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The Influence of Social Media on the Tourism Industry:
A Content Analysis of Culinary Tourism Brands via Instagram

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Media and Communication
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Brand and Media Strategy

by
Angela Christine White
December 2021

Dr. Susan E. Waters, Chair
Dr. Melanie B. Richards
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Keywords: Instagram, tourism, content analysis, framing theory, uses and gratifications theory,
diffusion of innovation theory

ABSTRACT

The Influence of Social Media on the Tourism Industry:
A Content Analysis of Culinary Tourism Brands via Instagram

by

Angela Christine White

The tourism industry in the United States is constantly changing and being influenced by social media, specifically Instagram. Culinary brands use Instagram to advertise their restaurants and dishes in a creative, visual way. As a result, Instagram is now being used as a tool by tourists and both potential and current customers to share their dining experiences and find these locations based on the visual appeal. This study provides a content analysis of Instagram account information and photo composition within eight popular culinary tourism destinations by examining the strategies used by the accounts. 50 randomly selected photos were used from eight popular culinary tourism locations. Framing, Uses and Gratifications, and Diffusion of Innovation theories were the theoretical framework for the study. The results of this study indicated key characteristics of some of the most popular culinary tourism destinations on Instagram

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my father, Donald White, who has always supported me in everything I do. Who has supported all of my artistic and academic endeavors and has encouraged me to never stop creating. Dad, thank you for your never-ending support, encouragement, and love.

To Jack, thank you for your undying love and support. Your optimism and encouragement motivates me to not only do my best, but to see the best in others and see the silver lining in any situation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
DEDICATION.....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	7
LIST OF FIGURES.....	8
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	9
Chapter 2. Literature Review.....	10
Tourism in the United States.....	10
Instagram, Influence on Users, and the Tourism Industry.....	15
Evolution of Niche Tourism.....	20
Culinary and Gastronomy Tourism.....	22
Instagram and Culinary Tourism.....	24
Theoretical Framework.....	26
Framing.....	26
Uses and Gratifications.....	27
Diffusion of Innovation.....	28
Chapter 3. Methods.....	30
Content Analysis.....	30
Selection of Instagrams.....	30
Sample.....	31
Brand Biographies.....	31
Oxford Exchange.....	31
VooDoo Doughnuts.....	32
Little Damage.....	33
The Yard Milkshake Bar.....	33
Taiyaki NYC.....	34
Creamberry.....	34
Three Dots and a Dash.....	35
Pietro NoLita.....	35
Initial Variables.....	36

Instagram Statistics	36
Photo Composition.....	38
Photo Content.....	45
Chapter 4. Analysis	55
Chapter 5. Discussion	64
Discussion of Findings.....	64
Limitations and Future Direction.....	67
Conclusion	68
References.....	70
VITA.....	834

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Tourism Destination Account Verification and Followers as of 7.12.2021	554
Table 2. Frequency and Percent of the Number of Hashtags	565
Table 3. User Generated Content Frequency and Percent	576
Table 4. Frequency and Percent of Colors in Photo	586
Table 5. Frequency and Percent of Image Composition (Busy/Clean)	587
Table 6. Frequency and Percent of Image Composition (Close up/Far Away)	57
Table 7. Frequency and Percent of Image Composition (Area of Focus)	57
Table 8. Frequency and Percent if Person was in Photo.....	58
Table 9. Frequency and Percent of How Food was Presented.....	58
Table 10. Frequency and Percent of Setting of the Photo.....	59
Table 11. Frequency and Percent of Posed/ Candid	59
Table 12. Frequency and Percent of Caption Language	60

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Example of User Generated Content via Caption	38
Figure 2. Example of User Generated Content via Tag	39
Figure 3. Example of Photo Composition, Colors in Photo - Warm	390
Figure 4. Example of Photo Composition, Colors in Photo - Cool	401
Figure 5. Example of Photo Composition, Colors in Photo - Neutral	401
Figure 6. Example of Photo Composition, Colors in Photo - All Colors	412
Figure 7. Example of Photo Composition - Clean	423
Figure 8. Example of Photo Composition - Cluttered/Busy	423
Figure 9. Example of Photo Composition - Far Away	434
Figure 10. Example of Photo Composition - Close Up	445
Figure 11. Example of Photo Composition - Centered.....	446
Figure 12. Example of Photo Composition - Random.....	456
Figure 13. Example of Photo Content, Person in Photo - Hands.....	467
Figure 14. Example of Photo Content, Person in Photo - Person in Frame.....	468
Figure 15. Example of Photo Content, Person in Photo - Multi Person Emphasis.....	47
Figure 16. Example of Photo Content, Location of Photo - Kitchen.....	48
Figure 17. Example of Photo Content, Location of Photo - Table	490
Figure 18. Example of Photo Content, Location of Photo - Restaurant	50
Figure 19. Example of Photo Content, Location on Photo - Outside Restaurant	51
Figure 20. Example of Photo Content - Posed.....	52
Figure 21. Example of Photo Content - Candid.....	53
Figure 22. Example of Photo Content, Language in Caption - Personal	53
Figure 23. Example of Photo Content, Language in Caption - Informative.....	54
Figure 24. Example of Photo Content, Language in Caption - Statement.....	54

Chapter 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most important sectors in the United States economy, supporting billions of dollars in GDP and thousands of jobs. As generations age, as travel trends come and go, and in the world post coronavirus, travel is being redefined. Trends in the tourism and travel industry are also shifting as social media evolves. It has never been easier to pick up a phone or a computer and plan a trip in a matter of minutes, all while using social media as a research tool. Travelers use social media through various stages of travel planning- pre, during, and post-trip. 23% of US internet users are significantly influenced by social media for their travel/holiday-related decisions (Gonzalo, 2014). 87% of Millennials use social media for travel research with sites such as TripAdvisor along with social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter, which are now the most popular mediums for travel-related research (Apollo, 2020). This has changed the way brands present themselves online and how they interact with their clientele in a digital world. The selected social media platform for the study was Instagram because it is not only a high visual platform, but a platform that brands consider to be the most important when it comes to their online footprint. This study looks into how tourism is related to social media and how companies use certain media tactics to brand themselves online. The theories used are framing, uses and gratifications, and diffusion of innovation via the method of content analysis.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Tourism in the United States

The tourism and travel industry is one of the largest industries in the United State, supporting both employment and the economy on the local, state, and federal levels (OECD, n.d). Tourism can be defined as the movement of people from outside their normal environment for personal or professional reasons who partake in activities related to one of the subsectors of the industry (Wescott et al., 2020). Domestic tourism can be described as tourism involving residents of one country traveling within their own country, in this case, the United States (Choo, 2015).

In the last decade, the tourism industry in the United States has grown 22% compared to 17% the decade before (U.S. Travel Association, 2020b). In 2019, travelers spent \$1.1 trillion in the United States (U.S. Travel, 2020a), up from \$941 billion in direct tourism in 2018 (OECD, n.d.). With interstate travel on the rise, domestic travelers spent \$972 billion, a 4.4% increase from 2018, and international travelers spent \$155 billion in the U.S., down 1.8% from 2018 (U.S. Travel, 2020a). Contributions from travel and tourism to the national gross domestic product increased almost three percent in 2019, totaling 8.6% of the total economy (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020). While the majority of money spent in the tourism industry in 2019 was from leisure travel, an estimated 30% came from business-related travel (U.S. Travel, 2020a).

The United States tourism industry directly supported an estimated nine million jobs directly and an additional seven million jobs indirectly in 2019, making it the seventh-largest employing industry in the country (U.S. Travel Association, 2020b). On average, every \$1 million in sales of travel goods and services directly generates eight jobs for the industry while every \$1 million in total non-farm industry sales creates an average of five jobs (U.S. Travel,

2020a). Of the various sub sectors of travel and tourism, accommodations, air travel, and food make up more than half of the output on jobs, as well as the largest contribution to the gross domestic product (Select USA, n.d.). The airline industry creates an estimated 750,000 jobs (Airlines for America, 2021). The hotel, motel, and lodging industry supported 2.3 million jobs, with 100 occupied rooms roughly supporting 241 jobs (Dobrosieklski, 2019). The restaurant industry supports 13.5 million jobs in the United States (Lock, 2020). Other sectors that support employment include entertainment, attractions, souvenirs or handmade items, tourism agencies, and tourism planning and development agencies.

Tourism in the United States is highly decentralized with national, state, and local governments controlling various aspects of the industry. The federal government does not regulate tourism directly, in some cases they do regulate transportation (OECD, n.d.), but there are several organizations that support travel. The National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO), within the International Trade Administration (ITA) of the United States Department of Commerce, serves as the central point of contact within the federal government. The NTTO is the source of official tourism statistics to inform public policy and private sector business decisions and works to enhance the competitive position of the United States with respect to travel and tourism (OECD, n.d.). The U.S. Travel Association is the national, non-profit organization representing and advocating for all components of the travel industry including national and international issues and research. The United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA) is a professional, voluntary trade association created with the primary purpose of promoting integrity within the tour operator industry. Brand USA, or visittheusa.com, is a highly successful public-private partnership formed under the bipartisan Travel Promotion Act of 2009, charged with promoting the U.S. as a destination to global travelers.

