Instagram the 'chameleon' -

The biggest influencer of overtourism in rural destinations

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AFFIDAVIT

I hereby affirm that this Master's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

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ABSTRACT

The overall aim of this dissertation is to explore the interlinks between overtourism and Instagram. Furthermore, the study aims to find out how Instagram changes the tourism behavior and experience. By taking a tourist perspective, overtourism and Instagram as the push factor and coping mechanism for overtourism is explored.

The primary research was of qualitative nature. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with tourists visiting Lago di Braies. Lago di Braies is a small mountain lake in the Italian Dolomites suffering from overtourism since 2006. The methodology was chosen because of the necessary in-depth knowledge to meet the main aims and objectives. Through 20 interviews with tourists visiting the lake, various news insights were generated

The results indicate that overtourism and Instagram are strongly interlinked. Actually, classic push factors for overtourism could not be proven on Lago di Braies. The core push factor identified was Instagram. From the angle of the tourist, overtourism manifests as negative crowding. Crowding is usually determined by demographic and geographic factors. The research showed that a much stronger role in these classic factors plays Instagram. Actually, the research outlines that Instagram is the main coping mechanism for tourists in order to minimize the negative effects for crowding.

This research is relevant to tourism and hospitality operators in Alpine destinations. It provides a deeper understanding of the deep connection of overtourism and social media and helps to understand the complex and fast evolving nature of overtourism in rural nature areas. Finally, this research contributes to a currently underexplored academic field.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background information

Over the last decades, the global tourism industry has been constantly growing and is now one of the world's largest industries (Giddy and Webb, 2016; unwto.org, 2019). Tourism is a big part of global life and international trade (Bieger, 2010; Wortley, 2019). For some countries and especially for some regions mainly for remote rural regions, tourism is the main source of income and thus of vital importance. During the last economic crisis that strongly affected the Mediterranean countries in Europe, tourism proved to be strong and crisis resilient. In the small mountain region of South Tyrol, the very Northern part of the Italian Dolomites, tourism is the main economic driver and is recognized as the most important economic sector. With over 7.500.000 arrivals and more than 33 million overnight stays, South Tyrol is among the most important and most successful destinations in the Alps (IDM, 2019; Stol.it, 2019).

Despite the last economic crisis and a political turbulent history, tourism was constantly growing over the last decade. Data shows that especially in the last years arrival numbers and overnight stays were constantly pushed to impressive numbers for a small mountain region. This guarantees social and economic freedom as well as good income for the local community. In fact, South Tyrol has the lowest unemployment rate in Italy and one of the lowest in whole Europe (Astat.provinz.bz.it,). Furthermore, it was once one of the poorest regions in the past, it has become one of the wealthiest regions in Italy and Europe with an average net income of euro 25.000 per person and a GDP of 23% (Astat.provinz.bz.it, 2018; Stol.it, 2019).

This massive growth of tourism and its supporting economies bring also some negative side effects like traffic, pollution, 'museumification', loss of local heritage and traditions, and endangerment of a very fragile ecosystem and its natural beauty. Tourism has a dualistic nature characterized by high resilience, growth and long-term income generator on the one hand. On the other hand by a short-sighted greed of overconsuming its own vital systems like local communities, culture and moreover nature (Francis, 2019).

Over the last three years and mainly during the high season, the negative effects of the constantly growing tourism sector became most apparent for both locals and tourists. The buzzword 'overtourism' was repeatedly appearing in the media, politicians' speeches and statements and last but not least in the daily talks of locals and tourists. The tourist numbers in some even remote and high mountain places became unbearable for locals, but also negatively affect the tourism experience of visitors as the image and main pull factor of an intact, relax, unpolluted and quiet mountain nature is impaired **(**EURAC research, 2018).

Some places in South Tyrol seem to be hit harder by 'overtourism' than others. Over recent years, a massive gentrification in the tourism sector of South Tyrol took place. More and more tourists keep visiting the same places and interestingly the same exact spots in areas where tourism was typically characterized by exploration where tourists were spread over a wide and not densely populated mountain area (EURAC research, 2018; Benedikter, 2018; FOCUS, 2019; Tageszeitung.it, 2019).

A massive factor for this phenomenon was the push of certain areas in social networks like Facebook, and especially Instagram. Undoubtedly, the Internet and especially social networks became a big part of peoples' lives, not only among millennials, but also among older generations. As social media became such a big part in people's everyday life, it also became extremely important in tourism (FOCUS, 2019; Gasser, 2019).

Some authors argue that Web 2.0 and especially social media already changed the tourism economy vastly and will continue to further change the sector. The rapid growth of the use of mobile devices that allow people to access Internet and social media pushed the importance of social media for the travel industry. Many tourists use social media not only before travel as information and booking source, but also during their holiday as information, inspiration and communication medium. In fact, smartphones together with all other mobile applications such as social media and further travel applications need to be seen as a holistic tool that is a vital part of person's life and recently also of their holiday experience. In fact, many people see their smartphone as a 'travel buddy', a companion that will guide, enhance and help document their travel (Almeida, Millán and Yi, 2019; FOCUS, 2019**;** Minazzi, 2016).

Many authors suggest that social media needs to be seen as holistic construct and should also be addressed as such in academic papers (Almeida, Millán and Yi, 2019; Cheng and Edwards, 2015: Minazzi, 2016). However, since social media is changing and evolving rapidly, it seems more accurate to focus on one platform to get better and more valid results. The importance of different social media platforms depends on many factors such as geography and demography. One of the biggest and vastly growing platforms that seems to be among the most important for travel is Instagram. The picture sharing platform has over 1 billion active users and a total of 1 million pictures are uploaded every minute (Instagram, 2019). Instagram changed the way how people see the world and themselves and consequently changed travel behavior and is further known as the social media platform to have one of the prime influences on tourism (Fatanti and Suyadnya, 2015; Smith, 2018). Recognizing, proving and documenting this importance is the focus subject of this research.

1.2 Justification of the Research

As already mentioned, Instagram and social media in general have a big influence on the tourism sector. Despite the proven importance of social media for the tourism and travel industry, it still lacks a solid theoretical basis. This is due to the fact that social media and especially the close integration in a person's life is a relatively new phenomenon. For instance, Instagram came out in 2010 and reached massive global importance in 2013 with 100 Million active users (Fatanti and Suyadnya, 2015; Instagram 2019). Furthermore, the whole digital sector is changing rapidly with new trends emerging fast, and user preferences reacting to these trends quickly. Such a dynamic environment makes solid academic work difficult (Aramendia-Muneta, Olarte-Pascual and Ollo-López, 2018; Fatanti and Suyadnya, 2015; Smith, 2018).

