity (p.492). Based on their discussion of space and exclusivity in relation to travel, I intend to examine how these semiotic techniques are used in the photos shared by Instagram travel influencers.

Summary of the Literature

In sum, several studies have noted that an increasing number of Instagram users base their travel decisions on the content shared on the platform, with user-generated content, especially the content posted by travel influencers being the most impactful in informing and influencing tourist activities. Nevertheless, this is just one information source used in travel planning and destination image formation. Scholars also note that travel influencers and Instagram content can shape how potential tourists perceive a destination, along with travel influencers using the 'tourist gaze' to present specific geographic locations. There is limited research that examines specifically the semiotics of space and exclusivity within the content shared by travel influencers. Further, the literature analyzes but does little to provide recommendations on how to read travel influencer photos that use semiotic techniques to create idealized, unrealistic destination images. Therefore, my research will address the gap in knowledge regarding how travel influencers use semiotic techniques in their photos and how travellers can best read these images.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

For my research, I undertook a cross-sectional study, collecting and analyzing a sample of three hundred Instagram photos taken from thirty travel influencers to determine how they used semiotic techniques related to space and exclusivity to create idealized destination images.

This research predominantly utilized quantitative content analysis due to my research question looking to determine how influencers use the semiotic techniques of space and exclusivity to create idyllic destination images and to influence the tourist gaze.

Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis

As my research question warranted a set of descriptive claims that looked to describe particular, quantifiable characteristics related to the semiotics of space and exclusivity to create idealized imagery using quantitative content analysis, I set well-defined parameters (semiotic parameters) to quantify such characteristics. By "pre-selecting the variables that will be studied" within the sample of Instagram travel influencer content, using quantitative content analysis establishes a "sharper line" that was "drawn between exploration (finding out what is there) and description (describing what has been found)," of which provided defined claims as to how travel influencers use the semiotics of space and exclusivity (Sandelowski, 2000, p.336). Therefore, the content of Instagram travel influencers was the dependent variable, and the depictions of space and exclusivity and their relation to destination images served as the independent variable within my study. While quantitative content analysis alone could have been used to determine potential numerical observations and trends, also using qualitative content analysis allowed for better interpretation of the content and enabled me to "explore the meaning and significance of the observations" (Merrigan, Huston, & Johnson, 2012, p.78).

Study Population and Sampling Method

To define my research's inclusion and exclusion criteria, I primarily focused on the three hundred most recent Instagram photos shared by the travel influencers (as of January 29th, 2021). While the frequency in which the travel influencers posted photos varied, selecting the ten most recent photos shared by each of the travel influencers allowed images to be chosen free

from selection bias. Additionally, most travel influencers often shared pictures frequently, with most posts examined coming from the month prior.

Sample of Instagram Travel Influencers

In *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods,* Sloan and Quan- Haase (2016) reference the work of Boyd and Crawford, highlighting that "the size of data should fit the research question being asked; in some cases, small is best," noting that studies examining specific occurrences amongst niche subpopulations of Instagram users often warrant the use of a smaller data set (Boyd and Crawford as cited in Sloan and Quan-Haase, 2016, p. 581). Therefore, due to my research intending to focus on the content of a niche sub-group of Instagram users, I used non-random selection methods to compile a purposive sample to select the appropriate individuals for my study. Further, I identified thirty well-known travel influencers with significant, active followings via web blogs and by exploring networks within the Instagram app, only selecting 'verified' travel influencers with hundreds of thousands of followers and high engagement (i.e. likes and comments). Overall, I chose thirty travel influencers, ten male, ten female, and ten non-gendered, to ensure gender balance. This selection method generally aligns with the sample size used by Baruah (2017) in his ethnographic study of this niche subpopulation of Instagram users, where he chose ten male and ten female influencers. Additionally, as the number of well-known, reputable Instagram travel influencers is relatively small, this sample size can be considered reflective of this population, and free of selection bias.

Selection of Travel Influencers

To select my sample of thirty travel influencers, I developed the following criteria: 1) influencers must be verified by Instagram, as denoted by a blue checkmark, 2) influencers must have over 100,000 followers, 3) influencers must post content primarily related to travel, and 4)

influencers must have their profile privacy settings adjusted to 'public' as this makes their

content accessible to anyone with an Instagram account. After developing these criteria, I used

listings from online blogs to compile potential travel influencers. Second, I created a separate

Instagram account, @capstone2021, to review the shortlisted influencers found on blog listings. I

then used the search functions within the platform to discover and explore the various

influencers' profiles before selecting thirty based on the criteria listed above. As using publicly

available content for research without the knowledge of those creating it being an evolving

ethical consideration, I assigned a numeric name to each travel influencer whose content I

collected and analyzed to add an additional layer of privacy and anonymity for these individuals

(denoted as TI1 to TI30). The Instagram bios and metrics of the travel influencers chosen for my

study are listed in Appendix A.

Message Population of Instagram Travel Influencer Content

To select a representative sample of the Instagram content shared by travel influencers, it

was necessary to select "a well-defined set of messages" pertinent to my research question

(Merrigan, Huston, & Johnson, 2012, p. 131). Concerning my study, the message population was

defined as the Instagram photos shared by the sample travel influencers noted above. Due to the

frequency of how often travel influencers share photos, collecting the ten most recent photos

shared by the travel influencers allowed for my data collection to reach a saturation point,

ultimately collecting three hundred posts for analysis evenly distributed across each influencer

(e.g. ten photos per influencer) as this will "give every element an equal chance to be included in

the sample" (Merrigan, Huston, & Johnson, 2012, p.131). Further, while the platform

functionalities of Instagram enable the sharing of video posts and temporary 24-hour 'story'

content, I focused specifically on the photographic content shared for the purpose of my

research.

Data Gathering Strategies

Following the guidance of Sloan and Quan-Haase (2016) on undertaking Instagram

related research and following a similar methodology to Baruah (2017), I manually extracted

data from the Instagram user-interface by creating a separate Instagram account specific to my

capstone research, @capstone2021, to identify, collect, and categorize the content shared by the

identified sample population of travel influencers. I 'followed' the sample travel influencers and

set notifications within the platform to alert me whenever they shared new content. Further, I

purposely selected the ten most recent photos shared by each travel influencer. To collect and

record the travel influencers' posts, I used features within the platform to save these photos and

categorize them based on which influencer shared them. This built-in saving and categorizing

feature further automatically sequenced the images based on the dates shared. Overall, I gathered

three hundred photos from the thirty select travel influencers.