Each state approaches tourism differently based on its economic impact. California is the most visited state by domestic and international tourists (Chelangat, 2018), and supports over one million jobs. 84.6 Million of the state's GDP is directly related to the tourism industry (Runyan Associates Inc. n.d.). Florida and New York come second and third to international tourists (Share America, 2019) while Texas, Nevada, Georgia, Hawaii, and Virginia are in the top traveled states for domestic tourists (Chelangat, 2018). Many states rely heavily on tourism as part of their economy. In a majority of states, the tourism industry contributes to 3-4% of GDP, while states like Tennessee, South Carolina, and Montana rely on tourism for 5-6% of state GDP (Henderson, 2020). Hawaii and Nevada rely on tourism the most with travel accounting for 10% of Hawaii's GDP and 16% of Nevada's GDP. Every state has popular tourist attractions but some locations are world-renowned with both national and international tourists. Some of the most popular destinations in the United States include the beaches of Florida and California, Volcanoes in Hawaii, The Strip in Las Vegas, the French Quarter in New Orleans, and Disney World and Land in Florida and California (Touropia, 2021). National monuments and historic locations like the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and the Pikes Place Fish Market of Seattle, Washington attract 10 million visitors each year (Bonnington, 2019; Kiesel 2020). The National Park Service is one of the biggest draws to tourism in the United States, welcoming over 331 million visitors each year with the most popular parks being the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Glacier National Parks (Lange, 2018).

Each generation travels differently, spending various amounts of money and time while traveling to vastly different locations. Generation Z travels the least and spends the least which is attributed to their young age and lack of expendable income (Globetrender Magazine, 2017). Generation Z is the most racially and ethnically diverse, the most educated, and the most open to

various cultures, wanting to be immersed in the local culture when they travel (McCarthy, 2020). Unlike previous generations, Generation Z starts to travel from a very young age and is interested in unconventional destinations (Turismo & Ocio, 2018). They are the most influenced by social media and their peers, looking for exciting yet Instagrammable places to take pictures and then share them online. In general, Generation Z picks a location, finds a small number of savvy places to visit that are within their budget, and are more likely to sacrifice a portion of their trip to create the experiences they want to have. For example, members of Generation Z are more likely to eat budget-friendly during their trip and use the money saved on dining for other planned activities or excursions. They might also sacrifice their lodging, picking an affordable place to stay to save a few bucks. While this generation is very diverse in where they travel domestically, they also travel internationally and spend a large portion of their travel budget on flights (Widmer, 2020).

Millennials in the United States are traveling more than any other generation making, on average, two domestic and three international trips a year and spending more than four thousand dollars on travel expenses (Leonhardt, 2018). They are the most diverse group of travelers in terms of the variety of their trips. Millennials take, on average, 35 vacation days a year and travel almost all of those days while other generations use their time away from work for relaxation and staying home commonly known as ‘stay-cations’ (Widmer, 2020). While they travel the most frequently they are also the most budget-conscious, taking the shortest trips, and traveling across a larger spectrum of places (Globetrender Magazine, 2017). Accommodation rentals, like Airbnb, are popular with millennials with 75% of Airbnb customers coming from Millennials and Gen Z who want to stay in a city or a unique stay on a budget. 35% of millennials look for luxury resorts when they travel and 85% look for all-inclusive trips (Widmer, 2020). Solo travel

is a newer form of travel that is becoming more socially acceptable and it is on the rise. Of all the solo travelers that made trips in 2020, the majority of them were millennial women (Condor Ferries, 2021). While the largest percentage of luxury travelers come from this generation, the largest percent of rustic travelers are also millennials who are seeking adventure and self-development (Stone & Stephens, 2019).

Members of Generation X generally focus on family-oriented travel. They rely heavily on online reviews and online planning to make sure their trip is a success (Globetrender Magazine, 2017). They are least likely to take trips because of the cost of traveling with multiple people, they tend to travel around school schedules, and tend to visit places to relax or entertain the whole family. Gen X peak travel times are summer and winter vacations and spring break and they generally pick locations with a variety of attractions so everyone in the family has something of interest to do. While they spend large amounts of money per vacation, they spend the least amount per person on their trips (Levy, 2020).

The Baby-boomer generation (aged 57 or older) are traveling almost the same amount as Millennials with over half taking three to four leisure trips in 2020, most of them going to see family. The majority of the tourists in this generation are retired. They spend more per trip than any other generation, averaging 7,800 per trip (Levy, 2020). They generally have the most expendable income over younger generations making money less of an issue, spending the most on their bucket list, and retirement trips. As opposed to Millennials, Boomers generally stay longer and spend more per day (Levy, 2020). They are less budget-conscious, focus more of their budget on lodging, and are heavily influenced by traditional advertisements like brochures and rack cards, lodging staff recommendations, and package deals and promotions (Globetrender Magazine, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been detrimental to the tourism industry. With national borders closed, flight and travel restrictions in place, and a fear of spreading or receiving the virus rampant, the tourism industry is suffering. At the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020, the biggest concern was employment, “The global pandemic, the first of its scale in a new era of interconnectedness, has put 100 million jobs at risk, many in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises that employ a high share of women, who represent 54 percent of the tourism workforce” (Beshudi, 2020, para.3). As of early 2021, 197 million jobs have been lost in the travel and tourism industry (WTTC, 2020). With national borders closed, international visitors rate dropped over 80% in 2020 in the United States and is not expected to return until 2024 (Constantin, 2020). The travel market is now pivoting to largely domestic tourism. “Domestic tourism, which accounts for around 75% of the tourism economy in OECD countries, is expected to recover more quickly. It offers the main chance for driving recovery, particularly in countries, regions, and cities where the sector supports many jobs and businesses” (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020, para. 2). The tourism industry worldwide is not expected to recover to 2019 levels until at least 2023 (Beshudi, 2020).

Instagram, Influence on Users, and the Tourism Industry

The power of social media has changed how we live and spend. More people are using social media now than ever and more people log on every day to connect with others. “We like to think that we are largely in control of our day-to-day lives, yet most of what we do, from what we eat, where we shop, and even the way we feel, is significantly influenced by those around us and those around them” (The New Times, 2018, para. 5). An estimated 3.6 billion people used social media in 2020 and that number is estimated to go up to 4.4 billion in 2025 (Tankovska, 2021). As of 2019, 90% of American adults use at least one social media account regularly with

Facebook being the most popular with 78% of Facebook users checking their accounts daily (Pew, 2020). Facebook is the most popular social media platform with 2.8 billion users, then YouTube with 2.3 billion, Instagram with 1.2 billion, TikTok with 690 million, and Twitter with 330 million users (Tankovska, 2021). Each of these platforms plays a different role and attracts different users in the social media landscape.

Instagram, owned by Facebook, is one of the most popular and profitable social media platforms with Generation Z and Millennials. An estimated 59% of internet users between the ages of 18 and 29 use Instagram and 33% of internet users between the ages of 30 and 49 use Instagram (Tankovska, 2021). According to one study, 17% of teenagers say that Instagram is the most important social media platform to them. 68% of Instagram users are female, 38% of female internet users are on Instagram compared with 26% of male internet users (The London, n.d.). These users spend, on average, one hour a day on the app (Moshin, 2020).

In 2019, Instagram was estimated to be worth 100 billion dollars and made 20 billion in ad revenue which is the main way they make money (Simon, 2021). “In 2019, more than 98% of all Facebook revenue came from advertising...it collected \$69.7 billion in advertising fees, and a hefty portion of this income came directly from Instagram” (Simon, 2021, para. 8). This revenue comes from paid advertisements, promoted posts, placed stories, and promoted shop items. “Advertising spending on Instagram grew 177% for the year ending in the second quarter of 2018, compared to only 40% growth for Facebook over the same time period” (Simon, 2021, para. 9).

A large part of Instagram’s success as a social media platform, and as an advertising tool, is because it is a visual platform. Instagram was created for photos and videos, generally taken

on phones, and was meant to make every day quick pictures look like extraordinary moments. The original version of the app focused on in-app photo editing, where pictures were organized by hashtags, and a user's page was meant to be a visual library of their lives (Blystone, 2020). Unlike its parent company Facebook, which focused on several forms of sharing; or Twitter, which focused on text-based sharing; Instagram focuses almost solely on pictures and videos. Very quickly after its inception, pages were formed that were dedicated to specific topics like coffee, bands, books, and so on. Now, one can find an Instagram page dedicated to almost any subject. In 2021, Instagram is used as a visual storytelling tool not only for individuals but for brands.

Businesses are using Instagram as a powerful marketing tool to promote their brands. 50% of Instagram users follow at least one business and the majority follow at least one social influencer (Moshin, 2020). An estimated 71% of US businesses claim that they use Instagram for business and more than 80% of businesses consider Instagram engagement as their most important metric (Moshin, 2020). While creating a brand on Instagram can take time to master, including curating hashtags, colors, fonts, influencers, and posting schedules, 70% of users turn to Instagram to look up a brand and 60% of users learn about new products via the social media service (Suciu, 2019), making it critical that brands advertise effectively on the platform. The first place for advertising on Instagram is the individual companies' pages where they place all of their content and interact with their audiences. Next is placing advertisements in users' feeds in the form of pictures, videos, carousels, and collections as well as in-story ads and explore ads. Lastly would be third-party paid advertising like influencers and or earned user-generated content.

