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Influencer Intentions and Usage of Stereotypes: travel content on Instagram for Italy, Morocco, Portugal and Tunisia

Abstract: This study investigates how travel Instagram influencers use stereotypes in their content on Italy, Morocco, Portugal and Tunisia. By analysing posts and photos, the research examines the frequency of perpetuating or debunking stereotypes, intentions regarding visits to a destination behind these actions, and the means of presenting opinions, experiences and recommendations. The authors have applied a quantitative and qualitative content analysis to the Instagram posts and photos. The findings reveal that more than half of the posts perpetuate stereotypes, while photos show a more balanced distribution. Encouraging or discouraging intentions regarding visits are more common in content that perpetuates stereotypes. The study highlights the significant role of visual content in shaping audience perceptions and underscores the need for influencers to use stereotypes responsibly. The research contributes to understanding the role of social media influencers in creating the image of a destination and shaping consumer decisions in tourism services.

Keywords: Instagram; intention to visit; stereotype usage; tourism destination; travel influencers

Introduction

In recent years, the ways in which customers choose tourist destinations and purchase tourist services have changed radically. The constantly advancing development of technology facilitates access to tourist offers and consumer decision-making (Zdon-Korzeniowska, Rachwał, 2011) with tourist services being chosen based on information shared by social media users and influencers (Saini et al., 2023). Tourists who consider

a destination, first download information about it, form their opinions and then choose a place to stay or avoid one that is stigmatised. According to Benhida et al. (2024), social media influencers leverage genuine, superficial credibility and expertise in specific domains and this article considers their role in perpetuating positive and negative stereotypes of tourism destinations.

Hence, research on influencers on society seems particularly important as they have a massive impact on decision-making, the choice of tourist services and perceptions of tourism destinations (Jaya, Prianthara, 2020). They are crucial in modern marketing communication, particularly in tourism (Saini et al., 2023).

Surprisingly, there is a lack of work on travel influencers' roles in creating or using stereotypes in their narrative techniques or visual styles. As Li described (2024), academic research has focused primarily on two main areas: the effect of travel influencer marketing and their impact on tourists and sustainable tourism development (Asan, 2022; Baltezarević et al., 2022; Palazzo et al., 2021; Schorn et al., 2022). The effectiveness of travel social media influencers has also been analysed by examining the role of argument quality and sponsorship status (Kapoor et al., 2022). Tourist stereotypes have been widely described in recent years from the perspective of how locals perceive tourists (see, for example, McKercher, 2008; Tse et al., 2022; Tung et al., 2020) but in the context of stereotypes, little is known about the role of social media creators. This article fills this gap. We agree with Żemła & Woronkiewicz (2021) that stereotypes create the image of places and consequently shape consumers' choices in tourism services.

Based on this research gap, the article aims to understand how travel Instagram influencers (TIIs) use stereotypes of selected tourism destinations. Specifically, the frequency of perpetuation or debunking of existing stereotypes, its association with visit intentions, and the means of using stereotypes have been investigated. The authors focused on four diverse countries, often chosen as a travel destination by Poles: Italy, Morocco, Portugal and Tunisia. In the academic and popular literature, many stereotypes concerning chosen countries are repeated and described on social media. In Poland, Instagram is the second most popular social media platform and in 2024 the number of Polish Instagram users was 15,386,922, outnumbered only by Facebook (Wirtualnemedia.pl, 2025). We chose Instagram over Facebook because travel influencers prefer it (Rankingblogow.pl, 2020) and we identified Instagram content as a rich data source to answer the research question.

The main question of the study was: How do travel Instagram influencers use stereotypes of Italy, Morocco, Portugal and Tunisia as tourism destinations?

The specific research questions that guided our analysis were:
- – SRQ1: How often do influencers perpetuate or debunk existing stereotypes of tourism destinations?
- – SRQ2: Is the use of the perpetuation or debunking of existing stereotypes of tourism destinations associated with an intention to discourage or encourage the influencer's audience to visit the destination?
- – SRQ3: What are the means of using the stereotypes of travel influencers in terms of presenting their opinions, experiences and recommendations in textual and visual content?

The research was preceded by a literature review on stereotypes of selected tourist destinations (Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia) and the selection of Polish TIIs whose posts depict these countries. Then, a qualitative content analysis of the selected posts

and photos was performed and after the categorisation of narrative techniques and visual styles in terms of stereotype use, statistical analysis was make. Finally, we chose the most striking examples for an in-depth qualitative analysis.

The results of this study will contribute to understanding the role of social media influencers in creating the images of tourism destinations and shaping consumer decisions regarding stereotypes in the selected countries.

Literature review

Role of travel influencers. The role of social media influencers (SMIs) is discussed in the literature, especially in modern marketing communication (Femenia-Serra et al., 2022), particularly in tourism (Saini et al., 2023). The impact of SMI content, follower ratios, and engagement in travel decision-making is widely studied (e.g. promoting travel destinations: Xu et al., 2018; and consumer travel decisions: Chen et al., 2023). Pop et al. (2021) analysed the role of trust in the consumer decision journey from the perspective of SMIs, underlining that consumer trust positively affects each phase of travel decision-making (Pop et al., 2021). The stereotyping process may change the consumers' perspective because trusted SMIs shape travel decisions and the perceptions of destinations.

The article focuses on travel influencers who differ from other SMIs. Li et al. (2024) underlined the differences in terms of commercial demands, products, audiences and collaborations with companies, as well as their impact on the tourism marketing agenda. Manthiou et al. (2024) analysed the travel influencer construct in five dimensions: inspiration, authenticity, attractiveness, content expertise and trustworthiness. These elements can be helpful when trying to understand the role of travel influencers, especially to understand followers' reactions to them affecting visit intentions and creating marketing communication strategies to attract more tourists through social media (Seçilmiş et al., 2022).