Coding and Analysis

After collecting and categorizing the photos shared by my sample of Instagram travel

influencers, I analyzed and coded each photo based on the coding sheet described in Appendix

B. With the units of analysis being the semiotics within the images shared by these individuals,

these semiotic elements were placed within a coding scheme based on categories devised

concerning the amount of background space, the positionality of influencers within photos, and

landscape types. I also looked to define units of analysis related to the additional content within

their Instagram posts (i.e. geolocation-tagging). Using the work of Thurlow and Jaworski (2012)

in which they examine "objects with symbolic meaning" (p.492), I adapted their "seven

organizing principles in [the] 'new world of luxury" (p.492) to define my units of measurement

in relation to space and exclusivity. For my particular study, I defined my units of measurement

related to space as vacuous space and neocolonialism, and for those related to exclusivity as

(dis)order, conspicuous consumption, and invisible labour. As each of these principles is rooted

in the imagery of open spaces and exclusivity, I defined each of these elements within my coding

sheet and examined the shared content to determine the frequency at which these semiotic

techniques were used. Below the semiotic techniques related to space and exclusivity in relation

to idealized destination images are defined in Table 1.

Table 1

Definitions of the Semiotic Techniques Related to Space and Exclusivity

Semiotic Elements Used to Present Space & Exclusivity	Description of Photos that Use the Semiotic Techniques
Space	***Vacuous Space*** • Photos that present indoor or outdoor settings with the travel influencer positioned in the foreground, mid-foreground, or background of the photos with a large amount of background space or landscape present. • Photos of landscapes or cityscapes devoid of representations of local populations or tourists actively engaging with the physical spaces. ***Neocolonialism*** • Photos that present the promontory witness - a neocolonial motif where an individual or group is positioned overlooking a vast, 'uninhabited' landscape, suggesting exploration or conquest. • Photos presenting individuals undertaking activities or wearing clothing resembling that of colonial times (i.e. African safaris).
Exclusivity	***(Dis) order***

	- Photos that depict a contrast between orderly and disorderly spaces. - These photos may use juxtapositions and contrasting elements such as new with old, urban with rural, indoors with outdoors, occupied space with empty space, foreign with familiar, western with colonial, and contrasting textures in order to symbolize differences between orderly and disorderly spaces. - Ordered spaces are presented as a retreat or spaces where the influencer is able to exert a level of control. ***Conspicuous Consumption*** - Photos that present the influencers' consumption of luxurious objects or experiences (i.e. material goods, tours, or meals). ***Invisible Labour*** - Photos where influencers are situated in manicured spaces or are participating in an experience or meal that an unseen labourer would have prepared or provided. - Photos that show spaces that are maintained (i.e. manicured gardens or swimming pools). - Photos that show items or objects that would have been prepared by unseen labourers (i.e. folded towels on poolside day beds).

When devising these categories, I ensured that the photographs were easily categorized within one category and that no applicable messages were excluded (Merrigan, Huston, & Johnson, 2012, p.139). Of note, photographs could present multiple semiotic elements related to space and exclusivity. This was captured in more than one category, as the presentation of the photographic elements related to space and exclusivity were not mutually exclusive (i.e. a photo with neocolonial semiotic elements could also present the semiotics of vacuous space). Once all of the sample messaging was coded, I looked to examine the "number and percentage of [photos] that fall into each category of [my] coding scheme" (Merrigan, Huston, & Johnson, 2012, p.137). I also compared "the distribution of messages across several categories in [my] coding scheme"

(Merrigan, Huston, & Johnson, 2012, p.138) and examined such distribution with respect to my research question.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

My findings and analysis outlined below provide insight as to the frequency in which the thirty Instagram travel influencers used semiotic techniques to depict space and exclusivity in order to present idealized destination images and how these techniques may be used in a deceptive manner. These findings also provide insight as to how Instagram users can best read the semiotic techniques used by travel influencers to ensure they are not deceived. Overall, I found that how the travel influencers used the semiotic techniques related to space and exclusivity varied, but that they were often used to present idealized destination images that did not account for the true realities of the locations shown. Additionally, while the frequency in which each of the semiotic techniques varied between travel influencers, the most frequently used techniques are highlighted below in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency of Semiotic Techniques Related to Space and Exclusivity Used by the Sample of Travel Influencers

Space	
Vacuous space	67%
Neocolonialism	23%
Exclusivity	
(Dis)order	17%
Conspicuous Consumption	18%
Invisible Labour	13%

These semiotic techniques were often also used to hide visual elements that would have negatively affected how the destinations shown were perceived and emphasize favourable visual elements. By using semiotic techniques to show space and exclusivity, the travel influencers could conceal negative social and political realities associated with some of the destinations shown, such as ecological devastation, economic inequalities, or social justice issues. For this reason, it is increasingly crucial for Instagram viewers to critically revise their tourist gaze and evaluate how semiotic techniques related to space and exclusivity are presented by travel influencers.

Semiotic Techniques to Depict Space

The travel influencers used semiotic techniques to depict vacuous spaces and neocolonialism when presenting idealized destination images. Strategic framing was often used to emphasize the rarified status of the travel influencer shown, with the large amounts of vacuous space shown signifying exclusivity. The travel influencers also used these semiotic techniques to

conceal negative attributes of the destinations shown. Through their use of semiotic techniques to present neocolonial imagery, the travel influencers connoted power, and conquest of the spaces and destinations shown.

Vacuous Space

The semiotic technique most frequently used by travel influencers to communicate idealized destination images was vacuous space. Overall, 67% of the photos used this semiotic technique, with the travel influencers often denoting vacuous spaces by presenting either indoor or outdoor settings with themselves positioned in the foreground, mid-foreground, or background of the photos with a large amount of background space or landscape being shown. In many instances, the travel influencers also presented themselves as being surrounded by the vacuous spaces, with other tourists, locals, or peers not shown within the photographs' frames, making it appear as if they were the only person, pair, or group in the locations shown. Many travel influencers also frequently shared photos of landscapes or cityscapes devoid of representations of local populations or tourists actively engaging with the physical spaces in order to denote vacuous space.

By concealing the semiotic presence of other tourists or local populations, the travel influencers are able to "manufactur[e] [the] emptiness" of the locations shown and remove the "human and temporal context," of the destinations, in turn reducing these locations to "visual commodit[ies]" for tourists to consume (Smith, 2019, p.6). As travel influencers may remove the human and temporal contexts of locations in order to connote space and exclusivity when presenting idealized destination images, these photos shared by Instagram travel influencers may invite Instagram users to partake in the tourist gaze and imagine themselves visiting the areas presented. Due to these photos presenting vacuous, idealized landscapes or townscapes that

contrast their viewers' everyday experiences, these images can encourage the tourist gaze and motivate individuals to imagine themselves visiting the locations shown. By encouraging individuals to view destinations through the tourist gaze, photos that use semiotic techniques to depict vacuous space may act as a source for travel inspiration and planning. However, while these idealized destination images that show and emphasize vacuous space can act as sources of inspiration in travel decision making, there is an increased need for Instagram users to critically analyze the semiotics of vacuous space being presented and the role this semiotic technique has in relation to the tourist gaze and how locations are perceived. Photographs that utilize this semiotic technique may present deceptive representations of the destinations. By concealing aesthetically unappealing semiotic elements such as crowds, traffic, or pollution, the Instagram users who view these photos may be unaware of a destination's true nature (exemplified in Figure 1). As travel influencers often utilize the semiotics of vacuous space to present destinations as remote or exclusive and align with the common "representation of travel on social media", there is an increased need to "lift[s] the veil" and examine how destinations may differ from how they are presented online (Smith, 2019, p.2-3). Therefore, while the photographs shared by Instagram travel influencers may be a substantive source of travel inspiration, individuals should seek other sources of information related to a destination (i.e. media articles or online forums) to gain a more fulsome and pragmatic idea of what they may experience.