However, more and more research is done on the subject social media. The main research focus in social media studies is related to the general influences social media has on people's life. Fastly emerging are also the studies that are focusing on the mental health issues related to the extensive use of social media, especially on young people (Hamm et al., 2015).

As social media gets more and more important in people's everyday life, it is also a subject of growing interest for the tourism industry, especially with tourism and destination marketers who see social media as a cheap and very effective marketing tool. This means most research related to tourism and social media is focused on how to use social media as a marketing tool and what is the most effective and cost sufficient way to use social media in order to attract more visitors. There is only limited research about how social media affects 'overtourism' and vice versa (Hays, Page and Buhalis, 2013; Sigala, 2017; Smith, 2019). This study wants to explore the links between 'overtourism' and social media from a tourist's perspective.

In order to look at this phenomenon, the place of 'Pragser Wildsee/Lago di Braies' or as some call it the 'lake of Instagram' in the Italian Dolomites is chosen. This scenic lake became famous through an Italian TV series and is now one of the most photographed and posted places in Northern Italy (Spiegel Online, 2018; TGR, 2018).

On a beautiful day, thousands of people walk on small paths around the lake to get the most beautiful shots and enjoy the scenery of this quiet mountain lake. International media perceive the lake as a perfect example how Instagram induced 'overtourism', destroyed a beautiful nature's jewel by making it a place of pilgrimage for tourists.

The effects of overtourism on local population is a popular subject of research and is often discussed in the media. However, the effects of overtourism on tourists and their experience is yet not a well explored area of research (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2016).

Hence, a major part of this paper is to investigate the interesting connection between overtourism and Instagram and to understand the possible influences of this connection on tourists and their travel decisions. In consideration of different angles of this topic, it would be beneficial to explore this field that has not received much attention to enlighten the growing attention on the effects of social media and overtourism. Most importantly, this research is academically relevant because this will enrich the existing academic literature on this subject.

The results of this study can be used as a point of reference in other fields of research, for instance in psychological or consumer behavior studies. Moreover, this study is not

only relevant to academics, but also to a number of practitioners like DMOs, Hoteliers, tour operators, travel agencies, etc. because of their implications how to deal with new travel behavior and the possible impact of overtourism over many areas.

Consequently, from a marketing point of view, it is interesting if the use of social media changes the purpose of visiting certain places and what effects overtourism, crowding and social media have on each other and on the experience, people get from visiting a place. The research undertaken in this thesis is therefore designed to contribute to a better understanding of this connection between Instagram and overtourism.

Tourism as such and especially 'overtourism' and its effects are of great interest to the author as his whole academic and work career is focused on tourism. The author is working in a hotel near Pragser Wildsee and deals with overtourism every day. Furthermore, the author has a big personal interest in the field of social media, he was keen on finding out more about the connection of social media and 'overtourism' from a tourist perspective. Since the author was not able to find enough adequate literature about this area, he felt the urge to examine it.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the thesis

This section will explain and highlight the main aims and objectives of the stud more specifically. The overall aim of this thesis is to examine the interlinks between 'overtourism' and social media, in particular Instagram' from a tourist perspective. The assumption is that Instagram is a major push factor for overtourism, while at the same time Instagram minimizes the negative effects of overtourism on tourists that use Instagram.

The research questions underpinning the studies in this subject area are:
RQ1: In which way do tourists feel that Lago di Braies is challenged by overtourism?

RQ2: What are the main reasons for tourists to visit Lago di Braies, and which role did Instagram play in this?

RQ3: In which way does Instagram help tourists to cope with the negative effects of overtourism while visiting such in this case Lago di Braies?

RQ4: What are the implications of an 'Instagrammable destination' of the tourist experience while being there?

Rephrased as objectives, the required outcomes of the study are:

- Objective 1: To critically review secondary data from relevant literatures on social media use and tourism and hence identifying gaps in these literatures
- Objective 2: To explore the connection between overtourism and Instagram
- Objective 3: To provide a theoretical framework to better understand the phenomena of social media and tourism
- Objective 4: To understand how Instagram changes the perception of holidays (in this case nature and mountain destination)
- Objective 5: To explore how Instagram changes the experience of visiting the actual destination

Accomplishing these objectives will qualify the achievement of the overall aim. Although most studies regarding social media and tourism do not focus on a particular social media platform and take social media as a whole, narrowing the scope to one particular platform gives new possibilities. The narrower context of focusing on Instagram allows to have a clearer and more detailed view on what appears to be the most important social media platform in the context of tourism. However, the aim of these studies is not to conclude with a universal valid normative framework of Instagram and overtourism experience connection, but to provide an explanation to better understand these complex phenomena and show the close connection of tourism and Instagram.

1.4 Methodology

In terms of social ontology, constructionism emerges to be the suitable foundation for this research, because it considers that social phenomena are continuously accomplished by social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Interpretivism acknowledges that the social world is complex, that there is more than one singular way to interpret meaning and understanding (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2012;).

Constructivist and interpretive approaches offer the researcher freedom to work and evolve theory built-up from collecting and analyzing primary data from the real world. By using the inductive approach, the researcher seeks to find a general opinion by following certain observations (Ghauri, and Grønhaug, 2010). Nevertheless, there are also explanatory elements in the study, since the researcher wants to explain certain aspects of tourism and social media phenomena especially in an overtourism context (Saunders et al. 2012).

In order to achieve the research aims and objectives, a combination of secondary and primary data is gathered and managed. The secondary data is primarily collected through a critical review of relevant academic and non-academic sources. As there is only limited scientific material on this topic, data and information related topics are used. Hence, trustworthy non-academic sources are used like well recognized newspapers, websites, and magazine articles.

The nature of the study is qualitative as it is often used in social science. The method is semi-structed interviews with 10 main questions and a series of follow up or sub questions. The interviews are all held in one week directly at the 'Lago di Braies'. In order to get valid and reliable results, the interviews are held in English, Italian or German depending on the nationality of the interviewed person. Due to financial and time constrains, the sample size is 20 people visiting the 'Lago di Braies'. A combination of three forms of non-probability sampling was used, namely: convenience sampling; snowball sampling and voluntary sampling.