Therefore, travel influencers play a vital role in shaping the perception of tourism destinations and decision-making (Benhida et al., 2024). Wahba et al. (2024) investigated the effect of SMIs on intention to visit with the mediating role of upward social comparison where the intention from an emotional perspective was underlined (Wahba et al., 2024). Stereotypes are also built and used on strong emotions and observable behaviours that are the basis for creating beliefs and the way influencers construct their social identity and the narratives they share can affect how destinations are perceived. This process involves a dynamic interaction between personal ambition, societal expectations and the platforms they use (Li et al., 2024).

Travel influencers can also play a role in shaping the stereotypes of tourism destinations, as representatives of mass tourists who see themselves as innovators, worldly, outward-looking, risk-takers who are different and somehow better than other members of society, meaning the residents of the tourism destination (McKercher, 2008). Therefore, the experience between the visitor and the guest deepens the sensation of being outside either group, creating stereotypes in turn. Their content often highlights specific aspects of a destination which can lead to the creation of both positive and negative stereotypes. Although influencers can help combat negative stereotypes by showcasing lesser-known aspects of a destination, they can also inadvertently reinforce stereotypes by repeatedly highlighting certain features or experiences (Femenia-Serra, Gretzel, 2020). As Jaya and

Prianthara (2020) proved, the reputation of a destination, how well-known a brand is, and the opinions of influential people on social media, all impact tourists.

Stereotypes in tourism. A stereotype is defined as an image of the external world in the human mind and is shaped by culture, allowing for quick and easy adjustment of the various pieces of information coming from the environment to develop patterns (Nelson, 2003). Stereotypes are mental constructs rooted in language and act as an 'unconscious filter' through which we perceive what is foreign, different and unknown. Created stories about places by the influencers can be part of a new narrative that modifies methods of sending messages but also shapes the language used by the sender (Owsianowska, 2014). This simplified information and the description are used to describe the destination in the tourism industry, and this may influence the decision-making process regarding the selection and perception of the place.

Stereotypes related to tourism destinations are rooted in ethnic and national stereotypes, often as the result of conflicts and wars which can create more conflicts and prejudices – a 'vicious circle' (Michalczuk-Ouerghi, 2019). The negative image of Romania in Poland, related to its existing stereotype, results in a low choice of this tourism destination (Żemła, Woronkiewicz, 2021). In addition, Gajić et al. (2023) proved that stereotypes and prejudices had a more direct influence on the dimensions of loyalty and revisiting for Serbia compared to other factors analysed. Stereotypes undoubtedly are part of the destination image, stemming from perceived relations between two nations (Chen et al., 2016).

Stereotyping in tourism also concerns those created by hosts and residents (see, for example, Chen et al., 2021; McKercher, 2008; Tse et al., 2022, 2023; Tung et al., 2020). Understanding attitudes towards tourists seems crucial because it affects the relation, emotion and behaviour, which guests can be seen by tourists. The interactions between hosts and tourists with existing and experienced stereotypes have an impact on the image of the post-travel destination and the evaluations of residents (Liu et al., 2017). Any tourist can be an influencer who describes their stay on social media.

As Chen et al. (2016) suggested, negative and stereotypical beliefs are shared and have a negative effect on destination perceptions, especially in the context of nations in conflict. In consequence, as Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001) proved in their research, travel intermediaries (which nowadays are also TIIs) can be less open to promoting a destination to which they have a negative or weak image. In this context, Pan and Hsu (2014) analysed factors that affect travel media content which may reflect and carry expectations and stereotypes. Bender et al. (2013) examined the content of travel media exploring how different language guides on Switzerland vary in their representations and interpretations of the tourism destination. Moreover, Owsianowska (2014) suggest that it is crucial to reveal those aspects of communication in travel narration that identify what words express. Our study broadens this perspective – we analysed the usage of stereotypes in posts and photos.

Justification of the choice of the countries and their stereotypes. We chose countries eagerly described by travel influencers so that the analysis was as in-depth and reliable as possible. According to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Portugal and Italy are countries where social and cultural norms are similar to those in Poland. At the same time, Morocco and Tunisia differ mainly due to religion. The selection of destinations was made based on a review of the literature on stereotypes and the authors selected those most frequently chosen by tourists from Poland. The keywords related

to the stereotypes of these destinations were determined by searching the literature and finding those that are repeated the most often (Table 1). Some sources are intentionally in Polish due to the analysis of stereotypes built in the minds of Poles. The selection was limited to 10 keywords for each country.

Italy is famous for its good food, while an integral part of Italian culture as *dolce vita* is also associated with cuisine and is deeply rooted in the lifestyle of Italians who value relaxation and the pleasures of daily life. However, they are also described as noisy, especially in crowded towns overflowing with tourists. Italians are perceived as attractive, which may be related to their concern for appearance and fashion which also seems iconic. The negative image of Italy is associated with the activities of the mafia, as well as social problems such as strikes and with garbage on the streets. Its cultural and historical wealth is particularly characteristic with numerous and extremely popular assets that attract crowds of tourists.

In publications about Morocco, the following characteristics were highlighted: Arabs and their religion (Islam), the situation of women (customs and rights), and the specific conduct of business (negotiations) or haggling in bazaars. In contact with the inhabitants, an association with great kindness, even disinterest, dominated. Other topics mentioned concern the culinary arts: intensively spiced dishes (a wealth of smells and spices) and very (even too) sweet dishes. In terms of associations with the appearance of the country, references to characteristic colours dominated: blue or light blue but, on the other hand, degraded spaces (rubble, abandoned buildings). The Sahara was also a typical association, and its vastness was associated with a sense of freedom.

In the descriptions of Portugal, favourable conditions for relaxation are particularly emphasised: the ocean, beaches and hot temperatures. In evaluating space, the perception of colours dominates: colourful buildings, narrow streets, characteristic tiles (*azulejos*) and trams. Moreover, Portugal is associated with islands (especially the Azores and Madeira) and wine.