Majority of companies have started to use influencers as a tool to build brand awareness in some fashion, whether it be on social media or on more traditional advertising. “The trend of influencers publishing sponsored content on Instagram continues to grow with no signs of letting up. Over the course of the year from February 2018 to February 2019, the number of Instagram influencers using the #ad hashtag grew by 133 percent” (Moshin, 2020, para. 23). Influencers are used for more than product placement, but are critical for gaining brand trust and brand loyalty. Marketers say influencer marketing is the most cost-effective method of obtaining new customers, 73% of marketers have a budget set aside for influencer marketing, 67% are actively engaging with and have a relationship with influencers, and teenagers trust influencers more than they trust celebrity endorsements (Social Media Marketing, 2018). Influencers are trusted figures in the community they are advertising and they generally have some knowledge on what they are advertising (Matthew, 2018). They are more approachable than a celebrity, and are seen as being more relatable and therefore more trustworthy. Users want to appear like the influencers they follow, creating a cognitive bias that every moment of our lives should be “Instagramable” (Fastenau, 2018). Beyond just having influencers, brands get user-generated content (UGC) from Instagram that they use in future campaigns. “User-generated content (UGC) is any content—text, videos, images, reviews, etc.—created by people, rather than brands. And brands will often share UGC on their own social media accounts, website, and other marketing channels” (Newberry, 2019, para. 1). Brands use user-generated content because it is authentic, creates trust in the brand, and drives purchasing decisions, not to mention free advertisement (Newberry, 2019). When a follower sees authentic, user-generated content from someone they trust, or someone that they can relate to, it puts in their mind that the product is legitimate; they see it in a

practical light that encourages them to purchase. Brands also connect with their followers by sharing and interacting with user-generated content, increasing brand loyalty.

RQ1: What Instagram tactics are selected businesses using to connect and stay relevant with their clientele?

Tactics can be defined as how the brands manipulate or ‘play’ the algorithm to be more favorable on the platform (Cotter, 2018). Tactics can also be defined as what actions the brands are taking to stay favorable with their audience. With the evolution of cell phones, the internet, and the birth of social media in the early 2000s, there has been a cultural revolution in that, “mobile media technologies and platforms that function as access points to an immense space of online circulation and the provision of services that affect most realms of everyday life, a shift that has refashioned tourism throughout its different stages” (Jansson, 2018, para. 16). Travelers use social media through various stages of travel planning- pre, during, and post-trip. 23% of US internet users are significantly influenced by social media for their travel/holiday-related decisions (Gonzalo, 2014). 87% of Millennials use social media for travel research with sites such as TripAdvisor along with social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter, which are now the most popular mediums for travel-related research (Apollo, 2020). During their trip, 74% of users use social media on their trip with 85% using their phones to find and book events, and 60% for directions or contact information (Gonzalo, 2020). Once they return from their trips, 97% of Millennials share the photos and videos of their holidays online (Apollo, 2020), and 46% of travelers post hotel, restaurant, and destination reviews on social platforms (Gonzalo, 2020).

Instagram is the perfect platform for travelers, posting pictures of their trips and tagging respective locations. 30% to 40% of travelers under the age of 30 make their travel plans based

on how Instagram-able the potential destination is (Apollo, 2020). In 2019, one million travel-related hashtags are searched on a weekly basis (Stone, 2019) with one of the most popular hashtags being #Travelgram with more than 80 million posts (Eva-Marie, 2020). Travel advertising spends (ad spend) in the US hit \$7.6 billion in 2018 (Stone, 2019).

RQ2: In what way has Instagram changed the way consumers and brands interact with the culinary tourism industry within selected restaurants?

Evolution of Niche Tourism

Niche tourism refers to how a specific tourism product can be tailored to meet the needs of a particular audience/market segment. Locations with specific niche products are able to establish and position themselves as niche tourism destinations (Ali-Knight, 2010). Hutchinson is largely credited with the concept of a niche, claiming that under certain conditions an organism can survive indefinitely because of its strategic advantages against its competitors (Hutchinson, 1957). This biological term was adopted by the business and marketing community in the 1990s to mean a market that serves a specialized group of people and is not served by competitors (Keegan et al., 1992). In general, the qualifications for a niche are, “The customers in the niche have a distinct set of needs, They are willing to pay a premium to the firm that best satisfies their needs, The niche is not likely to attract other competitors, The niche gains certain economies through specialization, The niche has size, profit, and growth potential” (Nevin, 2017, p. 16).

The first form of niche tourism was known as specialized interest tourism, or SIT, which was coined in the 1980s to describe eco and cultural tourism (Hall & Werierl, 1992). These destinations differ from mass tourism destinations in that they generally serve a small,

specialized audience while mass tourism serves large numbers of visitors on a consistent basis with little to no competition from outside markets (Marson, 2011). With niche tourism on the rise, the concept of positioning is not entirely limited to brands but destinations as well. The positioning of a destination, therefore, involves categorizing the place in essence to the kind of experience it offers to the visitors (InterGlobe, n.d.). Classic examples include Adventure tourism, like climbing major mountain peaks around the world; movie location tourism, like visiting New Zealand and seeing the locations of Lord of the Rings; and heritage tourism, like seeing the wonders of the world or cultural and historic sites related to one country or ethnicity. As social media has grown, so have tourism wants, creating more niches that reflect various interests of society (Tarlow, 2003).

There are several advantages, and disadvantages, to positioning oneself as a niche tourism destination. The fastest-growing method for the industry is niche tourism (Nevin, 2017). There is less competition, “The more specific or specialist a product or service, the less competition is likely to be out there, making it easier to create a targeted marketing strategy” (Seymour, 2018, para. 6). Brands are able to create brand loyalty, with a smaller customer base they are able to understand their wants and needs making them not only likable but sustainable (Parrish, 2003). The biggest disadvantage is that when there is competition, it is fierce. A 2017 Study from Nevin found:

The niche market does not make profit forever. Even if it is protected by patents or laws, a profitable niche will always attract competition, and when the competition is on the rise, the companies will have difficulties to differentiate themselves from other companies (p. 19).

RQ3: What are the customers’ distinct set of expectations for niche tourism within

the research sample?

Culinary and Gastronomy Tourism

Culinary tourism, in its simplest definition, is the act of traveling for food. The Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (2019) goes further to define it as, “any tourism experience in which a person learns about, appreciates, consumes, or- dare we say- indulges in food and drink that reflects the local cuisine, heritage, or culture of the place”. Gastronomy tourism goes a level deeper, the World Tourism Organization (2020) defines it as:

A type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor’s experience linked with food and related products and activities while traveling. Along with authentic, traditional, and/or innovative culinary experiences, Gastronomy Tourism may also involve other related activities such as visiting the local producers, participating in food festivals and attending cooking classes (p.8).

Everybody needs to eat, on holiday or not, but culinary tourism has evolved to the point where it is now a driving factor in one's travels. From the World Tourism Organization (2020), The need to eat is the same for all of us, but it also differentiates us. Gastronomy tourism has arisen precisely because of this difference: the difference between tourists who simply feed themselves during their travels and those for whom gastronomy has a decisive influence on their choice of destination and who wish to satisfy their hedonistic and cultural appetite in addition to their physiological need to eat (p.8).

To be classified as culinary or gastronomy tourism, the travel must first qualify as tourism and then the main purpose of the venture must be for the cuisine.

The dining experience is important for any tourist, regardless if that is the main purpose of their trip. Culinary tourism grew 8.11% globally in 2019 (Maida, 2019). “In 2012, it was

estimated that tourism expenditures on food services in the U.S. topped \$201 billion, nearly a quarter of all travel income. That makes food service the highest category of travel spend” (Shankman, 2015, para. 7). In 2007, culinary tourists spent one-third (36%) of their travel budget on food and 60% expressed interest in their culinary experience (US Travel Association, 2007). Globally, 88.2 percent of travelers consider food to be a defining element of their trip (Cole, 2016). 39 million U.S. leisure travelers choose a destination based on the availability of culinary activities, while another 35 million seek out culinary activities after a destination is decided upon (Shankman, 2015). “The 2013 American Culinary Travel Report by Mandala Research showed that the percentage of U.S. leisure travelers who travel to enjoy unique dining experiences grew from 40% to 51% between 2006 and 2013” (Tan, 2016, para. 7). An estimated 35 percent of the culinary tourism market comes from European countries (Maida, 2019).

The goal of culinary or gastronomy tourism has now evolved past the idea of just eating, it is about the experience. For these destinations to become and remain successful they generally meet not just biological needs but cultural and hedonistic needs as well (World Tourism Organization, 2019). On a biological level, we all eat. We choose what to eat based on our moods and our needs including eating at home or on the go, based on dietary needs and restrictions, for energy, what we can afford, and what we know or think will be good (Laska et al., 2015). On a cultural level, we eat for other reasons. Cultural attributes include where the food comes from on a national and local level, what the heritage is around the food, if the food is local to the region you are in, if the food is familiar or not and if the ingredients are familiar, and the quality of the food being prepared (Lia et al., 2017). Hedonistic consumption, eating for pleasure rather than energy, goes beyond eating for necessity but instead for the experience. This can

include where you eat, the type of restaurant (inside, outside, street cart, food truck, sit down), the atmosphere of the restaurant, and how the food is plated and presented (Lia et al., 2017).

Instagram and Culinary Tourism

Starting in 2012, food tourism entered the mainstream with the help of social media and food television programs featuring world-renowned chefs, restaurants, and events. “Culinary tourists share millions of food and beverage-themed photos daily across social platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, this increases travel consumers’ awareness of different cuisines and cultures, and it fuels their desire to experience them” (Shankman, 2015, para. 3). There is an unprecedented number of social media posts related to food, with 434 million posts with the hashtag #food on Instagram, and 6% of Facebook's newsfeed is related to food (Barre et al., n.d.). The biggest draw to posting food on social media is the aesthetics with the main theme being extraordinary food, generally a dessert or sweet treat, that was made outside of the home (Barre et al., n.d.). “Gone are the days of judging a dish by merely its flavour. Michelin Stars as a metric of quality have been ushered out of the kitchen by ‘likes’. Internationally acclaimed food critics have been bumped to the back of the line and replaced by reality TV stars wielding ten-megapixel smartphones” (Harbourside, n.d., para. 4).