1.5 Limitations

The challenge faced by all professionals researching the tourism and social media connection is that this market remains one of the most under-researched areas of the industry.

Despite of the importance, there is only limited research about the often-proposed effects of social media, especially Instagram, has on tourism and the tourist experience. There are three possible reasons.

Firstly, it can be argued that social media in general is still a recent phenomenon. Instagram for instance, reached global importance only in 2016 with more than 400 million users that were sharing and uploading over 80 million pictures and videos (Roth, 2019).
Secondly, social media is a rather dynamic industry that is constantly changing; thus, research data can become outdated rather fast. For instance, currently Facebook is still the most popular social network with more than 2.2 billion users worldwide (Francisti, 2019). But Instagram with its current 1 billion users is growing massively and is already more popular among young users under 30 (Schilling, 2019).

1.6 Structure of the thesis

The dissertation is structured in five different chapters. Starting with chapter 1 the introduction above.

> **Chapter 1** - The introduction: it gives a broad overview about the topic and underlines the importance of this research

> **Chapter 2** - Literature review: in this chapter relevant academic and non-academic literature is critically assessed in order to get a better understanding of social media and especially Instagram; overtourism and its influences on tourist experience. This chapter also sets the scene for the data analysis and conclusion.

This chapter shows the strong connection of Instagram, tourist experience and overtourism. The chapter is characterized by 2 main sections:

1. Overtourism
2. Social media and Instagram

The main topics of this section are introduced and explained. Moreover, the main concepts are presented and critically assessed.

Chapter 3 - Research Design: this outlines the research design for the primary research. Discussing in detail the research philosophy and method of data collection. Subsequently, this section justifies the selected research strategy, design and methodology. Additionally, ethical considerations, limitations, reliability and generalizability are discussed.

Chapter 4: Data Description and Analysis: in this chapter the findings of the interviews are analyzed. First, the profile of the participants is addressed and then the main findings are presented. Furthermore, the main findings are presented and critically reviewed in regard to the literature review. This review will be guided by the research questions presented in the introduction.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations: provides the conclusion related to the aims and objectives and the answer of the research questions explaining any limitations of the findings and finally giving any recommendations for further research.

The last section is the list of Appendices. This section contains extra data for reference referring to promote further discussion, but they are not necessary to understand this research paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to assess relevant academic and non-academic literature to get a good understanding of overtourism due to social media with the focus on Instagram. A variety of different academic and non-academic literature is taken into account to acquire a good overview on the different angles of this complex topic.

Many authors describe tourism as one of the fastest growing international industries. (Bianchi, 2018; Leposa, 2019; Newsome, Moore and Dowling, 2017; Singal, 2015; WTTC, 2019). In 2018, international tourism reached 1.4 billion arrivals, an 8% growth when compared from 2017 (UNWTO, 2019).

This number confirms that the sector is one of the most powerful drivers of economic growth and development. For some countries and many rural regions, tourism is the most important income generator with a large part of the population, direct and indirect, depending their income from the tourism sector (Dashper, 2014 Goodwin, 2019). Areas like the Greek islands, remote mountain regions of the Dolomites and coastal towns in Croatia were once among the poorest regions in Europe but are now the most popular and richest areas in the world thanks to tourism sector (Dashper, 2014 Goodwin, 2019; Zhao and Getz, 2008).

However, this tremendous growth in recent years has also negative consequences for certain destinations that had too many tourists. The buzzword 'overtourism' has come to prominence as one of the most discussed issues in media and among politicians with regards to tourism (Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018; Kuščer and Mihalič, 2019; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Milano, 2018; Oklevik et al., 2019).

2.1 'Overtourism'

The term 'overtourism' became increasingly prominent in usage over the last 5 years because of many high profile city destinations (e.g. Venice, Barcelona, Paris) vocal call and protest against excessive number of tourists (Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018; Kuščer and Mihalič, 2019; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Oklevik et al., 2019). Although the issue is most prominent in European cities, similar sentiments have been reported in other destinations too. Especially rural holiday destinations like the mountains, islands and beach resorts that are characterized by their intact nature and

a calm, peaceful atmosphere suffer under overtourism (Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018). Therefore, it can be argued it is a worldwide and diverse phenomenon.

Before 2017, the term 'overtourism' was largely unknown in international academia. Over the last years, due to marketability and media popularity of the term, it gained massive popularity among researchers (Perkumienė & Pranskūnienė, 2019; Scheyvens, 2009).

Despite the massive importance of the issue and the daily growing number of researches about it, the subject can be considered 'fuzzy'. It still lacks definition and clarity and is thus often used as vehicle for reselling existing ideas and gaining easy attention (Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018; Markusen, 2003; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Milano 2019; Muler, et al 2018; Perkumienė & Pranskūnienė, 2019; Scheyvens, 2009).

2.1.1 Definition of 'overtourism'

As already mentioned, overtourism still lacks a commonly agreed and well-defined academic definition. By nature of the issue, the phenomenon is associated with high tourist numbers, the type and time frame of their visit, and a destination's carrying capacity (Peeters et al., 2018). A very simple and basic definition can be found in the Collins dictionary: *"The phenomenon of a popular destination or sight becoming overrun with tourists in an unsustainable way"* (Collinsdictionary.com, 2019). This definition proposed by Greg Dickenson seems to be oversimplified as it does not explain the complex issue.

Another simple definition yet a bit more accurate in touching the complex aspects of the phenomenon, is the definition of Weber (2017):

"the phenomenon of overcrowded tourism destinations, where the (mainly social) carrying capacity is exceeded" (Dodds and Butler, 2019; Walmsley, 2019).

In the same direction, but more in detail goes the definition of Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018 they define overtourism:

"as the excessive growth of visitors leading to overcrowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks, which have enforced permanent changes to their lifestyles, access to amenities and general well-being".

This definition brings in important parameters like temporary tourism peaks, permanent changes of lifestyle, access to amenities and well-being. The definition of Milano Cheer and Novelli is as most other 'overtourism' definitions focused on the resident side (Dodds and Butler, 2019; Milano, M. Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Walmsley, 2017). This one-sided view is oversimplifying a complex topic that involves local residents as much as tourists. Overtourism needs to be addressed in a multi - stakeholder context (Dodds and Butler, 2019; Peeters et al., 2018).

This one-sided view that most authors adopt can be partly explained by the historic origin of the term. The term came up first when local residents protested against tourists in cities like Venice and Barcelona. (Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Milano 2019; Muler, et al 2018; Perkumienė & Pranskūnienė, 2019).