In turn, Tunisia, an extremely popular destination among Poles (hence the association with many Polish visitors), is mainly associated with all-inclusive travel agency offers and leisure. Despite the high standard of the offers, some public areas are perceived as dirty or neglected. Typical stereotypes about Tunisia are Islamization and a low sense of security, including the threat of extremists but in addition, attention is drawn to the narrow streets of the medinas, markets full of colours, spices and smells.

Table 1. Review of selected literature describing stereotypes of Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia and Italy

COUNTRIES	JUSTIFICATIONS IN THE LITERATURE	STEREOTYPES
Italy	*'Polonia? Aaah Bologna!' In a maze of Italian-Polish and Polish-Italian stereotypes* (de Carlo, 2008); Information for travellers to Italy (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs); *Italian language and culture between the image and reality* (Henszke, 2011); *You say: Italy, you think: mafia? The stereotype of an Italian in the eyes of Polish students* (Pawłowska, 2014); *Tourism destination images of Turkey, Egypt, Greece, and Italy as perceived by US-based tour operators and travel agents* (Baloglu, Mangaloglu, 2001); *Tourism satisfaction effect on general country image, destination image, and post-visit intention* (De Nisco et al., 2015)	crowddolce vita fashiongarbage good food mafia monument snoise attractive peoplestrike

Morocco	*'Supper with Berber' – Hosts and Guests in the View of Ethnic Tourism. Anthropological Analysis of the Travel Agencies' Offers* (Michniewicz-Ankiersztajn, Podgórski, 2015); *In search of cultural authenticity of the relations between Moroccan society and tourists* (Jagiełło, 2013); *Muslim fundamentalism and radicalism and the threats to tourism development* (Michniewicz-Ankiersztajn, Podgórski, 2015); Information for travellers to Morocco (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs); *Market guide for entrepreneurs. Morocco* (Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, 2006); *Tourism geography: Emerging trends and initiatives to support tourism in Morocco* (Steenbruggen, 2014); *Women and the Violence of Stereotypes in Morocco* (Sadiqi, 2011)	abandoned/restored buildingsArabsblue/sky bluefreedommarket/bazaar Saharaselfless kindnesssmells/spicessweet foodwomen's situation
Portugal	Information for travellers to Portugal (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs); *Trends in leisure tourism regions under economic crisis conditions based on the example of Algarve in Portugal* (Bajgier-Kowalska, Rettinger, 2014); *Melancholy, nostalgia and saudade: on Portuguese national identity* (Jurga, 2017); *Iberian Peninsula – a paradise for cultural tourists. An overview of Spain and Portugal's potential for the development of the chosen forms of cultural tourism* (Malchrowicz, 2009); *Tourist Product as an Emanation of Tradition and Culture on the Case of Porto Wine and Fado Music – National Tourist Products of Portugal* (Adamowicz, Gawrońska, 2012); *Multiculturalism in Aveiro in Portugal: the author's own experience resulting from participating in Erasmus* (Niemczyk, 2016); *Pictorial analysis of the projected destination image: Portugal on Instagram* (Kuhzady, Ghasemi, 2019); *The image of Portugal as a tourist destination–an international perspective* (Montenegro et al., 2014)	beachescolourful buildings colourfulhotislandsnarrow streetsoceantiles *azulejos* tramwine
Tunisia	*The Dynamics and Features of International Tourist Movement in Tunisia in the Years 1960–2015* (Widz, Brzezińska-Wójcik, 2016)*Exploration of the Tourism Destination Image's Determinants on the Revisit Intention: The Case of Tunisia* (Ksouri, Abdellatif, 2015)Information for travellers to Tunisia (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs)*Perspectives on the destination image of Tunisia* (Selmi, Dornier, 2017)*The influence of national stereotypes on the choice of tourist destination – case of Tunisia* (Michalczuk-Ouerghi, 2019)*The influence of terrorism and Islamization on the tourism economy of Tunisia* (Michalczuk-Ouerghi, Dłużewska, 2018)	all-inclusive/leisuredirtextremistsfull of coloursIslamlots of Polesmarketsnarrow streetsspices/smells

Source: authors

Materials and methods

After analysis of the stereotypes of selected tourism destinations by TIIs, the authors prepared the data on a spreadsheet. TIIs were selected based on popularity (less than one million followers because they have fewer sponsored posts) and published on at le-ast one of the chosen countries. Finally, we selected 25 TIIs with a total of 128 posts about the selected destinations (an average of 32 posts/country) (Table 2). The selected

influencers attached 501 photos to the chosen posts during the period from 2018-02-04 to 2024-10-09.

Table 2. Number of analysed posts from selected TIIs

Username	#followers	Italy (n = 36)	Morocco (n = 33)	Portugal (n = 23)	Tunisia (n = 36)	Overall (n = 128)
busemprzezswiat	161000	3	2	2	0	7
djerbaztimurem	1825	0	0	0	5	5
gdziebadz	93900	0	2	0	0	2
italia_by_natalia	45900	9	0	0	0	9
italiapozaszlakiem	29500	6	0	0	0	6
itskamila_speaking	13400	1	0	0	0	1
jaktodaleko	57200	0	4	0	0	4
kierunek_wlochy	58500	6	0	0	0	6
lastowicze	64000	0	0	0	5	5
mikolajsondej	161000	0	4	0	0	4
planfortheworld	5080	0	2	0	0	2
podrozovanie	60200	0	9	0	0	9
polishvoyagers	171000	2	0	1	0	3
powroty.do	19500	0	2	2	0	4
szalonewalizki	37500	0	0	1	0	1
thetravellingonion	141000	0	5	0	0	5
travelovcy	142000	0	0	1	0	1
travelstorypl	53900	0	0	3	0	3
tunezja.mojemiejscenaziemi	4895	0	0	0	2	2
wedrownemotyle	64300	9	2	0	0	11
where_is_kinga	5419	0	0	0	2	2
wiki_w_tunezji	1525	0	0	0	6	6
zadzieramkieceilece	55800	0	1	0	6	7
zajarani.zyciem	8581	0	0	6	0	6
zycie_w_podrozy	41800	0	0	7	10	17
Publication date [20YY-MM-DD]						
from		23-05-28	18-02-04	20-09-09	19-04-19	18-02-04
to		24-10-09	24-06-12	24-07-20	24-10-02	24-10-09

Source: authors

Using the empirical base, we provided qualitative content analysis of the selected posts and photos which is a study of recorded human communication suitable for letters, poems, web pages, books, news articles etc (Babbie, 2021). In tourism research, there are many examples of this method of analysis: both textual and visual content on Instagram, for example in the context of tourism promotion strategy (Majid 2019), cultural tourism promotion (Mele et al., 2021), slow tourism (Le Busque et al., 2021) and adventure tourism trends (Stanišić et al., 2024).