Because of photo-based social media platforms, like Instagram, food destinations have created visual menus that represent who they are as chefs, companies, and brands. Brand destination image, and specifically strong, positive destination image makes it more likely that a person will choose to visit that destination (Echter, 2003; Frías, 2007). “Marketers need to understand that generating consumer interest, especially in the food and travel industries, is less about the words and more about the pictures. When you tempt travelers with a tantalizing picture of food, you immediately hook them in” (Young, 2017, para. 8). When brands share their menu

through photos, customers have a better idea of what they are ordering. This idea is becoming the field standard, many consumers have admitted that they will not go to a restaurant unless they can see their menu and food online (Harbourside, n.d.). Influencers are constantly on the hunt for the next exciting item to post and each business is trying to create the next trend. “Consumers are falling over each other to purchase items or experiences that *look good*, that photograph well. They’re scrambling to locales that will provide that dramatic backdrop sure to impress their friends and followers” (Young, 2017, para. 9). Elements of design in plating are now common knowledge amongst consumers, having a mousse, foam, a cream, a brittle, texture, color is now a necessity. The idea of food looking good for social media has changed the way food destinations have prepared and plated their dishes. Since consumers generally look for extraordinary dishes, restaurants are now trying to stake their claim with the next show-topping dish.

Social media has inspired chefs with new ideas for dishes, platings, and ingredient pairings with thousands of pages and platforms dedicated to chefs and their craft (Baldwin, 2017). Some chefs and restaurants have adjusted their menus and their locations to look better through the lens of a cell phone, claiming the first impression they make on their audience is through photos on social media (Lee, 2017). The World Tourism Organization (2019) stated:

Destinations all over the world are now developing strategies to develop the culinary identity of their territories and to promote proposals whereby their gastronomy and its singularities may exert an important influence on tourists’ decisions to travel there and/or to attract the profile of gastronomy tourists who wish to experience the gastronomic culture of the places visited (p. 9).

To remain competitive, restaurants differentiate themselves through cultural and hedonistic ways.

Theoretical Framework

Framing

Framing Theory was created by Erving Goffman (1974) and refers to a frame as a social framework and as a mental schema that allows users to organize experiences. The theory has evolved to the media representing or communicating certain aspects of a story which leads their audience to have certain opinions; “the media highlights certain events and then places them within a particular context to encourage or discourage certain interpretations” (Framing Theory, 2012, para. 2). “Framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called ‘the frame’) influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure messages meaning” (Arowolo, 2017, p. 1).

There are several approaches to creating these frames. Equivalence framing presents two equal ideas in different ways, while emphasis focuses on one piece of information that was intentionally emphasized (NTC Center, 2018). Framing can be through rhetoric by describing physical versus social aspects, like blinking versus winking, or through emotional word choices like baby versus fetus (Bryant et al., 2013). Framing can also be a highly visual tool. Visual framing refers to how visuals, with or without text or narration, can provoke connotations, denotations, and ideological representations of a topic (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). Visuals are easier to understand, require less cognitive processing, and have a stronger emotional appeal (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

Framing is present in social media, specifically Instagram, in how brands and consumers portray themselves to their audiences. It has been discussed that visual framing is more effective than any other form of framing; it is more persuasive, easier to obscure issues, and easy for the consumer to understand (Yang, 2019). Aesthetic images posted online are sources of enjoyment

while the consumer was supposedly in need of education on the topic at hand. Consumers no longer eat just for survival but for hedonistic reasons (World Tourism Organization, 2019). Bouvier (2018) states that that food is full of symbolism and meaning and that we, by sharing food online, are sharing what is important to us as consumers and members of a community. For some it is health food, making healthy items look just as appealing as junk food or making vegan food look like not vegan food. For others, the nutritional information does not matter and it is more about making the food look extravagant, regardless of taste or nutritional content. The framing of an image is dependent on several characteristics. Influencers and brands use these intentional style traits and characteristics to "persuade, promote, or perform strategic intentions" (Yang, 2019, p. 13). Users use food photos on Instagram to not only share their own food photos but to decide where to eat. Consumers use Instagram as a tool, to see what the restaurant looks like, what their food looks like, to see if it is something they would enjoy, and to see if they will have a good experience and take good, aesthetically pleasing photos (Hosie, 2017). By framing food, events, and buildings in different ways, businesses are able to not only control their image and messaging but create the online environment they would like to make for themselves.

RQ4: How do these brands frame themselves in the modern culinary tourism industry?

Uses and Gratifications

Uses and Gratifications was created by Elihu Katz and his two colleagues Michael Gurevitch and Jay Blumer where they believed one of the most influential aspects of the growing media of the decade was to use it for peoples benefit (Katz et al., 1974). Uses and Gratifications theory has evolved in this age to understand how and why users seek certain forms of media and how that media fulfills their needs (Severin & Tankard, 1997). Uses and Gratifications can be

related to social media in how we as users interact with others to be involved, feel like part of a group, or seek information. “People use social media with different needs to gratify, and social media provide the versatility of information in the form of pictures, videos, posts, tweets, live streams, stories, messages, etc. to gratify these needs” (Hussain et al., 2020, para. 2). Major components include social interaction, how and why we talk to others; information seeking, the goal to self educate or form our own opinions; to pass time and relieve boredom; to entertain, and more specifically to escape into something more exciting; and as a tool to share information with one another conveniently (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

It is not just users consuming social media content; companies use it too. While Uses and Gratifications has generally been used by audiences in fulfilling their wants and needs, companies have begun to use analysis and understand consumer gratifications to further their social media accounts and interactions (Choi et al., 2015). A significant factor is that brands can use their social media accounts to learn about insightful information, specifically consumer opinions, almost instantly (Lou, 2002). By learning of the wants and needs of their clientele, companies can make critical business decisions and keep the customers they already have happy.

Diffusion of Innovation

Diffusion on Innovation is a media theory that was created in 1962 by Everett Rogers. Rogers believed that innovation is not a sudden event but instead is in the shape of a bell curve with innovation starting with a small number of people in the beginning, people adapting to the innovation, and then the idea falling out of innovation (Rogers, 2003). The four main channels for the innovation to work are the innovation itself, the communications channels, time, and the social system where the innovation lives (Rogers, 2003). The five main factors that influence the adoption of an innovation are its relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and

observability (LaMorte, n.d). Relative advantage is how and why this innovation is better than its predecessor, what makes it different, and just as, if not more successful. Compatibility refers to “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing value, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters” (Kocak et al., 2013, p. 24). The new innovation should not be the same as the previous, should be new and exciting, but not so different that the potential benefits outnumber the risks. Complexity is how hard the innovation is to understand. Trialability is “the degree to which the innovation can be experimented on” (Kocak et al., p. 25). Trying out the innovation provides peace of mind to users and gives them first-hand experience, helping to ease any discomfort and answer unanswered questions. Observability is how the innovation is adopted.

Diffusion of Innovation presents itself in social media through influencers and trends, whether it be trending hashtags or viral posts. Creating, or being one of the first to be involved, in a viral trend cements one's place in the spotlight for at least a brief period of time. If not the innovator, being an early adopter is key to success in the online world where the bell curve for innovation continues to get smaller and smaller.

Chapter 3. Methods

This Chapter will explain content analysis, the selection of Instagrams being used for the study, and the variable selection as well as why each variable is being coded.

Content Analysis

Content Analysis can be defined as “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (Neuendorf, 2002, para. 2). Content analysis has evolved in the past decade and has become more and more popular in analyzing social media where there are a variety of disciplines and factors that influence one another and has now evolved to include and compare text, tone, visuals and audio (Neuendorf, 2002). A content analysis was conducted on a selection on Instagrams for popular food tourism destinations to find trends related to their content, social media methods, and framing techniques. 15 Variables were used from three categories, Instagram analytics, image composition, and image contents. The content analysis will compare variables within each category and against each other.

Selection of Instagrams

A study from Mun Yee Lai et al. (2017) from Griffith University determined that there are several dimensions that determine a person's decision making when it comes to eating during travel and how the brand creates their brand destination image. The first is the type of food and cuisine focusing specifically on local, regional, or national cuisine of the region. Next is the geographical environment including the geography, farm/land, fishery/sea, providence and origin of food as well as the local food production. Next in the decision making process is the cuisine culture including heritage, local food culture, different style of eating or a different style of dish as well as the diversity of the culture and the food uniqueness including the cooking method or consumption method. The brands in this study do not identify with a specific culture,

background, or heritage but instead serve as a destination for uniqueness as opposed to cultural fulfillment. While the uniqueness of a destination is always a part of a person's decision-making, even when culture is involved, these locations focus heavily on their wow factors to sustain their business as opposed to cultural appeal.

Sample

Photos were randomly selected from selected Instagram accounts; 50 photos per account from the beginning of the account to the most recent picture at the time of the study. In total, 400 photos were coded of the ~10,650 photos published on these accounts which is 3.75% of the published photos.