Figure 1

Idealized Representation of Santorini, Greece Due to the Depiction of Vacuous Space By An Instagram Travel Influencers Versus the Challenges Associated with Overtourism

Influencer Photo	Non-Idealized Depiction of the Destination
(Best Vacations, 2020)	Tourists maneuver to snap a shot of one of Oia's famous sunsets [Online photo]. (2019). Greece Is. Retrieved from: https://www.greece-is.com/santorini-pressure-threat-overtourism/ (Kokkindis, 2019)

Note. While not shown in the photo of the travel influencer, in recent years, Santorini, Greece

has faced considerable social and environmental challenges due to the number of tourists

concentrating on the island. From 2012 to 2017, the island saw a 66% increase in visitors, with

the increase in tourists placing additional pressures on local residents, as well as the island's

infrastructure and environment (Bateman, 2019; Minihane, 2019). This required the government

to begin to implement measures to try and limit the number of daily visitors on the islands

(Butler, 2018). While travel influencers may use semiotic techniques to depict vacuous space, like in the instance of Santorini, these images may be representative of a particular, idealistic space and time but not the overall atmosphere of the destination.

Furthermore, how the travel influencers presented vacuous space in their photos was often dependent on how the photographer framed the scenes shown. By using strategic framing and scaling, travel influencers were often able to denote and emphasize vacuous spaces, making the destination appear much more exclusive, prominent, and remote. In addition, the travel influencers often used strategic framing to potentially hide aesthetically unpleasing semiotic elements such as pollution, crowds, or disadvantaged locals that individuals may interact with when visiting the destinations promoted by travel influencers. As the travel influencers used strategic framing to potentially conceal these negative aspects while emphasizing the presentation of vacuous spaces in order to connote that destinations are spacious or exclusive, this may encourage viewers to develop favourable perceptions of the locations presented.

By using the technique of strategic framing to present the semiotics of space and exclusivity in order to emphasize "semiotic silence" and to "note [the] prevailing emptiness in the landscapes", the travel influencers are able to add to the "exclusivity and rarified status of the tourist" in relation to the destinations shown (Thurlow and Jaworski as cited in Smith, 2019, p.6). Yet, by connoting that destinations are exclusive and that tourists may hold a rarified status, this can result in a disconnect between the destination images associated with locations based on Instagram travel influencer photographs and how individuals experience the locations shown (see Figure 2). As the photos shared by Instagram travel influencers often connote that they are the only individuals in a location, by depicting vacuous space, travel influencers may inadvertently heighten individuals' expectations when viewing destination images. This potential

discrepancy between the vacuous space presented within Instagram photos versus how

individuals experience a destination is likely to impact travel experiences significantly due to the

false expectations associated with space and exclusivity, potentially allowing for disappointment.

Figure 2

The Use of Strategic Framing to Conceal the Impacts of Overtourism in Palawan, Philippines.

Influencer Photo	Non-Idealized Depiction of the Destination
(Chelsea Y, 2020)	(Traveller Nomads, 2018)

Note. Not shown in the influencer photo, the Filipino island of Palawan has faced anthropogenic

and environmental challenges in recent years due to an increase in tourism. While tourism is a

primary source of employment and contributor to the local economy, the region has seen an

increase in plastic pollution, with "the water being tainted and the beaches [being] ruined"

(Amuse Team, 2018). Further, the local government is looking at measures to reduce the impacts

of tourism in the area, including additional fees or campaigns to dissuade excess visitation

(Amuse Team, 2018). As shown above, through their use of strategic framing, the travel influencer was able to conceal these negative aspects about the destination.

Questions for Reflection: Vacuous Space

As travel influencers may use semiotic techniques to depict vacuous spaces in order to present idealized destinations, viewers need to ask the following questions when viewing such photographs:

1. Do the travel influencers use semiotic techniques to conceal the presence of other tourists or local populations?

2. By using semiotic techniques to depict vacuous spaces, do the travel influencers conceal negative aspects associated with a destination (i.e. crowds, traffic, or pollution)? What are the social, political, or environmental realities of the destinations shown?

3. Do the travel influencers use strategic framing to make the spaces appear more remote or exclusive? What may be outside of the photograph's frame and would those factors positively or negatively affect how the destination is perceived?

4. Do the travel influencers present themselves as rarified tourists? Is this an accurate depiction of how many tourists may be visiting the location? How might tourism adversely impact local populations?

Neocolonialism

Many travel influencers also knowingly or unknowingly presented neocolonial ideologies through their presentation of vacuous space, with their photos often depicting the conquest or exploration of spaces shown. To assess whether photos used semiotic techniques to depict neocolonialism, I used the examples from Thurlow and Jaworski (2012), where they indicated that neocolonial tourism activities might be shown as "genesis amnesia" or "post tourism"

(p.511-512). I also looked to examine content for Smith's (2018) "promontory witness" motif (see Figure 3). Overall, 23% of the photos shared depicted neocolonial ideologies in relation to idealized destinations.

Figure 3

Example of the Promontory Witness Motif and Deceptive Framing
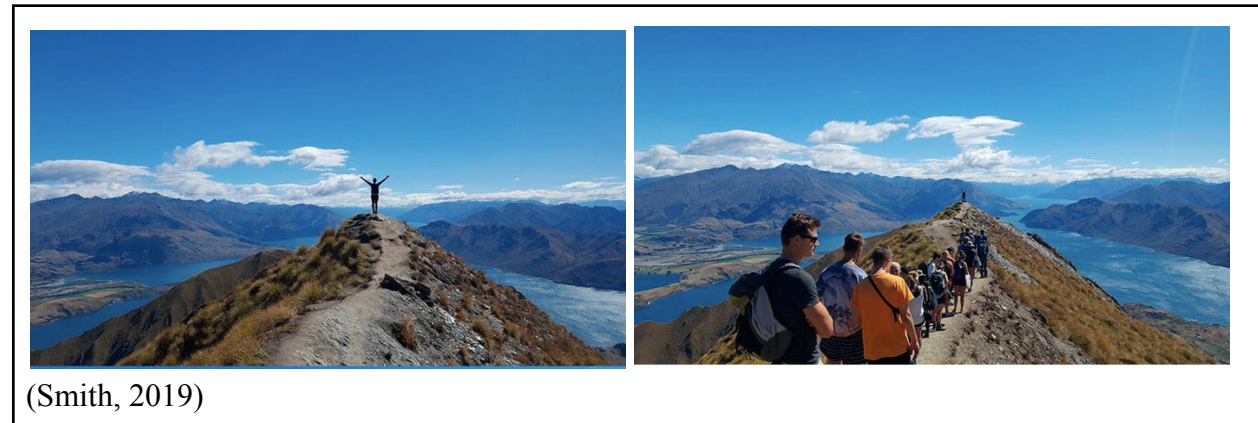
(Smith, 2019)