As Babbie (2021) suggested, we answered the question of what was written in the posts and shown in the photos (whether stereotypes were used?), how (in which way

the TIIs used the stereotypes?), and why (what was the intention of the post and photo?). Based on the answers to these questions, the Instagram content was coded and categorised similar to Le Busque (2021) in terms of stereotypes as non-reference, perpetuated or debunked and in terms of intention as discouraging, neutral or encouraging (Table 3).

Table 3. Explanation of categories in the qualitative analysis of posts and photos

Stereotypes		Intention	
non-reference	posts/photos that did not contain any reference to selected stereotypes	discouraging	refers to content that suggests that the audience should avoid visiting a particular tourism destination
perpetuated	meant to reinforce or maintain existing stereotypes about a tourism destination through the content shared by TII	neutral	content that neither encourages nor discourages the audience from visiting a tourism destination. It presents information in a balanced and unbiased manner without expressing a strong opinion
debunked	meant challenging, refuting or dispelling existing stereotypes about a tourism destination through the content shared by TII	encouraging	content that suggests that the audience should visit a particular tourism destination

Source: authors

This analysis allowed the authors to prepare the answer for SRQ1. After categorisation of narrative techniques and visual styles in terms of using stereotypes and expressing the intention to visit a destination, a statistical analysis was undertaken to answer SRQ2.

Finally, we chose the most striking examples for an in-depth qualitative analysis (Babbie 2021) of textual and visual content to answer SRQ3. This part of the investigation consisted of analysing specific types of posts, narrative techniques and visual styles used to describe the chosen stereotypes and underline the intention of posts and photos. To perform an in-depth qualitative textual analysis of posts and photos, one or two from each category (discouraging, encouraging and neutral) were chosen, if such existed, in the main analysis for a given country. A total of 12 posts and 12 photos were selected, the text of the posts was coded, and then the authors built the categories of interpretation consisting of references to the stereotype and their usage context. The photos were also coded: what is on the photograph, in what sense, and how colours are used in the context of stereotypes. The authors built on their interpretation of the intentions of posts and photographs, if they were discouraging, encouraging or neutral.

Results

Quantitative results. To address SRQ1, which asks how often influencers perpetuate or debunk existing stereotypes of tourism destinations, we tested the observed frequency distribution of these categories against an expected distribution with a chi-square goodness of fit test. The equal expected distribution of one third for each of the three categories was assumed to indicate whether the usage was approaching a random distribution.

Regarding posts (n = 128), we observed that the most frequent category of stereotype usage was 'perpetuated', with almost 52%. The category 'non-reference' appeared less frequently at 39%, while 'debunked' was the least frequent appearing in just over

9% of the posts (Table 4). The fit-test results are statistically significant $\chi2(2) = 36.06$, $p < .001$, thus categories of stereotype usage in posts are not equally distributed. These findings indicate that the content of posts is more likely to perpetuate existing stereotypes of tourism destinations, more likely not to refer to stereotypes, and less likely to debunk them, compared to the equal expected distribution.

Table 4. The distribution of posts by stereotype usage versus the destination

	Italy (n = 36)	Morocco (n = 33)	Portugal (n = 23)	Tunisia (n = 36)	Overall (n = 128)
Intention					
discouraging	0 (0%)	2 (6.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.6%)
neutral	15 (41.7%)	16 (48.5%)	3 (13.0%)	6 (16.7%)	40 (31.3%)
encouraging	21 (58.3%)	15 (45.5%)	20 (87.0%)	30 (83.3%)	86 (67.2%)
Stereotype					
perpetuated	19 (52.8%)	21 (63.6%)	11 (47.8%)	15 (41.7%)	66 (51.6%)
non-reference	13 (36.1%)	7 (21.2%)	11 (47.8%)	19 (52.8%)	50 (39.1%)
debunked	4 (11.1%)	5 (15.2%)	1 (4.3%)	2 (5.6%)	12 (9.4%)

Source: authors

There are some cross-destination differences among posts; nevertheless, in this article, we use this information only descriptively (Table 4). Morocco seems to differ from the other three destinations in the higher share of posts that debunk stereotypes and the lower share of non-references to them.

Regarding photos (n = 501), the most frequent category was 'non-reference' at 53% which appeared less frequently, at 25%, followed by 'debunked' in nearly 22% of the analysed (Table 5). The fit-test results are statistically significant $\chi2(2) = 87.23$, $p < .001$, thus categories of stereotype usage in photos are not equally distributed. These findings indicate that the content of photos is more likely not to refer to existing stereotypes of tourism destinations and less likely to debunk or perpetuate them compared to the expected equal distribution.