Brand Biographies

Oxford Exchange

Oxford Exchange is an American eatery located in Tampa, Florida. Oxford Exchange opened to the public in September of 2012 after intense renovations (Oxford Exchange, 2021). The physical building is historical to Tampa, originally housing a stable and a slew of businesses since its construction in 1891 (Oxford Exchange, 2021). The inspiration for the business came from brother and sister team Blake Casper and Allison Adams who, inspired by their world travels, wanted to create a place for all types of people to gather over food. The restaurant offers a variety of courses, “The Restaurant serves weekday breakfast and lunch, weekend brunch, and afternoon tea, where guests may be seated in an art-filled dining room with an open kitchen or the sunlit Conservatory, complete with creeping vines and a retractable glass roof” (Oxford Exchange, 2021, para. 1) as well as having a complete champagne bar, tea bar, and coffee shop. In partnership with the restaurant, the property also has a selection of shops including a bookstore, a Warby Parker eyeglasses shop, and a locally crafted gift shop. The Food Network

nominated Oxford Exchange as one of the most Instagrammable restaurants in America for its stunning retail and dining space and beauty of the space including the seating, lighting, and windows (Calise, 2019). In 2018, Architecture Digest named Oxford Exchange as one of the most beautiful independent stores in the country (Martin, 2018). At the time of this study Oxford Exchange's Instagram account had 67,000 followers and 2,250 posts.

VooDoo Doughnuts

VooDoo Doughnuts is an eclectic doughnut shop founded in Portland, Oregon by friends Kenneth Poggon and Tres Shannon. Since downtown Portland did not have a doughnut shop they decided to open their own on March 30, 2003, at exactly 8 p.m. between two nightclubs (VooDoo, 2020). They wanted to combine the conventional and unconventional, hosting weddings, concerts, and weekly Swahili lessons, all while selling doughnuts (VooDoo, 2020). They quickly gained press for their unique taste being featured in dozens of shows and magazines. The franchise now has 11 locations with the majority being in the Pacific Northwest. They offer 50 types of doughnuts but are known for the shape and decoration looking like a voodoo doll. They pride themselves on being from Portland, supporting local and national charities and artists. They have been featured in the official guide to Portland (Pullen, 2020), have been featured on Spoon University several times, and were named one of the Top 100 "Movers and Shakers" in the innovative food industry (Oracle, 2020). They have also been featured in The Travel Channel, The Cooking Channel, MTV, Good Morning America, The Today Show, The Tonight Show, Wheel of Fortune, Portlandia, Grimm, Leverage, The Amazing Race and Access Hollywood, and in print publications such as People, Playboy, Conde Nast, Spin, GQ, Jane, Maxim, Food & Wine, and more (Voodoo Doughnuts, 2020). At the time of this study, Voodoo's Instagram has 186,000 followers and 2,675 posts.

Little Damage

Little Damage is a family-owned soft serve shop located in Los Angeles, California. Little Damage offers a variety of rotating seasonal flavors, made from milk from local organic dairy farms with zero preservatives (Little Damage, 2021). They focus on flavors from the owner's childhood, bringing back nostalgia, and a variety of flavors from around the world that represent the patchwork of downtown Los Angeles (McArthur, 2019). Focus on health and serving the largest percent of people as possible, one in four flavors is vegan. Their claim to fame is their hand rolled black cones made with activated charcoal, rolled minutes after you order. Little Damage leaned into the aesthetic of their black cones, serving black soft serve and having an iconic black and white interior. With unique toppings, neon signs, and a free photo booth inside, their marketing director made it a goal to make the shop as Instagramable as possible (McArthur, 2019). Cosmopolitan named them one of the most Instagram-Worthy ice cream shops in the country (Beck, 2017) and one of the top 10 ice cream shops in Los Angeles by Delish (Iadonisi, 2020). At the time of this study, Little Damage's Instagram has 223,000 followers and 1,750 posts.

The Yard Milkshake Bar

The Yard Milkshake Bar is a chain of milkshake and ice cream shops with 11 locations at the time of this study and four locations in the works. The Yard Milkshake Bar was created by husband-and-wife team Logan and Chelsea Green who both came from entrepreneur families (The Yard Milkshake Bar, 2020). After Chelsea opened her first ice cream shop in 2011 she had the ambition to open The Yard in 2017. The idea was to create the most unique, spectacular shakes she had ever seen. In November 2019, The Yard appeared on the popular TV show Shark Tank where they accepted 400,000 dollars from Mark Cuban to expand their franchise

(2Paragraphs, 2020). Their Gulf Shores location was voted one of the eight most Instagrammable restaurants in the area (Gulf Shores, 2019). At the time of this study The Yard had 131,000 followers and 1,200 Instagram posts.

Taiyaki NYC

Taiyaki NYC is a small chain of six ice cream shops located in New York City, Miami, Boston, and Vancouver. Taiyaki is Japanese for fried fish, its origins can be traced back hundreds of years ago to the Edo Period and before taiyaki took its classic shape of a fish, it was first *imagawayaki*, a round-shaped cake similarly served warm and filled with azuki sweet red bean paste (Taiyaki NYC, 2016). While Taiyaki is still used in Japanese culture, it has evolved beyond its humble beginnings. Taiyaki NYC has moved past the classic red bean paste and matcha ice cream to elaborate creations that still respect their heritage. They have been featured in the New York Post, Refinery 29, The Huffington Post, The Food Network, Spoon University, and the Food and Wine network. TripAdvisor named it one of the top 10 dessert spots in New York City (TripAdvisor, 2021). At the time of this study, Taiyaki NYC had 169,000 followers and 400 posts on Instagram.

Creamberry

Creamberry is a one stop dessert shop in Las Vegas. After opening in 2016, they claimed their fame by posting about their puff waffle cones and rolled ice creams. They are known as the first to create the ice cream cotton candy burrito which has become an internet sensation. Creamberry has been featured on the Food Network, BuzzFeed, The Best of Las Vegas, Insider and Cosmopolitan. At the time of this study, Creamberry had 84,000 Instagram followers and 1,100 posts.

Three Dots and a Dash

Three Dots and a Dash is a premier tiki bar located in the River North area of Chicago. Three Dots has “researched tirelessly to source and create the best possible tiki cocktails using the freshest exotic fruits and spices, the finest rums and distilled spirits, and juices and elixirs that are cold-pressed and concocted in house every day” (Three Dots and a Dash, 2017, para. 1). They offer flaming tiki drinks, over 200 types of rum, luau bites to eat, all housed in a retro Polynesian Island themed bar. When it comes to the drinks no detail is ignored; they come in elaborately themed “glasses” like treasure chests, skulls, totem poles, and, of course, coconuts. Three Dots is meant to be a tropical escape from the concrete jungle that is Chicago. The Food Network named Three Dots and a Dash one of the most Instagrammable restaurants in Chicago (Lande, 2018). Three dots was named Best New American Cocktail Bar at the 12th annual Tales of the Cocktail festival and won Best Cocktail Menu (Marlatt, 2014). At the time of this study, Three Dots has 47,000 Instagram followers and 750 posts.

Pietro NoLita

Pietro NoLita is a healthy Italian eatery in New York City. The food is inspired by the owner Pietro’s mother and grandmother who live in Milan. The restaurant gained fame because of its all pink interior. “Inspired by the pastel colors of the Italian Riviera and the postmodern aesthetics of the Memphis group (an Italian design and architecture group founded by Ettore Sottsass in the 1980s)” (Pietro NoLita, 2020, para. 1). Leaning into the pink aesthetics, they offer pink heart-shaped ravioli, feminine cocktails, all served with pink touches of glassware and linens. BuzzFeed named it one of the most Instagrammable food spots in New York City (Roettger, 2017), and Spoon University named it the number one most aesthetically pleasing

restaurant in New York City (Tuchner, 2017). At the time of this study, Pietro NoLita's Instagram has 45,000 followers and 420 posts.

Initial Variables

Instagram Statistics

The first level of analysis is looking at the basic information about the Instagram post. By looking at the following variables we are able to see what posts are generally the most popular per account. The following variables were coded:

- Is the account verified? (Baklanov, 2020). Studies have shown that Instagram accounts that have the blue verified check mark next to their name have 30 percent more engagement with their audience than an unverified account (Baklanov, 2020). Only accounts with a large, legitimate following (not bots) may receive verification.
- Is the post a photo or video (Salleh et al., 2015). While the majority of the posts on Instagram are photos, some brands may post videos. The same levels of analysis will apply to the videos.
- Level of engagement including both the number likes and comments (Ward, 2016). It will be noted how many likes and comments each post has at the time of the study, also if comments are turned on for the posts.
- Number of hashtags (Hurt, 2017). The number of hashtags will be recorded and the hashtags will be listed to see which hashtags are used the most across all accounts.
- Is it user-generated content? Some Instagram accounts share user-generated content that has been shared with them through shares and tags. It is not always clear whether or not a post is user generated but for this study if the creator is credited in the caption or if the creator is tagged in the post it will be considered user generated. From the Nielsen

Consumer Trust Index, 92 percent of consumers trust earned content more than they trust paid content (Nielsen, 2012), defending the idea that user-generated content is not only good for brands but more enjoyable for the audience as well. Figure 1 shows an example of user generated content by photo credits through a caption.

Figure 1

Example of User Generated Content via Caption



- Figure 2 shows an example of user generated content through tagging the individual who has credit for the photo.