Additionally, the core of all definitions is the concept of carrying capacity that is strongly associated with local people's enjoyment of their homes and ways of life (Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019; Peeters et al., 2018).

A later definition used in an official report made by many well recognized researchers for the transport and tourism committee of the European Union (TRAN) adds a few more general aspects to the discussion.

"Overtourism describes the situation in which the impact of tourism, at certain times and in certain locations, exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and/or political capacity thresholds" (Peeters et al., 2018).

Psychological capacity has to do with the capacity of people to emotionally deal with crowding effects. Political capacity refers to the ability of local governments to manage excessive tourism masses. The core of this definition are all forms of stress caused by the volume of visitors.

- Social stress: hosts, guests, citizens
- Physical stress: infrastructure and space
- Economic stress: tourism, commercial zones, industry
- Ecological stress: noise, air quality, water use, waste (Peeters et al., 2018)

This detailed definition indirectly also recognizes the importance of the guest or consumer side (Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019).

Another common and often used definition by different authors defines overtourism as:

"destinations where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably" (Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019; Peeters et al., 2018).

This definition puts the multi - stakeholder point of view in the core of the definition and recognizes the quality of life and tourist experience as important variables.

Taking into consideration the different definitions, it can be argued that overtourism is a complex and not an issue easy to tackle. As the topic is pretty vague, depending on who is talking or writing about it, the definition changes. For instance, the definition made for the TRAN Committee and European Parliament lists the political dimension as one of the core issues. No other definition is even tackling this aspect. It can be summarized that there is no commonly agreed definition and because of the vague nature of the subject, there is room for interpretations. When thinking about overtourism, most people simply understand "too many" tourists in one place. But this interpretation leaves a room for questions, like who says it is too many tourists, or which number are too many tourists? Often these questions are tackled with different concepts, while the most popular is tourism carrying capacity (Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019; World Tourism Organization, UNWTO 2018).

2.1.2 Carrying capacity

The issue of overtourism is strongly related to the concept of carrying capacity.

The idea of carrying capacity is somewhat old and was first mentioned in 1930. Wagar's work (1964) work about carrying capacity of wild life parks is known as the basis of the carrying capacity theory. The concept is mainly used to manage visitors in protected areas and national parks (Singh, 2006; Wagar 1964; Zelenka & Kacetl, 2014).

Carrying capacity can be explained in several ways. An easy straightforward definition comes from Francis, (2018) *"Carrying capacity defines the maximum number of tourists in a destination or visitor attraction that can be accommodated, whilst sustaining the environment, heritage, and most importantly local people's enjoyment of their homes and ways of life"*

An often used and pretty similar definition comes from Middleton and Chamberlain (1998) *"carrying capacity is the level of human activity an area can accommodate without the area deteriorating, the resident community being adversely affected, or the quality of visitors experience declining"* (Butowski, 2016; Middleton & Hawkins, 1998).

Also the UNWTO 2018 recognizes that carrying capacity is an important concept and defines it as such "*The maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction*" (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2018).

All these definitions support the common idea that carrying capacity is the point at which a destination or attraction starts experiencing negative effects as a result of the number of visitors.

Due to its simplicity and vague character, the concept of carrying capacity faces criticism. Most authors argue that the concept is fatally flawed in both the conceptual assumptions made and its limited practical application (Butowski, 2016; Leask & Fyall, 2008; Massiani, & Santoro, 2012; McCool & Lime, 2001; Middleton & Hawkins, 1998)**.**

For instance, the concept assumes that elements on which carrying capacity depends are stable but the common knowledge that they are dynamic, complex and impossible to predict. Furthermore, the level of control necessary to manage a destination based on carrying capacity is likely to be impossible in the 'real world' (Butowski, 2016; Cole & Monz, 2003; Leask & Fyall, 2008; Massiani, & Santoro, 2012; McCool & Lime, 2001; Middleton & Hawkins, 1998)**.**

Due to this criticism and the significant problems with the application of carrying capacity model, alternative ways of explaining and managing overtourism were developed. Among the most promising and often used is the 'concept of acceptable limits of change' (Leask & Fyall, 2008; Massiani, & Santoro, 2012; McCool & Lime, 2001; UNWTO, 2018).

2.1.3 Limits of acceptable change

The concept of 'acceptable limits of change' describes a relatively new concept and is often used in the explanation and management of overtourism (Coccossis & Mexa, 2004; Francis, 2018; Massiani, & Santoro, 2012).

Limits of acceptable change is a supply sided multi-stakeholder centered approach that involves local people, governments, environmentalists, etc., and all are working together to define when and how tourism starts to cause problems. These local stakeholders define a series of issues which indicate that tourism is becoming a problem (Francis, 2018). Typically, such changes are water shortages, increasing food prices, increasing pollution, traffic, drunken behavior, shortage of apartments,

increasing prices of housing etc. (Coccossis & Mexa, 2004; Francis, 2018). To conclude, the concept of tourism carrying capacity and limits of acceptable change are strongly connected to overtourism. In recent years, both concepts have gone through a process of refinements. From a single criteria measurement towards a multidimensional approach, involving many different stakeholders, levels and issues, making it a complex and subjective model (Francis, 2018; Leask & Fyall, 2008; Massiani, & Santoro, 2012; McCool & Lime, 2001; UNWTO, 2018).

Even though both models have a somehow one-sided view, they help to better understand the roots and effects of overtourism.

2.1.4 Roots of overtourism

There are many contributing factors to overtourism and surely these will vary from place to place (Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Milano 2019; Muler, et al 2018; Peeters et al., 2018; World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2018).

Even though most studies on overtourism focus on the drivers for urban tourism, the same drivers are also valid for rural and coastal areas as much as for islands, attractions and heritage sites (Dashper, 2014; Francis, 2018; Fyall and Garrod, 2019; Peeters et al., 2018).

Besides, the aspects, reasons and roots for overtourism are hugely individual to each destination, there are some reasons that keep appearing in most case studies and research papers about overtourism (Francis, 2018; Peeters et al., 2018).

1. *The easy accessibility and affordability of travel*

   The decreasing cost of travel and transport compared with the easy and fast accessibility is a major driver of overtourism (Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Milano 2019; Peeters et al., 2018).