Table 5. The distribution of photos by stereotype usage versus the destination

	Italy (n = 286)	Morocco (n = 101)	Portugal (n = 41)	Tunisia (n = 73)	Overall (n = 501)
Intention					
discouraging	0 (0%)	18 (17.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	18 (3.6%)
neutral	212 (74.1%)	31 (30.7%)	4 (9.8%)	19 (26.0%)	266 (53.1%)
encouraging	74 (25.9%)	52 (51.5%)	37 (90.2%)	54 (74.0%)	217 (43.3%)
Stereotype					
perpetuated	32 (11.2%)	49 (48.5%)	17 (41.5%)	29 (39.7%)	127 (25.3%)
non-reference	149 (52.1%)	49 (48.5%)	24 (58.5%)	43 (58.9%)	265 (52.9%)
debunked	105 (36.7%)	3 (3.0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.4%)	109 (21.8%)

Source: authors

There are also some differences in the usage of the photos and we used this information descriptively (Table 5), as we did for posts. Italy differs from the other three destinations in that it has a much higher share of photos that debunk stereotypes and a lower share that perpetuate them. Moreover, Italy has the most photos overall and the highest number of photographs per post, 7.8 (286 photos/36 posts), while for Morocco, which has the second highest proportion of 3.1 (101/33), photos were more than twice less frequent. As for Italy photos represent almost two-thirds of all images analysed (n = 431), the overall distribution of stereotype usage in photographs is biased by content for this destination.

The findings to address SRQ1 indicate that analysed posts are more likely to perpetuate existing stereotypes, more likely not to refer to them, and less likely to debunk them. At the same time, photos are more likely not to refer to stereotypes and less likely to debunk or perpetuate them, compared to the equal expected distribution.

To address the second specific question, SRQ2, we analysed the association between the intention of travel influencers (discouraging, neutral or encouraging their audience to visit the destination) and their use of a destination's stereotypes (perpetuated, non-reference or debunked among the published content) in both posts and photos. A chi-square independence test and Fisher's exact test examined the relationship between intention and stereotype usage.

The results of the independent chi-square test were not statistically significant, indicating no strong association between influencer intention and stereotype use in posts $\chi 2(4) = 6.34$, $p = .172$ and the effect size, $w = .22$ suggests it is low (Cohen, 1988). As three cells in the table (Table 6) have expected counts less than five, we also performed Fisher's exact test to validate the chi-square approximation. The results of Fisher's exact test ($p = 0.55$) do not indicate a significant association between the intention to visit and the use of destination stereotypes on the posts analysed.

Table 6. The distribution of posts by intention regarding visits versus destination's stereotype usage

Intention	Stereotype			Total
	perpetuated	non-reference	debunked	
discouraging	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.6%)
neutral	15 (22.7%)	21 (42%)	4 (33.3%)	40 (31.2%)
encouraging	49 (74.2%)	29 (58%)	8 (66.7%)	86 (67.2%)
Total	66 (100%)	50 (100%)	12 (100%)	128 (100%)
χ2 = 6.396 · d f= 4 · Cramer's V = 0.158 · Fisher's p = 0.145				

Source: authors

Regarding the overall intention to visit a destination, the majority of posts were encouraging (more than two-thirds), followed by neutral (nearly one-third), and a small fraction were discouraging (less than 2%). The intention distribution was quite similar across all categories of stereotype usage in posts appearing most frequently in at least three-fifths of the posts in the 'non-reference' stereotype category, approximately two-thirds of the posts in the 'debunked' category, and almost three-quarters for the 'perpetuated' stereotype. It appeared less frequently, in at least 23% of the posts (with perpetuated stereotype) and at most about 42% (non-reference). Intention to discourage the audience from visiting a destination is, in fact, the least frequent type; it occurs only with perpetuated stereotypes in the content (n = 2).

The chi-square test results were statistically significant, indicating an association between the intention of the influencers and their use of stereotypes in photos $\chi2(4) = 96.34$, $p < .001$ and the effect size, $w = .44$ suggests it is moderate (Cohen, 1988). Given that two cells in the table (Table 7) have expected counts below five, we performed Fisher's exact test ($p < .001$), which confirmed a statistically significant association between the intention of the visit and the use of destination stereotypes in Instagram photos.

Table 7. The distribution of photos by intention versus stereotype usage

Intention	Stereotype			Total
	perpetuated	non-reference	debunked	
discouraging	18 (14.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	18 (3.6%)
neutral	30 (23.4%)	162 (61.1%)	74 (67.9%)	266 (53.1%)
encouraging	79 (62.2%)	103 (38.9%)	35 (32.1%)	217 (43.3%)
Total	127 (100%)	265 (100%)	100 (100%)	501 (100%)
$\chi2 = 96.336 \cdot df = 4 \cdot$ Cramer's V = 0.310 $\cdot$ Fisher's p = 0.000				

Source: authors

Overall, we found that the intention of most photos was neutral (53%), followed by encouraging (more than 43%) and less than 4% discouraging. The intention distribution is similar for the 'non-reference' and 'debunked' stereotype categories while in both the 'neutral' intention appeared most frequently, making up approximately two-thirds of the photos. The 'encouraging' intention appeared less frequently, 32% for the 'debunked' category and 39% for the 'non-reference' category. For the 'perpetuated' stereotype, intention distribution differs from the other two in usage. In this category, the 'encouraging' intention appeared more frequently, at approximately 62%, while the 'neutral' intention was less common, observed only in approximately one-fifth of the photos. In summary, the 'encouraging' intention in the photos with perpetuated stereotypes appeared almost twice as often as in the non-reference and debunked stereotypes. As for the posts, the intention of discouraging the audience from visiting a destination coincides exclusively with the perpetuated stereotype in the content (n = 18).

Regarding SRQ2, the analysis reveals that while there is no statistically significant association between intention and stereotype usage in posts, there is a significant association in photos. Photos that perpetuated destination stereotypes contain encouraging intentions more often than photos that debunk stereotypes or do not refer to them. This perpetuation may be related to discouraging intention in both photos and posts, although the association cannot be confirmed with statistical hypotheses testing due to sample size limitations.

Qualitative results. In the qualitative description of the results, the authors answer SRQ3: What are the means of using stereotypes by travel influencers in terms of presenting their opinions, experiences and recommendations in textual and visual content?