The most common way that influencers depicted neocolonialism was by positioning themselves as promontory witnesses. Smith (2018) describes the promontory witness as a motif where an individual positions themselves overlooking a vast, 'uninhabited' landscape, suggesting exploration or conquest. Photos that use the promontory motif or other colonial-esque semiotics can represent neocolonial interactions between the influencers and the landscapes in which they are present, signifying conquest or that the landscapes are available for their consumption. As Smith (2019) suggests, the promontory witness can "recontextualiz[e] ways of seeing 'foreign' places that are deeply imbricated within discourses of power" (p.1). Further, Smith's notion of 'ways of seeing' can heavily influence how individuals see locations based on compelling images previously viewed in digital and traditional media. Specifically, the promontory witness may strongly speak visually to Instagram users, as by concealing their faces while posing in this manner, travel influencers may act as a proxy for other Instagram users to see themselves in their

position overlooking the landscape or cityscape presented.

Due to this motif potentially encouraging viewers to imagine themselves in the place of the travel influencers, the landscapes presented may be commodified or viewed as spaces available for their consumption. Smith (2019) notes the idea of Thurlow and Jaworski in that "in the case of the promontory witness, landscapes - are so often selected, posed with, and posted for their currency on social media" with "tourist photographs hav[ing] long enabled the acquisition of social capital" (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2015 as cited in Smith, 2019, p.8), while also adding that "social media platforms dramatically enhance travel's capital-generating potential" (Smith, 2019, p.8). Therefore, this relationship between territorialism and the commodification of a destination may encourage viewers to seek out the destination to later recreate a photograph similar to that shared by travel influencers to acquire the social capital associated with visiting the destination.

Smith (2019) also presents this idea as he highlights the work of Thurlow and Jaworski (2015), building upon their belief in suggesting that "tourists often seek to have their pictures taken as a way of demonstrating accomplishment, or even imitating a kind of conquest reminiscent of nineteenth-century European explorations" (see Figure 4) (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2015 as cited in Smith, 2019, p.12) while also adding that tourists may look to tick a destination off of a theoretical #bucketlist, with these 'bucket lists' being "catalogues of desired experiences, and in tourism discourse often comprise lists of aspirational destinations or location-specific activities" (Smith, 2019, p.12).

Figure 4

Examples of Where Semiotic Techniques are Used to Depict Neocolonialism, Post-Tourism, and Conquest.

Influencer Photo	Colonial Era Depictions
(Saward, 2020a)	(Royal African Safaris, n.d.) [Untitled photo depicting a historical hunting safari] (n.d.). Africa Hunting. Retrieved from: https://www.africahunting.com/threads/vintage-safari-pictures.10147/page-5

Note. The travel influencer is shown on an African Safari wearing clothing reminiscent of colonial-era safari fashion. While not a hunting safari, the influencer is partaking in the viewing and consumption of the African landscape.

The travel influencers that used semiotic techniques related to vacuous space in order to present neocolonial ideologies often used these visual techniques to signify exploration or conquest, while disregarding a region's history or current social, political, or environmental challenges. Additionally, as the use of semiotic techniques to depict these motifs encourages the consumption of space, this may reinforce power dynamics between tourists and local populations. Local populations may be utilized for cheap labour to provide and produce goods and services for tourists, furthering historical systems of oppression. As the promontory witness is rooted in semiotic techniques that portray neocolonialism, where the travel influencers position themselves overlooking vast landscapes, these photos may unknowingly perpetuate colonial imagery, and power dynamics in relation to the destinations presented and local populations. This "motif sees the landscape as uninhabited but for the solitary, poeticized subject" (Smith, 2019, p. 5). By "representing popular tourist sites as "empty," however, is as much an act of imagination, as it is of calculation, where photographers and their witness-bearing subjects must carefully compose frames" (Smith, 2019, p.5) to exclude unaesthetic photo elements such as other tourists or local populations. Presenting these spaces as exclusive or remote, without crediting them as already inhabited, may create similar power dynamics to past colonial-era exploration and travel.

Questions for Reflection: Neocolonialism

When travel influencers use semiotic techniques to depict vacuous spaces and their power over

the destinations they may knowingly or unknowingly present neocolonial ideologies, viewers

should ask the following questions when viewing photos that use these semiotic techniques:

1. Does the travel influencer present the landscape or cityscape as uninhabited? Who are the

    locals of the destination shown? What is the history of the location? Does the country

    have a past colonial history?

2. By presenting spaces as exclusive or remote, without crediting them as already inhabited,

    how could this reinforce power dynamics between tourists and locals?

3. Does the photograph suggest exploration or conquest? How does the influencer present

    themself in relation to the destination shown? Do they signify that the destination is a

    space for them to explore or conquest?

4. Is the destination presented as a commodity that encourages viewers to seek out and

    recreate the imagery shown in order to generate social capital?

5. Do the travel influencers use these semiotic techniques to demonstrate accomplishment

    or conquest?

Semiotic Techniques to Depict Exclusivity

        The travel influencers used semiotic techniques to depict exclusivity via (dis)order,

conspicuous consumption, and concealing labourers when presenting idealized destination

images. By presenting ordered and disordered spaces, the influencers were able to create

semiotic borders between calm environments in which they were situated and chaotic external

landscapes. The travel influencers also used these semiotic techniques to highlight their

consumption of products, experiences, and destinations to signify their power, influence, and

ability to consume. Through their use of semiotic techniques to conceal local labourers in the

destinations shown, the travel influencers negated the energy and work done to create the

idealized destinations and experiences shown.

(Dis)order

One of the primary semiotic techniques used by the Instagram travel influencers to

connote exclusivity was (dis)order as 17% of the shared photos presented this semiotic

technique. When presenting (dis)order to connote exclusivity, the travel influencers looked to use

"contrasting textures and spaces" in order to create a dichotomy between ordered and disordered

spaces. The travel influencers often used juxtapositions and contrasting photographic elements to

connote and emphasize differences between the orderly spaces in which they were situated and

the disorderly external environments. How the travel influencers communicated order and

disorder varied, with some influencers using semiotic techniques to juxtapose themselves within

spaces or to contrast the locations they were in from the photos' background areas. Other images

also looked to highlight contrasts in textures within natural landscapes. The travel influencers

often emphasized contrasts between urban and rural spaces, human-made and natural spaces, or

their bodies with external environments.