   In Europe this factor is strongly associated with low cost airlines (Peeters et al., 2018; Goodwin, 2019; Jordan et al., 2018; Peeters et al., 2018; Weber et al., 2017; Weber, 2017). For instance, Ryanair is the second biggest airline in Europe and flies to more than 200 destinations in 37 European and Mediterranean countries. Ryanair is transporting more than 139 million guests for an average price of 39 Euro (Ryanair, 2018). It can be argued that low cost airlines changed the travel

behavior fundamentally causing more people to take short breaks with multiple short-haul flights each year (Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019 Weber et al., 2017).

2. Sharing economy

Sharing economy in tourism is mostly associated with Airbnb. Airbnb is the biggest accommodation-sharing website in the world with more than 5 million accommodations listed (Airbnb.com, 2019; Muchneeded.com, 2019). It changed the travel and tourism market fundamentally with thousands of beds suddenly made available in towns and cities around the world, without being subject to any kind of planning, permits or – in many cases – taxes (Goodwin, 2019; Laage, 2019; Urban, 2019; Wetzel, 2019).

Due to this massive and fast growth of accommodations, made possible through Airbnb, the company is strongly linked to overtourism and often seen as one of the biggest drivers for overtourism by the media (Goodwin, 2019; Laage, 2019; Thanh Thuy Schwertner, 2019; Urban, 2019; Wetzel, 2019).

3. Tourism growth paradigm

A major push factor for overtourism is the endless growth paradigm in the tourism industry. Local and national governments, tourist boards and tourism business owners have long considered a successful year based mostly only when arrival numbers have increased substantially.

Authors like Francis (2019) and Goodwin (2019) argue that nobody questioned whether these numbers are of cruise ship passengers, duty free shoppers, resort guests, backpackers or high-end visitors. It seems that the number is all that counts. The overrun of certain destinations with masses of tourists has led in many destinations to a shift from volume growth strategies to a more sustainable approach (Gössling et al., 2016; Hall, 2009; Hall, 2008). This approach is supported by a large number of authors, while at the same time there are also critical views of destinations moving away from mass tourism and the growth paradigm (Gössling & Scott, 2018; Jordan et al., 2018; Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010; Oklevik et al., 2018; Peeters et al., 2018).

4. Strong seasonality

Seasonality is a big issue in tourism especially in holiday tourism on beach and mountain destinations that are strongly depending on weather and school holiday times. For instance, ski destinations or Summer destinations have short seasons, an average of only 4 months. This leads to a concentration of tourism masses for a relatively short amount of time. Some authors and tourism entities see extending the season as key to avoid overtourism. It can be doubted that this is the solution, since a season extension is difficult, as it depends on factors that cannot be influenced such as climate, school holidays in source markets and other factors (Gössling & Scott, 2018; Peeters et al., 2018; Sampson, 2019; Smith, 2018).

5. Technical advanced methods of travel

The technical progress in transport technology plays a major role when talking about overtourism. Undoubtedly, transport is larger in scale than it was ten years ago. Aircraft, coaches, trains and cruise liners became bigger and deposit more passengers with each arrival. This is linked to the growth paradigm in tourism, that more is always better (Oklevik et al., 2018; Peeters et al., 2018).

6. Mass driver cruise ships

Strongly linked to the issue of technical advanced travel methods is cruise tourism. Even though this fact is exclusively to only a small number of coastal towns and islands, it is nonetheless seen as one of the biggest drivers for overtourism by a large number of authors and especially media and thus by the general public (Francis, 2018; Godwin, 2019; Gössling & Scott, 2018; Jordan et al., 2018; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Milano 2019; Muler, et al 2018; Peeters et al., 2018).
This can be explained by the fact that cruise ships combine a large number of negative effects and drivers associated with overtourism.
- The first notable protest against tourism took place in Barcelona and Venice, two cities hit hard by thousands of day visitors spilled out of cruise ships.
- Cruises are relatively cheap due to the fact that cruise ships have many cost advantages like low paid staff, cheap and polluting type of fuel, tax advantages and other factors make cruises relativity cheap.

- Over the last years, bigger and technically more advanced cruise ships entered the market making the number of cruise ship tourists growing every year
- Thousands of passengers overrun port cities for a relatively short time, ensure that historic streets, monuments, cafes and shops are overcrowded with people, creating an unpleasant feeling or 'seasonality feeling' during the day
- Cruise ships often leave tons of trash that they produce at sea in small port towns that are overwhelmed to deal and recycle such a big amount of waste.
- Cruise tourism leads to a massive change of destinations forcing a development in an artificial destination that suits the demand of cruise ship companies and their guests. This leads to a loose of local traditions and identity

Because of this, cruise ship tourism is often seen as the number one example of the negative effects of tourism and more as a synonym of overtourism (Benner, 2019; Connolly and Smith, 2019; Francis, 2019; Francis, 2018; Godwin, 2019; Jacobsen, Iversen and Hem, 2019; Milano 2019; Peeters et al., 2018; Sampson, 2019; Smith, 2018).

7. *Honeypots*

The new travel habits for short but more holidays together with social media motivate tourists to just see the 'must sees' – the so-called 'Honeypots'.

There is evidence that worldwide the average length of stay dropped as much as 15% between 1995 – 2015 (Gössling, Scott and Hall, 2018). When tourists visit for shorter periods of time, they are more likely to focus on the most important attractions, which leads to a concentration of tourist flows in time and space. The honeypots issue is closely linked to social media and Instagram (García-Palomares, Gutiérrez and Mínguez, 2015, Peeters et al., 2018).

8. *Social media especially Instagram*

Recently a well-known German news magazine stated that "Instagram destroys places" (Spiegel Online, 2018). More and more journalists and experts see social media and especially Instagram as a primary aspect when talking about overenthusiasm (Krzikalla, 2019; Jurinak, 2019; Spiegel Online, 2018; Pousset, 2019). Social media is closely related to the honeypots issue. Meaning social media plays a major role in concentrating tourists in a limited number of places causing overcrowding (Krzikalla, 2019; McKinsey and World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017; Jurinak, 2019; Pousset, 2019). In extreme cases, people concentrate around just one tiny spot in order to get the same picture angle as they have seen on pictures of other users. A famous example for this extreme is the 'Trolltunga' rock in Norway where people are queuing for hours just to take the same picture (handelsblatt.com, 2019; Krzikalla, 2019; Jurinak, 2019; Pousset, 2019).

After looking at these major roots of overtourism, it becomes clear that all these factors are interrelated, which shows how complex the phenomenon is. An ever-increasing important factor is social media. It is seen as a recent issue where the effects that it has on tourism and the connection to overtourism are considered huge but still under-researched (McKinsey and World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017; Peeters et al., 2018).