Among the analysed countries and influencers, the most discouraging post, which showcases a critical opinion about travel, turns out to be a post by the profile *busemprzezswiat,* on a trip to Morocco. The post consists of three parts. The first, very briefly, announces the character of the post and the expression 'it will be bitter' indicates that the post will not be a gentle description. The central and longest part of the post informs us that corruption is the main factor occurring in Morocco, specifically in Marrakech.

The post does not encourage visiting Morocco. It shows that even with a return visit, one cannot be convinced by this country, and the overall atmosphere of the place becomes imperceptible to the visitor precisely because of the pushy and greedy locals lurking at every corner. In the analysed post, an effort was made to identify the prevailing stereotypes. There is the visible stereotype of the Arab, who is different, culturally distinct and sometimes even does not express culture, however, the stereotype of the selfless nature of the Moroccan locals, ready to help without seeking benefits, is debunked.

The style of the second discouraging post is more common, marking a known tendency to express hidden negative opinions. It can be seen in the post from *zycie_w_podrozy* from Portugal, specifically from Lisbon. The post once again consists of three parts but is shorter and more informational than opinion-forming. In the first part, the post announces a positive opinion. The author of the text draws attention to the spirit of the nightlife in Lisbon (expressed in the words: 'something magical was happening'). In the second part, the reader may wonder why the author greatly emphasises her/his love for exploring cities at night and the answer is: 'I don't like crowds of tourists; I feel better walking through empty streets,' which suggests to the reader that Lisbon during the day is crowded and unpleasant to explore. Although we do not find the previously mentioned stereotypes regarding Portugal in the presented post, new ones appear, such as crowds of tourists and the magical charm of the towns.

Despite both posts being negative, they do not have visible similarities. They illustrate the difficulties in creating such entries and the different perspectives in showing such information.

The situation is entirely different with the encouraging posts, which contain clear indications to visit selected countries. A certain expression pattern is visible, replicated and characteristic.

After exhausting the topic of initial impressions or presenting the general opinions of other travellers, influencers proceed to an emotional turning point. In the case of Tunisia, this could involve breaking out of the safe comfort zone of an 'all-inclusive' package tour and venturing into the untamed, neglected parts of the country. The neglect and daily life of Tunisians become markers of authenticity. Similarly, in the case of Portugal, specifically a trip to Madeira, the influencers *busemprzezswiat* initially planned to relax on the beach but ultimately decided to explore the island. They broke the stereotype of passive recreation, which is probably preferred by other tourists, and discovered abandoned historical buildings and other mysteries. The same travellers share their experience in Italy: 'We treated Italy as a transit point,' which later turned out to be 'beautiful', 'unique', 'exceptional' and 'unparalleled'. This effect is even stronger in Morocco where the authors of the profile *podrozovanie,* after previous negatively toned posts expressing fears and anxieties about visiting the country, eventually express positive emotions. They are surprised that all the negative stereotypes they had heard were not found and that Morocco turned out to be a friendly place worth deeper exploration.

Sometimes, influencers build an unnatural sense of confidence. In two posts (Portugal and Morocco), the declaration of changed perspectives immediately followed an overly intense sense of belonging to the local community or environment, which seems disproportionate to the short time spent there. In the post by *busemprzezswiat*, they write: 'Like true locals of Madeira, we went to Porto Santo for our vacation'. To underscore their confidence in the island, the authors try to blend into the local community. Similarly bold expressions are used by the authors of *podrozovanie* during their first trip

to Morocco: 'we felt like part of the local nature' or 'we are even eating like locals now, without using crockery'.

Encouraging posts are also characterised by the recurring stereotype of the landscape that could be described as 'the sea of sand'. Sand appears repeatedly as a factor that, according to the influencers, attracts visitors to these countries. Sand is the 'wide beach with yellow, incredibly silky sand' in Portugal and the desert areas in Tunisia and Morocco: 'Watching the sunset over the dunes of the Sahara is one of my best travel memories'. The mention of deserts or beaches is a central theme in a vast number of encouraging posts about countries in the article.

The last group consists of posts with neutral intentions. These posts are often informational and include questions directed at followers. The profile *zycie_w_podrozy,* in the post about visiting a specific Portuguese town, uses a technique recently popular on social media 'letting others direct your life'. The author of the post asks followers to recommend tourist attractions and accommodations. Ultimately, the influencer promises to deliver the desired content in return. This approach aims to create the impression that followers have the power to decide for them.

Sometimes, to draw attention to a post, the authors use multiple exclamations created to captivate the audience, such as 'WOW! Really!? What time is it!?' The authors of the profile *wedrownemotyle* sought to inform potential tourists about the possibility of visiting Rome without crowds early in the morning before sunrise. They suggest sightseeing in the late fall and propose an option for those willing to take on the challenge: 'Let's motivate some people to get up early.'

The profile *wedrownemotyle* takes a different approach to presenting neutral content in a post describing a trip to Morocco, including a visit to Fez. Despite referencing typical stereotypes about Arab countries (the smell of spices, the medina, muezzins calling to prayer), they explain these elements and their impact on the surroundings. This ensures that the descriptions are not just template statements but offer an accurate picture of the destination and as a result, every Instagram user who reads the post can form their own opinion about the place.

Photographs that were described as discouraging were characterised by an unfavourable colour composition. They presented objects in the wrong light, creating the impression of being unattractive. Discouraging intention often uses the stereotypes discussed to communicate, and thus perpetuating them. The photographs contained references to the traditions and customs of selected tourist destinations and characteristic elements of space in combination with a contrasting and negative background or element. An example illustrating the perpetuation of a stereotype with discouraging intention can be a photograph from Morocco showing the attitude of the local community toward sugar (Photo 1). The colour scheme of the photo and the indication of how the influencer interprets customs do not encourage trying local products and may even discourage visiting the selected country.