By using this semiotic technique to create visually distinguished orderly and disorderly

spaces, the travel influencers were often able to signify that they are in control of their

environment, despite travel generally being a disorderly, foreign activity. Travel influencers often

used contrasts between two spaces in order to create semiotic borders between orderly spaces in

which they were situated and disorderly external landscapes. Through emphasizing these

contrasts and semiotic differences between ordered and disordered spaces, the travel influencers

were able to present idealized, orderly destinations that often would not be reflective of the

broader landscape (see Figure 5). The travel influencers would often use their photos' colours to

show defined distinctions between ordered and disordered spaces to connote a border between

spaces. Additionally, the travel influencers would often emphasize physical elements within their

photos to further emphasize the differences between ordered and disordered spaces. By

emphasizing the contrast between the two spaces, this often established strong connotative

borders between the orderly location the influencers were situated and the disorderly, wild

natural landscapes. Additionally, as the influencers often used the geolocation tags, their photos

may have presented misleading depictions of the specific destinations shown. As their

photographs only provided insight as to luxurious, aesthetically pleasing locations within broader

settings, they often did not provide the viewer with insight as to what they may experience in the

broader landscape (i.e. congestion or pollution). This may potentially mislead individuals who

base their travel decisions on the imagery shared by travel influencers.

Figure 5

Examples of Where Semiotic Techniques are Used to Signify Semiotic Borders Between an Orderly, Exclusive Space in Bali, Indonesia Compared to the Chaotic, Disorderly External Local Environment

Influencer Photo	Non-Idealized Depiction of the Destination
(Morris, 2020)	(Esrock, 2019) (Blinkov, 2017)

Note. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of tourists arriving in Bali was increasing at a substantive rate, with 6.5 million individuals travelling to the island in 2019 (Minihane, 2019). Due to the increase in tourists, locals have voiced concern with regards to the social and environmental issues this has brought to the region (Minihane, 2019). While tourism has led to
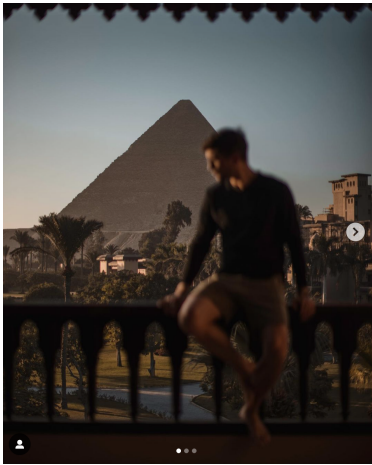
the rapid growth of the region's economy, it has also contributed to the amount of waste and plastic pollution in the region (Siddharta, 2019). Through their use of juxtaposing the disorderly external environment of Bali and emphasizing an orderly space, the travel influencers use semiotic techniques to depict exclusive spaces within a disorderly landscape, while also concealing social and environmental challenges.

While the degree to which travel influencers used the semiotics techniques to show (dis) order varied, many travel influencers used this semiotic technique to present the orderly spaces in which they were situated as an 'escape' from the contrasting disorderly background settings shown in their photographs. These orderly spaces often differed considerably from the geographic locations in which they were located, with many of them only being accessible to those with the financial resources needed. By presenting the semiotics of ordered spaces in juxtaposition to disorderly background environments, the destinations shown may be seen not only as a getaway from one's daily life, work, and regular responsibilities but also a potential escape from a chaotic, unpredictable foreign environment. Therefore, this may entice the viewers of these photos to envision themselves as being able to visit challenging foreign destinations. By creating this invisible, semiotic border between ordered and disordered spaces, this may signify to viewers that they can view, and engage with a destination from a comfortable, ordered space that disregards potentially challenging encounters they may have in a disorderly locale (i.e. poverty, or environmental degradation). This is an example of how travel influencers can intentionally or unintentionally shape misconceptions of destinations. How travel influencers present destinations and how travellers may experience the destination may differ. The connoted calm, ordered spaces presented in the content of travel influencers may not adequately prepare

travellers for the realities that could be experienced in the contrasting external, disorderly

environments that are not shown in the influencers' photographs (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

*The Contrast Between an Orderly Location that a Travel Influencer is Situated and the Nearby
External Local Environment in Cairo, Egypt*

Influencer Photo	Non-Idealized Depiction of the Destination
(LeBlanc, 2020)	(Google, n.d.)

Note. The photo shared by the Instagram travel influencer depicts an orderly space at the

Marriott Mena House Cairo in Cairo, Egypt. While this photo presents an idealized, orderly

space, it contrasts the nearby external environment with an image obtained from Google Maps

street view. As the streetscape of the city and areas surrounding the pyramids are likely to be

chaotic in nature due to traffic, touts, and groups of tourists, the influencer was able to remove

these semiotic elements from the space presented.

Questions for Reflection: (Dis)order

As some travel influencers use semiotic techniques to depict borders between ordered and disordered spaces, viewers should ask the following questions when viewing such photos:

1. How do travel influencers use semiotic techniques to emphasize differences between orderly spaces in which they were situated and disorderly external environments? How could the external environment be characterized?

2. Are these idealized, exclusive orderly spaces reflective of the broader landscape of the destination shown? Do these orderly spaces provide insight as to the broader, external environment of the destination?

3. What challenges may be experienced in the external, disorderly spaces (i.e. poverty, violence or environmental degradation)? Are these challenges reflected in the idealized images shown?

4. How do these semiotic borders emphasize power relations between orderly spaces meant for tourists and local populations?

Conspicuous Consumption

Many travel influencers also used semiotic techniques to highlight their consumption of travel-related experiences in order to emphasize exclusivity, with 18% of photos shared by travel influencers presenting conspicuous consumption. Travel influencers often denoted particular material objects (i.e. vehicles, meals, hotel rooms) or experiences (i.e tours, spas), to connote that they held a certain degree of privilege and ability to partake in these luxurious, exclusive experiences. These portrayals could contrast how others may experience locations or experiences when travelling in less-luxurious circumstances, or in their day-to-day lives. Therefore, by presenting their consumption of certain luxury items or exclusive experiences, the travel

influencer may reinforce and demonstrate their position of power to their followers and other

Instagram users who view their photos (see Figure 7). Consequently, this signifies the travel

influencer's ability to consume these experiences and can indicate the influencer's status,

potentially encouraging Instagram users to consider their content credible.

Figure 7

The Contrast Between an Exclusive Experience 'Consumed' by a Travel Influencer When Flying During the COVID-19 Pandemic Versus What the General Public may Experience

Influencer Photo	Non-Idealized Depiction of the Experience
(Saward, 2020b)	[Untitled photo of a crowded plane during the COVID-19 pandemic]. (2020). Deutsche Welle. Retrieved from: https://www.dw.com/en/how-safe-is-air-travel-during-covid-19/a-55435284

Note. The travel influencer is shown flying in first-class during the COVID-19 pandemic,

connoting her consumption of a luxurious experience. This photo contrasts with the less

luxurious experience the general public may have while flying at the same time.