2.1.5 Overtourism and its effects on tourists

As already mentioned, overtourism is mostly explained and discussed from the local population side. Furthermore, the effects overtourism has on local communities has often been discussed. Yet an unresearched topic is the effects overtourism have on tourists (Popp, 2012). In a representative survey of 29.000 international travelers in 24 countries in Europe, Asia and the Americas conducted in 2017 by the World Travel Monitor (IPK International, 2017), approximately 25% of all international tourists felt that their destination had been 'overcrowded' and that this is impacting negatively on their experience (Popp, 2012).

2.1.6 Crowding vs visitor density

When talking about overtourism from a tourist prospective, the concept of crowding is key. When considering crowding, there are two important subjects to look at. There is crowding itself and tourist density.

Crowding is referring to the tourist experience and subjective perception. It is defined as a negative evaluation of a certain density or number of encounters with other visitors (Shelby et al, 1989). On the other hand, there is visitor density that is used to describe the number of people objectively present, calculated per unit of physical space.

These two subjects are strongly interlinked as density is seen to be a necessary precursor of crowding. Nevertheless, research suggest density alone is not sufficient to arouse the feeling of crowding. Crowding is a subjective psychological state, characterized by 'stress' and a 'psychological construct' rather than an objective reality (Neuts et al., 2012; Li et al., 2017).

2.1.7 Factors that influence crowding

The literature identifies several factors that influence crowding under similar levels of visitor density. These include the following:

- *Nationality and cultural background*: Tourists from Asia and America are generally less sensitive to visitor density. Furthermore, tourists in general are more tolerant of visitor density when visiting other cultures (Li et al., 2017);
- *Demographics:* This includes classic attributes like education, age and gender (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017);
- *Characteristics of the area or type of activity*: It is clear that tourists visiting cities are less sensitive than visiting mountain or beach destinations (Klanjscek et al., 2018; Manning et al., 2000; Tarrant et al., 1997);
- *Motivations for the visit:* This factor is strongly linked to characteristics of the area and type of activity. It seems obvious that tourists motivated by an authentic traditional cultural or nature seeking experience were found to be more sensitive to crowding (Jin et al, 2016);
- *Interaction with the local community*: Interestingly, some research showed that more interaction with locals leads to an increased perception of crowding because of competition for facilities (Neuts & Nijkamp, 2012; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017);

- *Individual preference:* In the end crowding is subjective, therefore what level of crowding is acceptable or considered, the norm is highly individual (Bell et al., 2011);

2.1.8 Good Vs bad Crowding

Perceived crowding can have negative impact on the tourism experience by reducing the enjoyment of the destination (Jin et al., 2016). However, there is evidence that crowding is not necessarily bad. Actually, there are obvious examples of good crowding, or in other words positive tourist perceptions associated with high visitor density in relatively little physical space (Kim et al., 2016; Popp, 2012). Good crowding is associated with situations in which tourists expect or even demand the presence of many people such as during events and festivals (Mowen et al., 2003) In such situations, crowding contributes positively to the experience by creating an exciting atmosphere (Kim et al., 2016).

Some studies suggest that not only on festivals, but also in urban tourism contexts crowding is often perceived as positive, because it assures people that they are at the right spot and that the spot is worth visiting. Nevertheless, it can be argued that there is a fine line between good and negative crowding (Neuts and Nijkamp 2012; Popp 2012).

2.1.9 Crowding and its effects on tourism satisfaction

Most authors agree upon the fact that crowding can affect visitor satisfaction (Jin et al., 2016; Usher & Gómez, 2017) especially in the case of sun, beach and mountain nature destinations (Alegre & Garau, 2010). Other studies especially in the context of city tourism show that even though an increased perception of crowding can have a negative effect on the quality of the tourist experience, it does not necessarily diminish visitors' satisfaction (Li et al., 2017). These results can be explained either by the above mentioned 'good crowding' or by tourists' coping mechanisms and their attempts to have the best experience possible despite perceptions of negative crowding (Li et al., 2017; Popp, 2012).

Reviewing the literature on coping mechanisms, there can be identified two main strategy themes. First the behavioral strategies and secondly the cognitive (Popp, 2012).

- *Behavioral strategies*: When tourists experience perceptions of crowding, they may decide to move to other destinations or change their time of visit (Arnberger and Brandenburg 2007).

- *Cognitive strategies:* Instead of changing location or time, tourists might also just change their perspective on the experience they were seeking. Or simply convince themselves that they enjoy the experience more than they actually do (rationalization) (Arnberger & Brandenburg, 2007; Popp, 2012).

It can be summarized that most authors agree upon the fact that in many cases high visitor density can negatively impact the quality of the tourist experience. However, the literature shows inconsistent results in terms of the relationship between actual density and negative crowding perceptions. This means that high level of crowding does not automatically imply a lower holiday experience or visitor satisfaction. As already mentioned, some crowding is experienced positive and some is neutralized by coping behaviors, that reduces the disappointment and stress associated with crowding.

Negative crowding perception depends on different factors. Among the most important are definitely the individual characteristics of tourists, such as culture and gender, and the tourism context. This means that research shows a big difference between nature-based recreational tourism and urban city tourism. In general, the negative effects of overcrowding are perceived worse in nature-based recreation tourism context like seaside and especially mountain destinations (Arnberger & Brandenburg, 2007; Popp, 2012).

2.1.10 The tourism experience
The crowding effect is strongly connected to the experience tourists have. Meaning crowding and overtourism directly impact the tourism experience.

(i) The tourism experience definition
There are different rudiments to describe travel experience. One of the most famous concepts comes from Urry (1990). He argues that the tourist experience is different for

each individual, because the traveler subjectively objectifies and interprets the places he visits. In the same direction, goes the definition from Uriely (2005), he refines the viewpoint by suggesting that the diverse characteristics of the travel experience can be explained by the diversity of traveler's motivations. Also, Jennings and Nickerson (2006), recognize the highly subjective character of the tourist experience by defining it as a sense-making process in which travelers construct the travel experience by learning, understanding, and feeling the places visited and the culture embedded in these places.

Volo (2010) agrees upon the subjective character and sees the tourism experience as a kind of inner psychological status that is everything between perception and sensation. Quan and Wang (2004) suggest that tourists' experiences must be seen as an organic whole in which the core and supporting experience come together.