Photographs with neutral intentions presented destinations without a clear evaluation. The composition of this type was not focused on a selected characteristic element as they mainly presented the landscape from a distant perspective (Photo 2). References to stereotypes in the photographs are different and not always noticeable, desert, urban landscape and nature motifs often appear, while the composition of colours is natural, and the whole photograph gives the impression of unexaggerated life, like a traditional postcard.

*Photo 1.* Example of a photo with a discouraging intention
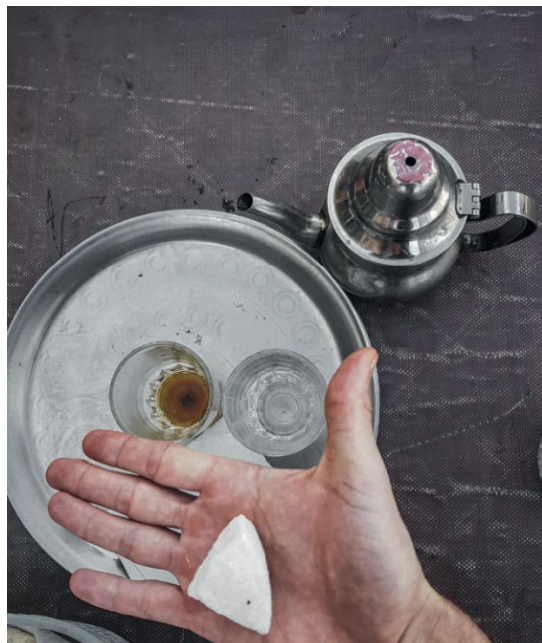
Source: *jaktodaleko*, photo from the post: 7.02.2020, retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/p/B8RGKc6hzUa/ (access: 7.02.2025)

Photo 2. Example of a photo with a neutral intention
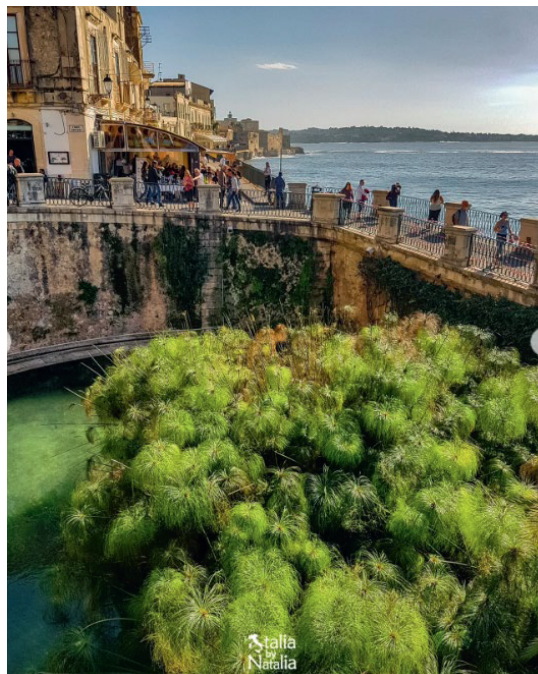
Source: *italia_by_natalia*, photo from the post: 27.09.2024, retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/p/DAaR0_7IPM_/ (access: 7.02.2025)

Photo 3. Example of a photo with an encouraging intention
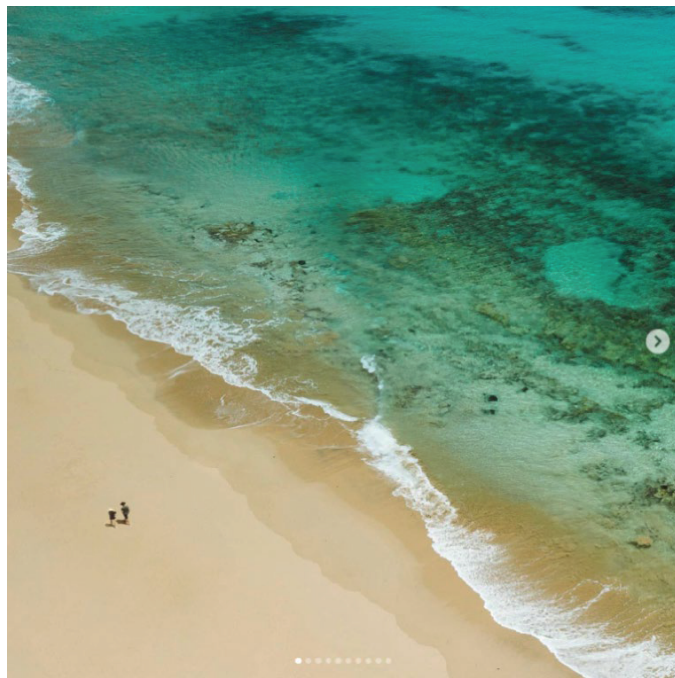
Source: *busemprzezswiat*, photo from the post: 30.05.2021, retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/p/CPfSVEpHkdR/ (access: 7.02.2025)

Photos classified as encouraging visits to selected destinations were presented in a brighter light. The composition of colours and the presented objects were considered encouraging due to the emphasis on essential elements in the foreground (including references to the stereotype), specifying important details. Encouraging photographs refer to presenting impressive landscapes, e.g. silky beaches, friendly people or popular objects. The stereotypes presented in the photographs were perpetuated in positive contexts. One such stereotype is azure water and sandy, clean, empty beaches in Portugal (Photo 3) reflecting reality in a positive sense, encouraging visitors.

Conclusion

Most of the analysed Instagram posts presented perpetuate existing stereotypes of popular travel destinations (52% of posts), but nearly two-fifths do not refer to them, and just over 9% debunk stereotypes. For photos, the distribution of stereotype usage was different: most do not refer to existing stereotypes of analysed destinations (53%), a quarter perpetuate, and nearly 22% debunk them. Although the results suggest that the content medium may be associated with the portrayal of stereotypes, we conclude that TIIs tend to perpetuate stereotypes of travel destinations, as we found this type of usage among more than half of the analysed posts. Moreover, TIIs tend to use stereotypes of travel destinations, as we found around 62% either perpetuating or debunking them. The observed difference in the distribution of stereotype use between photos and posts may be due to different strategies of portraying destinations, as we noted for

Italy, which has the highest number of photos per post, combined with a much higher share of photos that debunk stereotypes and a lower share of those perpetuating them compared to other countries. However, the photos were taken from analysed posts, thus the distribution of stereotype usage at the post level was used to form the conclusion regarding our first specific research question.