The travel influencers also used semiotic techniques to show their consumption of foreign

spaces and exclusive activities, in turn connoting that destinations are 'commodities' for tourists

to consume and experience. In doing so, these commodified spaces and experiences may be

viewed as a part of a larger, consumable 'collection'. Smith (2019) highlights this notion of

collecting and consuming a collection of destinations or experiences, noting that individuals may see destinations and experiences, as "crossing an item off one's bucket list" (p.13). Smith notes that this "bears a resemblance to the collection of an artifact, as such bucket list items are typically rare and only secured after significant planning and effort" (p.13). While in the past, individuals may have purchased physical souvenirs, postcards, or shared film photographs with their immediate friends or family, Instagram has enabled individuals to share their vacation photos in near real-time and signify they have 'consumed' these destinations or experiences.

Furthermore, Smith (2019) suggests that through the use of certain photographic motifs, individuals can "rende[r] the landscape into a souvenir itself, a tokenized possession that metonymizes the tourist's experience in the destination [where the] emplacement of the individual tourist within the landscape thus creates a postcard not of place, but of themselves-in-place, with their gaze from atop a promontory the artifact that is publicly displayed" (p.13). In doing so, this encourages individuals to show their real-time 'consumption' of a travel-related experience as opposed to bringing home a souvenir. Therefore, as influencers may be able to use semiotic techniques to emphasize the conspicuous consumption of destinations and experiences, this may encourage individuals to view spaces as consumable which may impact their experiences when travelling and how they interact with spaces, other tourists, and local populations.

Questions for Reflection: Conspicuous Consumption

As some travel influencers using semiotic techniques to depict conspicuous consumption and their power and privilege, viewers should ask the following questions when viewing photos that use these semiotic techniques:

1. Through signifying their consumption of material objects (i.e. vehicles, clothing, meals, etc.) or experiences (i.e tours, hotel stays, spas), how does this connote their privilege, status, and power as a travel influencer? Does this conspicuous consumption make their content and personalities appear more credible or influential?

2. How do travel influencers present destinations or experiences as 'commodities' for consumption? How does their presentation of experiences and destinations tie into bucketlist culture? How does the 'consumption' of a destination alter how one may experience or enjoy it?

3. Who are these experiences and destinations accessible to? What privileges are the travel influencers afforded to have these lifestyles?

Invisible Labour

It was also found that 13% of the photos shared by travel influencers utilize semiotic techniques to conceal labourers in order to connote exclusive, idealized destination images. Many travel influencers presented themselves situated in well-manicured spaces such as gardens or pool areas, or participating in experiences and meals that unseen labourers would have prepared or maintained. By utilizing semiotic techniques to stage photos in this manner connotes that travel influencers and tourists, in general, may have unphotographed labourers preparing specific spaces, goods, services, or experiences for their consumption and enjoyment when

travelling (see Figure 8). This semiotic technique can emphasize exclusivity in relation to an idealized destination, as this imagery can connote that travellers are in positions of power where the unseen labourers act in servitude to them.

Further, depending on the location and nature of the travel, the unseen labourers may be paid low-wages or exploited to ensure that tourists have an optimal experience. Additionally, as travel influencers conceal labourers by using semiotic techniques, viewers may disregard the human aspects of local populations and workers that are economically dependent on tourism dollars. By concealing the aspects of labour, tourists may gaze at locations and imagine themselves as engaging in similar travel experiences; however, viewers may not question whether the labour needed to provide such experiences could be exploiting native labourers. Other influencers also used the semiotics of space and exclusivity to conceal local labourers, such as photographic depictions of uniformly folded towels on poolside day-beds or perfectly manicured gardens. By presenting these semiotics of space and exclusivity to disguise labour it may further add to an idealized destination image that enables viewers to disregard the social interactions and power dynamics that can be created or reinforced from their travels.

Figure 8

An Example of an Instance Where an Instagram Travel Influencer Uses Semiotic Techniques to Conceal Local Labour & the Unseen Labourers in Bali, Indonesia

Influencer Photo	Non-Idealized Depiction of the Experience
(Forbes Travel Guide, 2021)	(Rosa, 2019)

Note. As more people vacation abroad and certain destinations see a considerable increase in the number of visitors, local populations are increasingly employed in the tourism sector. However, these labourers are often unseen in tourism-related imagery, with tourists often not considering the workers that maintain the luxury spaces or provide the services they experience. This was evident in the photographs shared by travel influencers, as semiotic techniques were often used to disguise or conceal labour. As shown above (left), an 'unseen' labourer would have carefully folded the towels and prepared the pool space for the tourist. Similarly, above (right) shows 'unseen' labourers in Bali, Indonesia, where the individuals clean a beach for tourist enjoyment. Of note, in less developed nations, certain businesses and services "need to allow the paying tourist customer to do and be whatever they desire", in turn resulting in "exploitation, consumerism, and wealth extraction work to produce an incredibly destructive kind of mass

tourism" (Kolinjivadi, 2021). Further, much of the wealth generated at popular tourist destinations is accrued by "multinational conglomerates which own travel agencies, hotels, airlines, cruise ships and even local commercial retail shops"(Kolinjivadi, 2021). Therefore, as the tourism industry expands, tourists should reflect upon who is employed in this sector where they will be visiting.

Questions for Reflection: Invisible Labour

Due to some travel influencers using semiotic techniques to conceal visual elements associated with labour, viewers should ask the following questions when viewing photos that use these semiotic techniques:

1. Who are the unseen individuals tending to and maintaining the spaces presented by the travel influencers?

2. Who are the individuals making the goods or providing the services for the travel influencers?

3. What are the common labour practices in the destinations shown? Are the labourers paid fair wages? How does tourism affect local labour markets and are they exploitive?

4. Do the travel influencers highlight labourers in the destinations shown? What is their relation with the local labourers that provide the goods and services?

5. Do the travel influencers intentionally conceal exploitative labour?

Research Limitations

One of my study's limitations was that the sample of photos were only coded by one individual (myself). However, to best ensure repeatability, the coding was done systematically with well-defined categories. As this research is semiotic in nature, certain qualitative or quantitative photographic elements may be interpreted differently depending on the individual

coding them. Therefore, I looked to create my coding categories based on the work of Thurlow and Jaworski (2012), where they identified semiotic elements of space and exclusivity to mitigate any potential bias and guide my analysis.

An additional limitation of my study is that I intentionally focused on photographic content. Photographs are the primary medium in which users share Instagram content. However, Instagram as a platform has continued to evolve since its inception in 2010, with users now being able to share videos or 'stories' that are separate from a user's 'feed' with these posts disappearing within 24 hours, unless pinned as a 'highlight' to the users' profile.

Instagram has also evolved to enable users to share multiple photos within a singular 'post.' While some of the sample travel influencers' posts included numerous photos, I limited my study to the first photo shared within each set when I encountered these multi- posts. As most posts analyzed were shared as singular photos, I only used the first photo in multi- posts to best keep my sample to 10 pictures per influencer, as the first photo arguably has the most impact as it is the first one that viewers see on their feed.