- core experiences that usually derive from attractions and being the motivator of tourism are different with the daily life experience
- supporting experiences that derive from the activities facilitating the peak experience like accommodation, food consumption and other additional services

Experiences arise from internal stimuli, such as past experiences and expectations, and external stimuli, such as the destinations tourists visit, which are experienced through their five senses (Bastiaansen et al., 2019). Hence, it can be concluded that an experience involves the tourist emotionally, physically, intellectually and spiritually. An experience is made up inside a person and the outcome depends on many external stimuli like human interaction, prior knowledge, past experience and how the individual reacts to these influences

(ii) Tourism experiences influencers

The phenomenology of experiences is usually analyzed in terms of their intensity, memorability and the benefits that tourists get (Campos et al., 2017).

This view recognizes that experiences are not only personal but highly influenced by broader social conventions like cultural and social norms. Such norms are important influencers as they both enable and constrain people's understanding and meaning of tourist experiences. Furthermore, factors like physical environment, consumed products, context and one of the most important other people highly influence tourism experiences (Campos et al., 2017; Mossberg, 2007; Morgan, et.al, 2010; Quan and

Wang 2004). Moreover, it is assumed that social media has also big influence on the tourist experience.

2.2 Social Media

As already mentioned, today's social media and especially Instagram is seen as one of the major push factors for overtourism. The purpose of the following pages is to give an overview of social media and Instagram.

2.2.1 Definition of social media

Due to the recent and ever changing nature of social media, there is still no common agreed term and definition of social media (Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides, 2011; Mangold and Faulds 2009; Mróz-Gorgoń and Peszko, 2016; Walsh, Johns and Dale, 2019; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In fact, in literature there can even be found different words that describe the same issue. For instance, social software (Richter & Koch, 2009), social web sites (Akehurst, 2009; Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010) and user-generated media (Shao, 2009). However, it seems that social media has the widest acceptance among researchers and especially among the wider public (Alves, Fernandes and Raposo, 2016; Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, & Díaz-Armas, 2011; Safko, 2012; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Since there are many different words describing social media, there are also different definitions. Some authors see the roots of most social media definitions in the definition of consumer generated media by Blackshaw and Nazzaro's (2004): "a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers who intent to educate each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues" (Alves, Fernandes and Raposo, 2016). Among the many definitions of social media, two stand out. The definition from Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) and Safko and Brake (2009).

The simple and straightforward definition of Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) defines social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Safko and Brake (2009) take a broader angle by including not only the media but also the "activities, practices and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media" (Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides, 2011; Safko and Brake, 2009).

Even though the term social media is often used as a synonym for social networking sites, it is important to remember that social media includes much more. There exist a variety of different social media types.

2.2.2 Different types of social media

There are many different types of social media. Depending on the author, the number can vary between two or more than ten (Kim, Jeong and Lee, 2010; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). The lack of a commonly agreed definition induces an absence of accordance toward its classification and boundaries (Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides, 2011; Kim, Jeong and Lee, 2010; Mangold and Faulds 2009).

The influential authors Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) identified six types of social media: Social networking websites, blogs, content communities, collaborative projects, virtual social worlds, and virtual game worlds. It can be argued that this attempt neglects newer types of social media such as microblogging and location-based services, primarily due to the still fluid status of the social media landscape.

Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2011) proposed eight types of travel-related social media web-based applications: social networking sites, blogs, micro-blogs, wikis, content community sites, consumer review sites, Internet forums, and location-based social media (Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides, 2011).

Even though these categories are of recent nature, today they are becoming obsolete. As most applications emerge and or add new features, they do not fit anymore into these categories. It can be summarized that most successful players like Facebook are somehow a hybrid, as they have a variety of features.

Given such an absence of an agreed taxonomy of social media, this paper approaches social media as a whole, as a group of online software platforms that enable and facilitate sharing of user generated content.

2.2.3 Major features of Social media

In general, social media possesses the following major features:

- *sharing***:** social media channels enable tourists to share multimedia content (i.e., text, photos, videos) in a fast, efficient and international way.

- *scale* (virtual) presence: social media are accessible from any device, any place and anytime. This creates a feeling of omnipresence. People get the sense that they are always (virtually) surrounded and observed by others with whom they can also interact to exchange opinions, experiences and information resources. This feeling of virtual social presence of others has significant effects on what tourists experience, why they wish to experience it and how they evaluate their experiences.

- *Conversations:* social media enable tourists to initiate and participate in conversations where they can talk about experiences. These online dialogues have significant influence on the way tourists interpret, select, and evaluate their experiences.

- *Identity***:** tourists build and promote their identity by sharing content, interact and network with others. The construction of self-identity is also found to be one of the major motivators for using social media.

- *Relationships***:** tourists can use social media for identifying, networking, and exchanging resources with others, which ultimately helps them build bonds and relations with them.

- *Groups***:** social media enable tourists to create and participate in groups where they can interact and collaborate.

2.2.4 Social media in the travel industry

The international travel and tourism industry are one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world, with a continued strong demand for international travelers across the globe (statista.com, 2019; UNWTO, 2019). The tourism and travel industry

have always been influenced by advancements in information communication technologies (Buhalis & Law 2008; Poon, 2006). The impact social media has on tourism is seen to be tremendous (Gretzel, Kang, & Lee, 2008; O'Leary, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2006).

Social Media has been successfully adopted by travelers to search, engage and share their travel experiences with others (Cao, Yu &Tian Tian, 2017). Numerous travelers rely on social media applications, particularly social networking sites and content communities. Indeed, 76% of travelers share holiday photos on social media and 40% share recommendations or reviews (Živković, Gajić & Brdar, 2014).

The level of interactions reveals that travelers primarily use social media applications for knowledge sharing and get influenced by their destination choice, as well as trip planning process. Additionally, it is used during the travels in order to gather information and share instant travel experiences with friends and family (Cao, Yu & Tian Tian, 2017 Nezakati et al., 2015). Information search is a key activity for travelers using social media. As tourism products and services are intangible and of experimental nature, trustworthy information is of major importance (Cao, Yu and Tian Tian, 2017; Gretzel, Yuan and Fesenmaier, 2000; Nezakati et al., 2015). Studies show that people trust information from social media and especially travel review sites like TripAdvisor, Facebook ratings etc. more than 'official information' from Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) etc.

This leads to the conclusion that the acceptance and trust and thus importance of social media for individuals grows with the level of active engagement (Munar, 2011).