Remarkable patterns of associations between the use of perpetuation or the debunking of existing stereotypes of tourism destinations to discourage or encourage the influencers' audience to visit were found. We have revealed that, in general, both types of non-neutral intention – encouraging and discouraging – were more frequent in the content that perpetuated stereotypes compared to debunking and non-referencing them. Specifically, photos we labelled as perpetuated destination stereotypes seem to contain encouraging intentions nearly twice as often as photos of the other two types. Furthermore, the perpetuation may be related to discouraging intentions by TIIs in both photos and posts, although the association cannot be statistically confirmed. This suggests that visual content may play a more critical role than textual; however, it may also characterise the medium itself, as Instagram is known as a photo-centric platform (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Surprisingly, the discouraging intention was observed only for Morocco and only with the perpetuation of stereotypes, and this may warrant further investigation into cultural or contextual factors for comparison between destinations.

The TIIs choose different ways of using stereotypes by presenting their opinions, experiences and recommendations in textual and visual content. Travel influencers use stereotypes in textual content by presenting critical or positive opinions, experiences and recommendations. Discouraging posts highlight negative aspects such as overcrowding while encouraging posts emphasise unique cultural experiences and beautiful landscapes. Neutral posts often provide facts or ask followers for recommendations, creating an interactive experience. Influencers use emotional narratives, descriptive imagery and personal anecdotes to shape their audience's perceptions of selected destinations. In visual content, the TIIs perpetuated or debunked stereotypes by manipulating colour composition, lighting and subject focus. Discouraging photos often used unfavourable colours and negative elements to highlight unattractive aspects, while neutral photos presented balanced and distant perspectives without clear evaluation. Encouraging photos used bright colours and positive elements to emphasise appealing aspects, perpetuating stereotypes in a positive context.

The result of mostly perpetuating usage of stereotypes in our research agrees with the conclusion that stereotypes are one of the sources that create the image of destinations and shape travel decisions in the tourism industry (Żemła, Woronkiewicz, 2021). Similar to the work of Femenia-Serra and Gretzel (2020), the present study shows that TIIs can help combat negative stereotypes by displaying lesser-known aspects of a destination, and they can also unconsciously reinforce stereotypes by repeatedly highlighting certain associations.

Our findings confirm those of earlier studies, such as Asan (2022), on the categorisation of the impacts of travel influencers on their followers. The use of stereotypes in shaping the intention to visit destinations can be categorised as an 'informative effect' as well as a 'motivational effect' (Asan, 2022). TIIs give information and share experiences by using stereotypes; simultaneously, they can encourage exploring new places. Post descriptions are often built on the emotions that mediate stereotypes (Tse et al., 2022) and are created after their interactions with locals. If TIIs were treated stereotypically

as tourists, their experiences could impact the post travel destination image and residents' evaluations (Liu et al., 2017).

In contrast to the earlier findings of Wahba et al. (2024), our results underline how TIIs' usage of stereotypes can build an intention to visit a tourism destination. Their image of a place, especially negative, may result in less willingness to encourage people to visit (Baloglu, Mangaloglu, 2001), as was demonstrated in our research. In consequence, as Pop et al. (2021) argued, consumers based on their trust in TIIs may change their travel decisions and perception of destinations. Indeed, the impact of Instagram content can be significant; the 128 posts analysed for this article gained 122,024 likes and 2,989 comments.

Moreover, our research highlighted that using stereotypes in travel content can reinforce harmful biases and misrepresentations, leading to a skewed perception of destinations and their cultures (Michalczuk-Ouerghi, 2019). This can even lead to geographical discrimination. The ethical considerations and potential consequences of perpetuating or debunking stereotypes in travel content should be examined further. The same should be considered by researchers, as well as their potential for bias in interpreting influencer intent.

The study found that TIIs predominantly perpetuate existing stereotypes of tourism destinations, with more than half of the posts analysed doing so. The findings highlight the significant role of visual content in shaping audience perceptions, with encouraging and discouraging intentions often linked to the perpetuation of stereotypes. Thus, we broaden knowledge about influencing consumer travel decisions in the tourism industry and building the image of destinations by social media influencers.

The limitations of the study include its small sample size and a focus on specific geographic locations, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, potential biases in interpreting influencer intent and the subjective nature of content analysis should be acknowledged. The research does not include the ethical implications of using stereotypes in travel content, and the actual impact on audience perception and behaviour is not explicitly covered.

Hence, the research has practical implications. Travel influencers, marketers and tourism boards should be aware of the stereotypes they perpetuate in their content. They should strive for responsible use of stereotypes by providing balanced and nuanced portrayals of destinations, emphasising diverse and authentic experiences (Femenia-Serra, Gretzel, 2020). This approach can help foster a more accurate and respectful understanding of unfamiliar cultures and places, thus building awareness in tourism (Palazzo et al., 2021). The TIIs can even be an essential partner in preventing the phenomenon of overtourism.

Future research could explore a larger and more diverse sample of influencers and destinations to improve the generalizability of the findings. Differences between destinations in observed phenomena need to be addressed in further studies. Investigating the impact of different social media platforms and comparing the use of stereotypes between various types of influencer (e.g. micro vs macro) could provide deeper insight. Employing mixed-method approaches, such as combining content analysis with audience surveys, could also offer a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Understanding and addressing the use of stereotypes in travel content is crucial to promoting responsible and ethical tourism. By fostering accurate and respectful representations, influencers can contribute to a more informed and appreciative global audience, benefiting both destinations and their visitors.

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