Figure 2

Example of User Generated Content via Tag



Photo Composition

Photo composition is strictly defined as how the photo is composed looking specifically at art related terms. These variables will look less at the content of the photo and instead at how the elements are placed in the photo and if some elements trend higher than others. Food photography traditionally leans towards certain elements of composition like using bright light, taking photos from above to show the whole plate, and plating and styling based on the type of foods (Pelzer, 2020). The following variables were coded:

- Color in photo (warm, cool, neutrals, all colors). Warm colors will be considered reds, oranges, yellows, pinks, or filters but over the photo to give it a “warm” effect. Cool colors will be considered greens, blues, and purples, or filters placed over the photo to give it a “cool” effect. Neutrals will be considered tans, browns, greys, black, and white or any filter that is used to dull or wash the colors in the photo. Whatever colors are used most in the photo will be used even if a combination of colors are used. All colors would

be considered a generally even split of all colors. Figure 3 shows an example of a photo that is composed of warm colors.

Figure 3

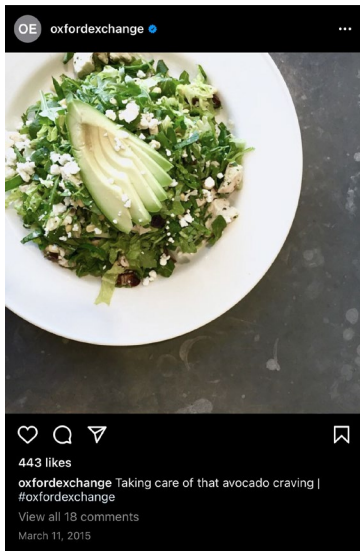
Example of Photo Composition, Colors in Photo - Warm



- Figure 4 shows an example of a photo composed with cool colors with the main color being green.

Figure 4

Example of Photo Composition, Colors in Photo - Cool



- Figure 5 shows an example of a photo composed of neutral colors with the main color being black

Figure 5

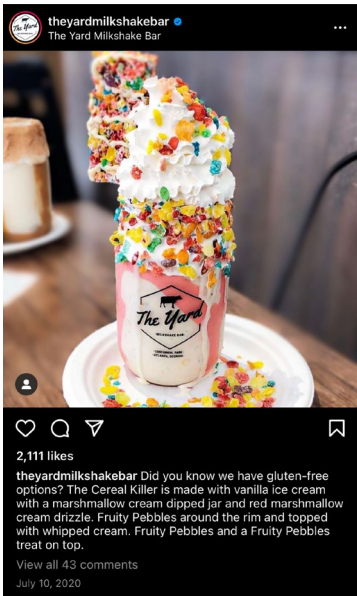
Example of Photo Composition, Colors in Photo - Neutral



- Figure 6 shows an example of a photo composed of a variety of colors where no one color group is dominant.

Figure 6

Example of Photo Composition, Colors in Photo - All Colors



- Image composition- clean, cluttered, decorated (Ali-Knight, 2010). Clean is defined as the photo having one focus with little to nothing else in the frame. Cluttered, or more appropriately busy, photos may or may not have more than one focus and will have multiple items of interest in the photo. Decorated photos will have one item of interest with small embellishment to accentuate the focus, this would include photoshopped or edited items into the photo (i.e. text over the picture). Figure 7 depicts a photo that is clean with a simple background and one item taking dominance in the shot.

Figure 7

Example of Photo Composition - Clean



- Figure 8 shows an example of a cluttered or busy photo where the eye is pulled to more than one focus, for example the multiple dishes on this table.

Figure 8

Example of Photo Composition - Cluttered/Busy

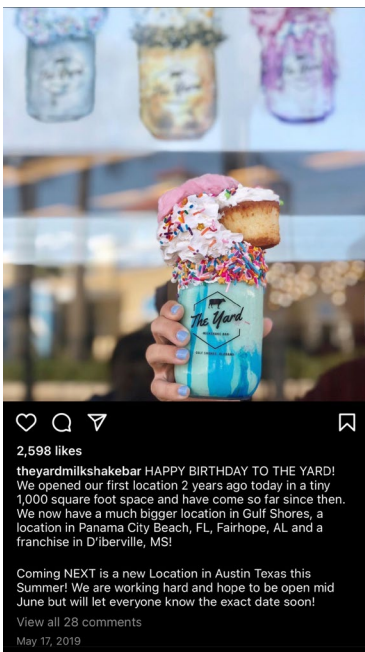


- Far Away or close up. This refers to the focus of the photo, far away would mean you can see the background and close up would mean the background is barely visible. Food

photography exploded on Instagram in the early 2010s and several photography experts set the standard as to what and how food should be photographed for Instagram. Generally, photos that are close up to show details of the food are more popular (Bonisteel, 2018). Figure 9 shows an example of a far away photo where the background is visible.

Figure 9

Example of Photo Composition - Far Away



- Figure 10 shows an example of a close up photo where only a small part of the dish is visible.

Figure 10

Example of Photo Composition - Close Up



- Food in the photo, centered or random (Ali-Knight, 2010). Where is the food item in the photo, centered in the frame, to the side, bottom, top, or not in the photo at all. Figure 11 is an example of a centered photo where the drink is centered in the rule of thirds.

Figure 11

Example of Photo Composition - Centered



Item.

Figure 13

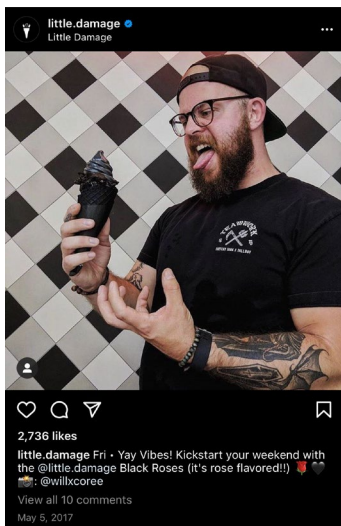
Example of Photo Content, Person in Photo - Hands



- Figure 14 shows an example of a person in the photo where the person is the focus in the frame. They are visible from the waist up.

Figure 14

Example of Photo Content, Person in Photo - Person in Frame



- Figure 15 shows an example of people in the frame where there is one person in focus and several other people in the image even though they are not the focus.

Figure 15

Example of Photo Content, Person in Photo - Multi Person Emphasis



- Condition of the food- raw ingredients, cooked ingredients, finished product (Ali-Knight, 2010) Raw ingredients would be defined as individual ingredients before they are cooked, plated, or prepared in any way including fresh or frozen vegetables, fruits, or meats, as well as packaged items like chocolate, nuts, or grains. Cooked ingredients would be considered components that are prepared or being prepared but have not made it to the final dish. The finished product would be defined as the food when it is ready to be served to the customer.
- Settings of the photo (in kitchen, at table, outside of restaurant, other location) (Ali-Knight, 2010). This will be determined by the background of the photo as well as the

tagged location in the photo if one is shared. Figure 16 shows the location of the photo as being in the kitchen where the appliances and utensils are visible.

Figure 16

Example of Photo Content, Location of Photo - Kitchen



- Figure 17 shows an example of a photo taken at the table where you can see individual place settings and a small portion of the restaurant in the background.

Figure 17

Example of Photo Content, Location of Photo - Table



- Figure 18 shows an example of a photo taken somewhere in the restaurant that is not the table or the kitchen. This could be discovered by the tagged location or inferences made by examining the pages as a whole.

Figure 18

Example of Photo Content, Location of Photo - Restaurant



- Figure 19 shows an example of a photo taken outside or outside of the restaurant where the photo is clearly taken somewhere outside even if the exact proximity to the restaurant is unknown.

Figure 19

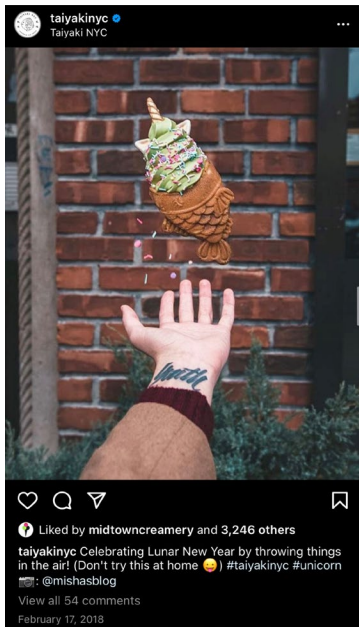
Example of Photo Content, Location on Photo - Outside Restaurant



- Does the photo appear to be posed or candid? (Powell, 2011). A posed photo is one that has been prepared and planned while a candid photo is made to look like the photo was not planned, or was not planned and is truly candid. Any photo that is clearly staged will be considered posed. Photos that appear to be, for example, the plate of food as it was placed on the table with no manicuring will be considered candid. Figure 20 shows an example of a posed photo where a very clear amount of thought was taken into the composition and editing of the photo.

Figure 20

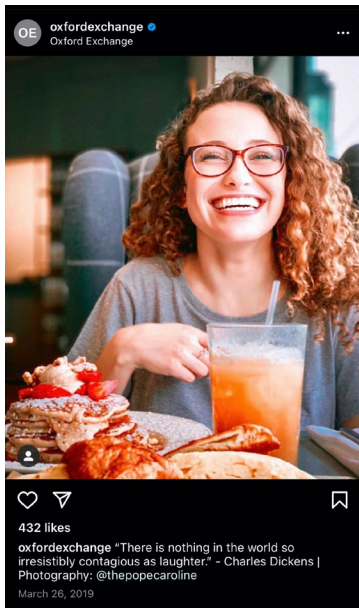
Example of Photo Content - Posed



- Figure 21 shows an example of a candid photo, while this is harder to pinpoint an assumption can be made based on her face, body language, and photo composition that the photo is either candid or is made to look candid.