As briefly noted above, COVID-19 may have limited my research as certain influencers may have been travelling less or presenting their travels and destination images differently during this time period. Yet, as much of the content shared still depicted space and exclusivity in relation to destination image, potentially similar to how it was presented in the past.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This section will provide an overview of my key findings and will list a summary of the questions individuals should reflect upon when viewing the content of Instagram travel influencers. The key findings in combination with these questions will provide individuals with

the skills and abilities needed to best read the photos shared by Instagram travel influencers and better form accurate representations of destinations when travel planning. Lastly, this section will discuss potential areas of research to further build knowledge in this area.

Summary of Key Findings

Through their use of semiotic techniques to emphasize vacuous spaces in their photographs, the travel influencers were able to connote exclusive experiences and hide potentially aesthetically unpleasing semiotic elements such as pollution, crowds, and disadvantaged locals that individuals may inadvertently experience when visiting destinations. In doing so, these photos that emphasize vacuous space encourage the tourist gaze, enabling prospective tourists to envision themselves within the foreign destination. However, this may heighten individuals' expectations when viewing destination images as there is the opportunity for discrepancies between the vacuous space presented within the Instagram photos presented and how individuals experience a destination. While these images that utilize semiotic techniques to emphasize vacuous space in order to present idealized destination images can act as sources of inspiration in travel decision making, there is an increased need for Instagram users to critically analyze the vacuous spaces being presented because these photographs may present deceptive representations of the destinations shown. The semiotic techniques used to emphasize neocolonialism were often used to signify accomplishment, exploration or conquest, with these images encouraging the 'consumption' of the destinations shown. In turn, this may potentially create or reinforce power dynamics between tourists and local populations, where local populations may be utilized for cheap labour to provide and produce goods and services for tourists.

The travel influencers used various semiotic techniques to portray exclusivity in relation to the idealized destination images presented, including emphasizing (dis)order, conspicuous consumption, and concealing labour. The travel influencers depicted visual contrasts between orderly and disorderly spaces to signify that the orderly spaces in which they were situated were 'escapes' from the contrasting disorderly background settings. By presenting the semiotics of ordered spaces in juxtaposition to disorderly background environments, the destinations shown may be seen not only as a getaway from one's daily life, work, and regular responsibilities but also a potential escape from chaotic, unpredictable foreign environments. The travel influencers also used semiotic techniques to emphasize conspicuous consumption of exclusive travel experiences which also reinforced and demonstrated their position of power to their followers and other Instagram users. Additionally, many travel influencers used semiotic techniques to conceal labourers by emphasizing the semiotics of exclusivity, encouraging viewers to think of themselves as engaging with a similar travel experience while not exploiting native labourers, with this potentially further adding to idealized destination imagery.

Therefore, for these reasons noted above, it is increasingly important for Instagram viewers to critically evaluate how space and exclusivity are presented in relation to the destination images presented by travel influencers as these individuals may use semiotics to create deceptively idyllic destination images that alter the realities of the locations being presented.

Summary of Questions for Reflection When Viewing Travel Influencer Photographs

The following table summarizes the questions that individuals should reflect upon when viewing photos shared by Instagram travel influencers. By asking these questions, individuals will be able to form representative destination images when gazing at the destinations shown.

Table 3

Summary of Questions for Reflection When Viewing Travel-Related Instagram Photos

Semiotic Technique	Questions for Reflection When Viewing
Space	
Vacuous Space	- Do the travel influencers use semiotic techniques to conceal the presence of other tourists or local populations? - By using semiotic techniques to depict vacuous spaces, do the travel influencers conceal negative aspects associated with a destination (i.e. crowds, traffic, or pollution)? What are the social, political, or environmental realities of the destinations shown? - Do the travel influencers use strategic framing to make the spaces appear more remote or exclusive? What may be outside of the photograph's frame and would those factors positively or negatively affect how the destination is perceived? - Do the travel influencers present themselves as rarified tourists? Is this an accurate depiction of how many tourists may be visiting the location? How might tourism adversely impact local populations?
Neocolonialism	- Does the travel influencer present the landscape or cityscape as uninhabited? Who are the locals of the destination shown? What is the history of the location? Does the country have a past colonial history? - By presenting spaces as exclusive or remote, without crediting them as already inhabited, how could this reinforce power dynamics between tourists and locals? - Does the photograph suggest exploration or conquest? How does the influencer present themself in relation to the destination shown? Do they signify that the destination is a space for them to explore or conquest? - Is the destination presented as a commodity that encourages viewers to seek out and recreate the imagery shown in order to generate social capital? - Do the travel influencers use these semiotic techniques to demonstrate accomplishment or conquest?
Exclusivity	

(Dis)order	• How do travel influencers use semiotic techniques to emphasize differences between orderly spaces in which they were situated and disorderly external environments? How could the external environment be characterized? • Are these idealized, exclusive orderly spaces reflective of the broader landscape of the destination shown? Do these orderly spaces provide insight as to the broader, external environment of the destination? • What challenges may be experienced in the external, disorderly spaces (i.e. poverty, violence or environmental degradation)? Are these challenges reflected in the idealized images shown? • How do these semiotic borders emphasize power relations between orderly spaces meant for tourists and local populations?
Conspicuous Consumption	• Through signifying their consumption of material objects (i.e. vehicles, clothing, meals, etc.) or experiences (i.e tours, hotel stays, spas), how does this connote their privilege, status, and power as a travel influencer? Does this conspicuous consumption make their content and personalities appear more credible or influential? • How do travel influencers present destinations or experiences as 'commodities' for consumption? How does their presentation of experiences and destinations tie into bucketlist culture? How does the 'consumption' of a destination alter how one may experience or enjoy it? • Who are these experiences and destinations accessible to? What privileges are the travel influencers afforded to have these lifestyles?
Invisible Labour	• Who are the unseen individuals tending to and maintaining the spaces presented by the travel influencers? • Who are the individuals making the goods or providing the services for the travel influencers? • What are the common labour practices in the destinations shown? Are the labourers paid fair wages? How does tourism affect local labour markets and are they exploitive? • Do the travel influencers highlight labourers in the destinations shown? What is their relation with the local labourers that provide the goods and services? • Do the travel influencers intentionally conceal exploitative labour?

Areas for Future Research

As my research question looked to broadly determine the extent to which Instagram travel influencers used the semiotics of open space and exclusivity to present idyllic destination images, there is opportunity for future scholars to take further focused approaches regarding the specific semiotic techniques highlighted in my work. Further, as there may be variance in regards to how space and exclusivity are presented in relation to destinations, there are additional opportunities for researchers to examine the role of the semiotics of space and exclusivity within travel influencer content and how it may shape a particular location's destination image. Research in this area could potentially look to compare and contrast the depictions of a destination within travel influencer content against how tourists may experience it or how it appears outside of Instagram.

Additionally, as my study results are specific to photographic content, there is an opportunity for future research that examines how travel influencers present space and exclusivity in relation to destination image through video, story content, or multi-photo posts. As Instagram's platform functionalities continue to evolve and expand, this may be an area for additional research, with future studies potentially being able to use my results to assess how photographic, cinematographic, and short-form content may interrelate to shape idyllic destination images. Other areas of opportunity for future research could also examine how travel-related content is presented on other emerging social media platforms such as TikTok.