Figure 21

Example of Photo Content - Candid



- Is the language in the caption personal, informative, or other (Davidsson, 2019). Personal language would use language that is directed to the consumer or using first person, active language. Informative would be considered strictly sharing information about the product, restaurant, and upcoming event, or so on. In Figure 22, the language is more personal using language that evokes some emotion and is less formal, similar to talking to a friend. The use of a call to action is a tactic commonly used to appear more approachable and personal.

Figure 22

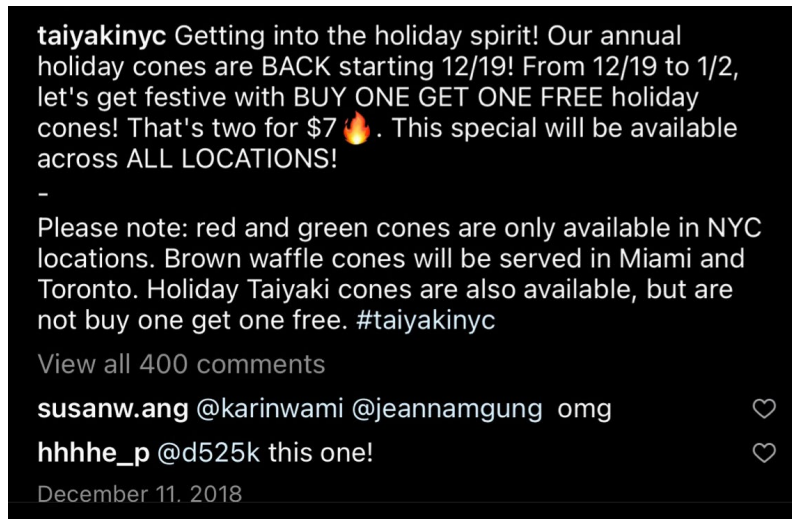
Example of Photo Content, Language in Caption - Personal



- Figure 23 shows an example of an informative caption where details of the restaurant specials, menu, hours, and locations are described.

Figure 23

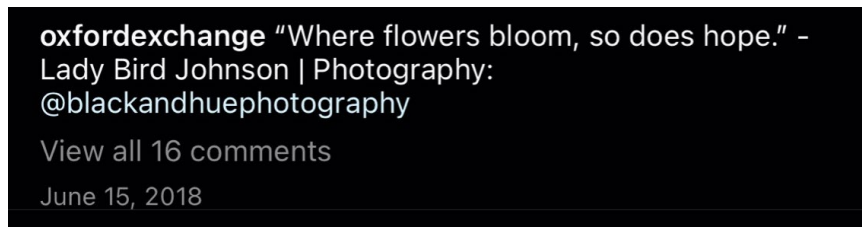
Example of Photo Content, Language in Caption - Informative



- Figure 24 shows an example of a statement caption where there is not information, no call to action, but instead is a quote or powerful statement that is not relevant to the photo.

Figure 24

Example of Photo Content, Language in Caption - Statement



Chapter 4. Analysis

This study examines popular techniques and variables within eight culinary tourism destination brands on Instagram. In this section, the results will be shared from the content analysis by variable in the form of tables. Each will go over the frequency and percent of each variable category.

Table 1 lists each account, whether or not the account is verified, and how many followers the account had at the time the content analysis was completed. Eight accounts were analyzed in the content analysis. Of the eight accounts, six of them were verified on Instagram and two were not (25% unverified). Followers per account ranged from 45.1 thousand to 222 thousand at the time the content analysis was completed.

Table 1

Tourism Destination Account Verification and Followers as of 7.12.2021

<u>Account</u>	<u>Verification</u>	<u>Followers</u>
Oxford Exchange	Yes	68.6K
Voodoo Doughnut	Yes	194K
Little Damage	Yes	222K
Creamberry	No	9.3K
Three Dots and a Dash	No	49.5K
The Yard	Yes	154K
Pietro Nolita	Yes	45.1K
Taiyaki NYC	Yes	176K

Table 2 shows the frequency of the number of hashtags per post, listing the number of hashtags, how many in the set of photos had the number of hashtags, and what percentage the

frequency equals. Of the 400 photos the majority of the posts did not have hashtags (42%). 20.6% had one hashtag and 7.9% had two hashtags. 28.2% of the posts had more than 3 hashtags with most being 29 a post.

Table 2

Frequency and Percent of the Number of Hashtags

<u>Number of Hashtags</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
0	171	42.8%
1	84	21%
2	32	8%
3	9	2.25%
4	3	.75%
6	6	1.5%
7	4	1%
8	12	3%
9	7	1.75%
10	6	1.5%
11	6	1.5%
12	7	1.75%
13	11	2.5%
14	7	1.75%
15	5	1.25%
16	6	1.5%
17	1	.25%

18	3	.73%
19	9	2.25%
20	1	.25%
21	2	.5%
22	1	.25%
23	1	.25%
24	3	.75%
25	1	.25%
29	2	.5%

Of the posts, majority of the content was not user generated content or the photographer name, instagram account was not credited (66.5%) and a minority of posts did give credit to another creator via bio or tag making it user generated content (33.5%). Table 3 shows the frequency of whether or not the photo appeared to be user generated content, and what percentage the frequency equals.

Table 3

User Generated Content Frequency and Percent

<u>Is it UGC</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Yes	134	33.5%
No	266	66.5%

Table 4 shows the frequency and percent of the colors in the photos, showing how many photos were classified as a color group and what percentage was the color group. The most popular colors used were neutral colors (36.8%) followed by very colorful photos (28.5%).

Table 4*Frequency and Percent of Colors in Photo*

<u>Colors</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Cool	25	6.3%
Warm	114	28.5%
Neutral	147	36.8%
All Colors	114	28.5%

Table 5 shows a breakdown of image composition showing the frequency and percentage of if the photo was busy or clean. The most popular composition was clean crisp photos with one center of focus (59%) while photos that were busy or had more than one point of focus were less popular.

Table 5*Frequency and Percent of Image Composition (Busy/Clean)*

<u>Composition</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Busy	164	41%
Clean	236	59%

Table 6 shows how many of the photos were close up as compared to far away. Majority of the photos were close up (65%) as opposed to far away and the subject of the photos were centered (62.5%) more often than not.

Table 6*Frequency and Percent of Image Composition (Close up/Far Away)*

<u>Composition</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Close Up	260	65%

Far Away	137	34.25%
N/A	3	.75%

Table 7 shows the frequency and percentage of the area of focus of the image.

Table 7

Frequency and Percent of Image Composition (Area of Focus)

<u>Area</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Centered	250	62.5%
Random	79	19.75%
Bottom	31	7.75%
Right	12	3%
Left	15	3.75%
N/A	13	3.25%

Table 8 shows the frequency and percentage of whether or not a person was shown in the photo. Just over half (51.5%) of the photos did not have a person in them and 48.5% did have a person in the photo in some capacity. When it came to people in the photos a majority of the people were young adult women and a majority of the photos only showed their hands or arms holding the food or item. Some of the accounts consistently showed what appeared to be the same person while some showed a variety of people, the correlation can be seen by looking at if there was a person in the photo and if the post was user generated content.

Table 8

Frequency and Percent if Person was in Photo

<u>Was a person in the Photo</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Yes	194	48.5%

No 206 51.5%

Table 9 shows the frequency and percent of how the food was presented, if it was the final dish, the raw ingredients, or if the food was depicted at all. Looking at the condition of the food, 94.9% of the photos showed the finished product (completed dish) while only 2.25% showed raw or prepared ingredients. Of the photos showing raw ingredients several also had the finished dish in the frame.

Table 9

Frequency and Percent of How Food was Presented

<u>Presentation</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Finished Product	374	93.5%
Raw Ingredients	10	2.5%
No Food Pictured	16	4%

Table 10 shows the frequency and percentage of the setting of the photos. A majority of the photos were taken at the restaurant, mostly inside with some taken outside of the restaurant.

Table 10

Frequency and Percent of Setting of the Photo

<u>Setting</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Restaurant	211	52.75%
Outside - Restaurant	64	16%
Storefront - Restaurant	13	3.25%
Outside	44	11%
Kitchen	16	4%
Table	32	8%

No Physical Setting	5	1.25%
Other	15	3.75%

Table 11 depicts the frequency and percent of the image composition, looking and whether or not the photo appeared candid or posed. The majority of the photos appeared to be posed while a small percentage appeared to be candid.

Table 11

Frequency and Percent of Posed/ Candid

<u>Content</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Posed	340	85%
Candid	60	15%

Table 12 looked at the frequency and percentage of the caption language. Majority of the captions were informative including dish details, restaurant details, hours, specials, ect. % of the captions were personal including casual language or fun calls-to-actions, or emojis.

Table 12

Frequency and Percent of Caption Language

<u>Language</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Informative	183	45.75%
Personal	71	17.75%
Statement	121	30.25%
Quote	20	5%
Question	2	.5%
No Caption	3	.75%

RQ1: What Instagram tactics are selected businesses using to connect and stay

relevant with their clientele?

Majority of selected accounts use set hashtags for all of their posts and they keep them limited. Hashtags were generally used to promote a specific event, a partnership with another organization or brand. Of the brands that used hashtags consistently, the brand name was almost always used as one or the only hashtag used. Some accounts do not use hashtags regularly and instead use tagged photos, user-generated content, to get content for their accounts. These pictures are both posed and candid, depicting people or just the food, but are generally high-quality images that fit into the accounts visual aesthetics. Captions are generally informative while some are both informative and personal. Most consist of dish and restaurant information with calls-to-action to company websites and other resources to learn more information. Only one of the eight accounts have comments disabled; the other seven accounts have comments turned on.

RQ2: In what way has Instagram changed the way consumers and brands interact with the culinary tourism industry within selected restaurants?