Future research is also warranted in regards to specifically examining the potentially deceptive nature of travel influencer content and how this may affect how individuals perceive different locales. As my study did not take an overly focused approach on photogenia, future scholarship may be undertaken to determine how filtering and photo editing may influence how

destinations are seen. Additionally, due to the possibility for individuals to be deceived as to

what influencer content is an advertisement or partnership, there is further opportunity to

examine the relationship between sponsored content, destination images and whether this

influences the viewer's perception of the information or destination presented.

Lastly, as my study only focused on Instagram travel influencers, a future study on how

traditional media (i.e. TV shows, movies, or music videos), generalized Instagram influencers

(i.e. celebrities, lifestyle influencers, etc.) or general Instagram users shape the destination

images of various locations may be of further, additional benefit.

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Appendices

Below are two appendices:
- Appendix A: Travel Influencer Profile Metrics
- Appendix B: Coding Scheme

Appendix A: Travel Influencer Profile Metrics

Male Travel Influencers					
Influencer	Number of Posts	Number of Followers	Number of Accounts Following	Verified by Instagram (Y/N)	Bio
TI1	2,192	1.1M	1,384	Y	Travel vlogger sharing my adventures & hoping to inspire social change. Plant based. Founder of @livetheadventure & @thesocialgoodclub
TI2	947	173K	159	Y	Youngest Spaniard to Visit Every Country in the World. Professional traveler & Author. Read my EBOOK, "STORIES from my travels"
TI3	799	663K	606	Y	Escaped the 9-5. YouTube/Travel. Lets talk: christian@lostleblanc.com. Online academy @lostcreatoracademy
TI4	884	2.6M	613	Y	Presets @doyoutravelpresets, Photo&video filters @tonestudioapp, Clothing @alorthelabel, Film @jackmorrisfilm
TI5	3,898	3.6M	894	Y	Have Camera, Will Travel. LDS - Photographer - Speaker - Filmmaker
TI6	1,740	193K	889	Y	World's #4 Most Influential Traveler - Forbes, World's

					Best Family Traveler - Fodor's, 97 countries (62 w/kids), Ambassador: AFAR
TI7	394	412K	876	Y	YouTuber and Pixel Collector. Travel, tech, lifestyle. I have a confession to make.
TI8	616	3.8M	931	Y	@followmeto project, Film Producer @hype.film, Influencer of the year, Tope 3 Travel Influencer by Forbes
TI9	1,191	818K	457	Y	callum@callumsnapehoto.com. Vancouver, Stay Wild. #CalSnapeCreate
TI10	2,329	1M	541	Y	YouTuber, Skier, Entrepreneur and World Traveler living in Monaco.
Female Travel Influencers					
Influencer	**Number of Posts**	**Number of Followers**	**Number of Accounts Following**	**Verified by Instagram (Y/N)**	**Bio**
TI11	781	111K	898	Y	NYC, Cancer Survivor. Philanthropist, Luxury Travel Blogger, Avgeek.
TI12	2,391	541K	664	Y	Escape Artist. Currently in: #California. Photos Edited with @tbapresets. All-Female Tours @tbaescapes
TI13	1,199	2.9M	86	Y	Welcome to my colourful world. English travel + hotel + lifestyle creator. My app @izkiz.
TI14	1,649	2.4M	1,028	Y	Lifestyle x Travel, Ouerto Escondido, Viaja conmigo, Prueba mis presets

					@whatthechicfilters
TI15	2,070	1.4M	993	Y	Traveler & Creative - girl from Sydney
TI16	1,313	1M	1,014	Y	Born in Hawaii, Exploring movement, depth, and mindfulness
TI17	1,738	2M	625	Y	aus/bali, Photo editing @doyoutravel presets, my app @tonestudioapp
TI18	5,339	1.1M	1,042	Y	SWEDISH GAL LIVING LA VIDA LOCA. Currently in: Stockholm, Sweden. For Business Inquiries angelicablick@live.se. SHOP MY JEWELRY
TI19	1,384	1.3M	686	Y	Show & mindful wanderings near & far. Little moments @emilielula. info@helloemilie.com
TI20	1,191	558K	378	Y	Back in Australia. management@worldofwonderlust.com
Non-Gendered Travel Influencers					
Influencer	**Number of Posts**	**Number of Followers**	**Number of Accounts Following**	**Verified by Instagram (Y/N)**	**Bio**
TI21	10.2K	14.4K	46	Y	Inspiring people to connect and have a positive impact through travel. We are a climate-positive company that advocates sustainability
TI22	6,258	3.7M	10	Y	Celebrating #BeautifulHotels from all over the world. Discover the most unique, experimental, and finest stays with us
TI23	2,963	5.1M	74	Y	Journey with us!

					#BestVacations, Photos by our team & we feature yours, we travel the world non-stop
TI24	9,247	2.7M	874	Y	Where are you in the world? Show us. #IamATraveler #StillATraveller
TI25	2,165	2.8M	160	Y	A culture of wanderlust by @andy.
TI26	5,127	743K	1,162	Y	The global authority on luxury travel. Tag #forbestravelguide for a chance to be featured on our account.
TI27	4,162	2.7M	4,975	Y	For 45 years we've been helping travellers to explore every day. Tag your shots w/ #lonelyplanet or #mylpguide for a chance to be featured!
TI28	7,096	5.6M	613	Y	All of the visual inspiration you need to kick your wanderlust into high gear. Use #TLPicks for a chance to be featured on the T+L account
TI29	3,461	2.8M	7	Y	Wander around and wonder about the world. Hashtag #voyaged for a chance to get featured.
TI30	6,983	13.8M	28	Y	Wonderful places around the world, #wonderful_places, contact@wonderfulplaces.com, Watch our TV show.

Appendix B: Coding Scheme

Standardized Information - General Information	
Influencer:	
General Post Content Information	
Variable	Categories
Use of geolocation tags	Yes / No
Region of geo-location tag shared (if yes)	
General Notes:	
Use of Subjects and Their Positionality within Content	
Variable	Categories
Content includes a Subject	Yes / No
Type of Subject	Alone With Partner Group No Subject
Presentation of Space	Vacuous Space - remote/rural Vacuous Space - urban Crowded Space - remote/rural Crowded Space - Urban Exclusive/luxury - isolated
Positionality of Subject	Foreground Mid-Foreground Background/Distance
Body Position	Selfie Facing Towards Camera Front of Body - Looking Away from Camera Turned Around - Looking Away
Use of Background Space	A large amount of background featured Limited background
Notes:	

Elements of Exclusivity	
Variable	Categories
Space	
Vacuous Space	Yes / No
Exclusivity	
(Dis)order	Yes / No
Neocolonialism	Yes / No
Conspicuous Consumption	Yes / No
Invisible Labour	Yes / No
Notes:	