This research shows that a majority of these brands saw growth through likes and comments, and later user-generated content, as time has gone. In general, posting has become more consistent if not daily and more content is being shared through posts, captions, and comments. In a majority of the accounts, captions became more informative with detailed information that would generally belong on a website. Several brands recognized themselves as an Instagramable location or claimed they have won awards related to their photos, presentation, or social media accounts. Some accounts give calls-to-action to create and share user generated

content, this has also evolved over time becoming more common. Consumers use Instagram as a tool by tagging friends and peers, searching, and exploring the platform to find these locations.

RQ3: What are the customers' distinct set of expectation for niche tourism within the research sample?

Based on the content of the captions and comments, customers use Instagram as a tool to learn more about the brand, certain dishes, events, hours, and locations. Brands use captions to share basic information and use captions to answer questions as they arise. Customers use captions to ask questions and also to share or tag other users so quickly and effectively share the posts content. Customers create user-generated content to share their own experiences with these brands which serves a dual purpose. For the brand it is earned advertising and free content while the customer can use it to create their own person as a tourist and consumer. Consumers want a photogenic dish as well as a photogenic location inside or outside of the restaurant. They expect the real life experience to look like the pictures they are liking on their phones. These users are interested in these brands because of their innovation, the brands focus on being Instagrammable with a claim-to-fame which acts as the innovation.

RQ4: How do these brands frame themselves in the modern culinary tourism Industry?

These brands each have their own aesthetic which stays consistent through their posts. If a brand begins to use a certain color scheme, like neutral or colorful; or composition, like centered and clean, they tend to stick with the same photo composition with little variation. The majority of these brands have framed themselves as exciting and creative as opposed to high-end culinary locations. The focus is less on the culinary art and more on the “wow” factor and presentation.

Chapter 5. Discussion

Discussion of Findings

In review of the results, the research questions reveal the most frequently used strategies by popular culinary tourism brands. The findings are reviewed in this section. This content analysis only represents a small percentage of culinary tourism destinations and highlights an even smaller percentage of culinary tourism destinations that have placed a specific emphasis on their branding and social media presences. A study from Mun Yee Lai et al. (2017) from Griffith University determined that there are several dimensions that determine a person's decision making when it comes to eating during travel and how the brand creates their brand destination image. These Instagram accounts were selected because of their large social following, the amount of care they put into their social accounts including having social media or marketing managers, and because of the variety of accolades they have received because of their Instagram or social media content. The results of this study indicate a series of commonly used strategies used by these brands to create and promote their products which have made them some of the top tourism destinations in the country.

As shown in Table 2, hashtags that are used sparingly are more beneficial. “In posts that have at least one hashtag, engagement rates are on average 12.6% higher than in publications without hashtags. While they may not drive exponential engagement growth, they give audiences an organic way to discover branded content through the topics and forums that interest them” (Fedushko & Solos, 2019, p. 82). Majority of the hashtags used were the brand's name or account name. This is a tool used by the brands to increase their reach without overwhelming their audience with several hashtags. Posts with several hashtags had several for a specific

purpose, whether it be a contest or partnership with another brand and they were significantly more informative as opposed to personal.

Tourists use Instagram as a tool in their travels with 30% to 40% of travelers under the age of 30 making their travel plans based on how Instagram-able the potential destination is (Apollo, 2020). Tourists know that brands are going to frame their product or destination to show nothing less than the best so they rely on user-generated content to see what others are saying or seeing. Even though the distribution on user-generated posts can be sporadic, they are a more trusted source of what can be expected from a brand both in terms of content and popularity (Paül i Agustí, 2018). Table three shows that brands do use user-generated content sparingly. The photos selected to be shared by the brands fit into the photo composition of the page and give a personal touch to the pages. Comments should also be turned on at all times, this allows users to comment on each post and is the standard setting for Instagram. One account examined currently has comments turned off and while metrics like likes have not been affected it defeats one of the main purposes of Instagram. For users to connect with the brand they have to have a quick and effective way to communicate which is the purpose of comments.

Tables four through seven explore photo composition. The tables show that the majority of the photos are neutral colors, or a variety of colors, that they are generally very clean and close up to the focus, and they are generally centered. This varies based on the specific brand. Each brand has their own way of defining their look. Some brands stick to a specific color like pink and others stay fairly neutral. With the focus of the majority of these pictures being food, neutral or warm is incredibly popular exclusively based on the subject. The majority of the photos are very clean with one item being the focus or the only thing in the shot and they are generally a very close-up shot that is centered. Each brand has their own aesthetic in their own

way of styling photos so the big takeaway from photo composition was consistency within each brand and adapting to what framing techniques work based on likes and comments.

Table eight shows the frequency of whether or not a person was in the photo. If a person was in the photo it was also recorded what the person was doing in any demographics that could be assumed from what was presented. Around half of the photos did have a person in the frame in some aspect but the majority of the photos that had a person in them was just a hand or an arm. More often than not it was just a person holding the food item. If a person's face was shown it was generally a young adult female.

Table nine breaks down how the food was presented. Almost all of the pictures show the finished dish or finished product. Of the few photos that showed ingredients, most showed ingredients plus the finished product or show ingredients like whole vegetables or grains. Only one photo shows the cooking process. A small percentage, 4%, does not show food at all. Table nine shows that the majority of the photos are taken in the restaurant, whether it be outside or at the table. Photos of dishes inside of the restaurant promote restaurant image and the context of the location helps to create the brand image (Herranz et al., 2015). The photos are generally posed down to the sprinkles and garnishes. Brands want their product to look as flawless and enticing as possible, the problem comes in when the posted photos are not the standard when the consumer goes to the location and purchases the item. When expectations are high the consumer is expecting the most Instagrammable food so when the location, setting, and dish is not to the consumers standard it can hurt brand image (Mull, 2017).

The majority brands in this study do not identify with a specific culture, background, or heritage but instead serve as a destination for uniqueness as opposed to cultural fulfillment. They are considered to be the innovators in their respective subcategories by creating an innovative

product and they have been able to continue this success as opposed to dropping with the bell curve because of continued innovation and, presumably, good business practices related to marketing. While the uniqueness of a destination is always a part of a person's decision-making, even when culture is involved, these locations focus heavily on their wow factors to sustain their business as opposed to cultural appeal. Of the locations that do have cultural roots they are not advertised or promoted as a cultural destination.

Limitations and Future Direction

Because of the time limitations of the study, 50 photos were analyzed from eight accounts for a total of 400 photos. This represents a very small fraction of accounts and content making the data limited. A larger set of data could have discovered stronger or different trends among brands. Only large accounts were studied as opposed to small accounts. Integrating smaller accounts could have created a base for what would be considered a more normal social media account with a more average following. The accounts selected also all won awards or accolades for their social media content. By integrating accounts who did not receive awards, data could show key factors that make award-winning accounts noteworthy. This could then be used by accounts as an example of how to change their content to potentially win similar awards. Instagram and social media are constantly evolving with a wider, younger user base and ever changing features. The tourism industry is also constantly evolving, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is little research between the impact of social media on culinary tourism, and that relationship is constantly changing and growing. These Instagram strategies are relatively new and have not been fully researched, but are also subjective to the user and the brand based on their target audience and aesthetic.

While this study looks into the visual appeal of food it does not look into customer response on the taste of the food. The study is based around the idea that the food does not have to taste good, it just has to look good, but that is not necessarily true. For these brands to be and stay successful, there is an assumption that the food is at least considered good by the majority of the audience. Looking at the diffusion of innovation of these locations, some of these restaurants were involved in certain culinary trends that have come and gone yet these locations are still in business and still adapting. While good business practice and overhead have a lot to do with the longevity of a business, we are assuming the branding and marketing also play a large part in these restaurants' success and longevity. Further research needs to be done exploring business insights to see how and where branding and marketing fit into brand success for each business picked.

Conclusion

The tourism industry, specifically the culinary and gastronomy tourism industries, are critical to the local, regional, and national economies. With 70% of eateries being small businesses, 9.9 million restaurant workers, and 95% of owners claiming their online presence matters (V, 2021) it is critical that tourists support these local economies to keep people employed and money in local economies. With the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism-dependent economies have been destroyed and the rebuilding process is going to take years to recover if they are able to (Beshudi, 2020).

It is evident from this study that social media is critical to branding for culinary tourism destinations. On average, 23% of US internet users are significantly influenced by social media for their travel/holiday-related decisions (Gonzalo, 2014). 87% of Millennials use social media for travel research with sites such as TripAdvisor along with social media platforms including

Facebook and Twitter, which are now the most popular mediums for travel-related research (Apollo, 2020). While culinary tourism is just a part of the tourism industry, it is one that we all utilize and can not be ignored; we all have to eat. What we choose to eat varies based on each person and each situation but the basic principles remain the same; consumers listen to their peers on where to go and they want dishes that are visually appealing. These brands have invested in their social media presence through hiring professionals and specialists to curate and monitor social media pages, an investment that has proven to be successful. In turbulent times, such as global pandemics, small businesses do not always have the ability to hire someone to manage social media accounts but their use is still critical to the marketing success of the brands.

The research in this study can act as a reference guide to smaller culinary tourism destinations for a way to build their social media presence to be not only successful but to be an advertising tool. This study also serves as a testament to how critical social media is for all industries. As social media evolves it is critical that all segments of the tourism industry remain up to date and adapt to stay relevant and profitable. The ease of creating a brand image and monitoring it on social media should encourage brands to rethink how they use their social media account

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