Social media turned the Internet into an immense space of empowered consumers. It successfully changed the way they access, share, distribute, discuss, and create information (Sigala, Christou, & Gretzel, 2012). The explosive adoption of social media in tourism is not only driven by the need for fast information, but also by the inspirational value of holidays for content creation, and the intrinsic satisfaction it brings by nourishing individuals' need for belonging, sharing and self-display. Currently the most influential social media platform for tourism is Instagram. This platform like no other transformed tourists from interpreters to co-creators of meaning (Campos, et al 2017).

2.3 Instagram

Instagram is a relatively young social media platform that rapidly gained popularity and is especially interesting for the tourism and travel industry.

2.3.1 Characteristics of Instagram

Some authors classify the platform as a content community. According to Instagram's mission statement, the platform exists to "capture and share the world's moments" (Instagram 2019). It can be described as online photo album that provides photos, video capturing and sharing tools that in essence allow users to share privately or publicly, photos and videos (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Germon, Sokolova, & Bami, 2017).

Instagram rapidly evolved from a simple media platform for online photography becoming an important platform for marketing and branding, especially of tourism products (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015).

2.3.2 Instagram user base

After its launch in October 2010, Instagram had 25.000 users, while in 2019 Instagram counts more than 1 billion active users and a total of 50 billion photos shared on the platform. With more than 100 million photos uploaded every day, Instagram is one of the biggest and fastest growing social media platforms (Instagram, 2019).

Visual social media platforms like Instagram are often said to attract more female users (Smith 2014). There are no official statistics that support this general theory, but most pier studies support this assumption (Worthy, 2019). However, Instagram's user age distribution is better documented: The platform is especially popular among young users, 68% of all users globally being younger than 35 years old (Instagram, 2019). With the increasing popularity of Instagram, the fastest growing group of users is over 35. Similar tendencies could also be seen on Facebook (Worthy, 2019).

2.3.3 Instagram's main functions

Instagram started with basic functions that allowed users to create a profile, to search for contents (pictures and videos), and to interact with each other (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015).

(i) Instagram Profile

A basic Instagram profile was divided into two sections, the 'bio' which is a brief introduction of the users and the 'layout', a 3-column grid containing thumbnails of their photos and videos (Appendix 2).

The explorer serves primarily to search for contents; thus, it recommends content based on previous interactions within the 'app' (Appendix 3).

(ii) Instagram Post

The main part of a classic post is usually picture or short video. To this main visual content, users can add a 'caption' which is a short text that emphasizes the content posted. Additionally, users can also use hashtags (Appendix 4).

A hashtag is a label for content having two main purposes: First, it helps to categorize content and secondly, it helps others who are interested in a certain topic to find it quickly. Today, hashtags are commonly used for marketing purposes and appear to be one of the most important features of Instagram. Especially interesting for the tourism context is the possibility to geotag posts. Geo-tags or also called 'location tags' show where contents have been created. A function that has a significant part in the success of Instagram is the filter option. It allows to easily edit pictures on the mobile phone. This function empowers the creativity of everybody.

2.3.4 Instagram most important features

To enforce engagement, Instagram keeps constantly changing and adding new features for its users. Among the most notable are:

- In 2015 Instagram launched 'Instagram Direct': it allows users to direct messages to each other and send content privately (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015).
- Bookmarking permits users to safe posts for later consumption
- One of the most important features was the introduction of Instagram stories in 2016 (Instagram press, 2016). Instagram stories were developed to boost content creation through the day, as the content is created to disappear within 24 hours. As the stories became very popular among users, Instagram added new features like Instagram story highlights. Instagram story

highlights appear in a new section of users' profile, just below the 'bio' and above the 'layout'. This feature is a way for ephemeral stories to remain until users decide to remove them. In addition, new tailor-made filters and effects for Instagram stories have been launched to further personalize the story content. Stories can also be saved and categorized for longer use. Later in 2016, Instagram added story mentions and Instagram live. Story mentions allow users to add another user's account with a 'link' inside the story. Whereas live videos, created at the same time, enable users to share moments in real (Instagram for Business, 2019).

- Businesses can unlock Instagram business profiles along with Instagram insights. Business profiles have all the usual Instagram features, it mainly enables Instagram Ads. Instagram Ads are the main promotion tool on Instagram. Instagram ads appear as posts, which include the text 'sponsored' in the feed of users, they can add a call-to-action and are available in a wide range of formats, including photos, videos and carousels (Instagram for Business, 2019; Law, 2019).

2.3.5 Instagram's main interaction points

First of all, the interaction points of Instagram are simple, fast and straightforward.

Instagram allows users to follow other users they are interested in. This creates a feed on the homepage showing recent posts from everyone the user is following.

The main interactions are short comments, likes and smileys under the posts. Comments can be written and personalized with smileys, stickers and other special effects (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015).

Besides, users can send private massages and chat with each other (Law, 2019; Stegener, 2019).

2.3.6 Instagram and travel industry

Instagram is not a travel-specific platform by design, it is utilized for many different purposes as its users can envision. Nevertheless, Instagram gained massive importance in the travel industry. Tourism is a highly visual industry where tourists buy tourism products and services based on visual information (Nelson, 2005). This fact makes clear why the visual content centered platform Instagram is that important for tourism. Instagram counts more than 285 million posts under the hashtag '#travel' and

almost 1 million accounts on Instagram are searching for travel-related hashtags every week (Instagram, 2019).

2.3.7 Instagram and tourism promotion

Social networking has become an important communication method to connect individuals and organizations effectively. On a personal level, it is a popular online social platform to interact with friends (Subrahmanyam et al., 2013). However, especially in tourism Instagram is also used for promotion. Photographs play an important role in tourism as they are the medium of "capturing" reality. Photographs are an opportunity for tourists to share their experiences with others (Groves and Timothy, 2001). Instagram together with mobile technology made it easy and enjoyable to take and share pictures. Pictures created by users shared on Instagram spread through the 'silent' word of mouth model (WOM). In other words, online photos on Instagram are a symbol of reality, also serviced by other consumers (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011).

The strength of Instagram as a tourism promotion tool is that every user becomes a potential marketer for each visual material uploaded. Meaning everybody who uploads pictures about a destination spreads this out to the followers (Alton, 2019).

2.3.8 Authenticity on Instagram

Most pictures on Instagram related to travel show common themes such as calmness, loneliness and nature. However, often in realty these places are overcrowded and characterized by the negative effects of overtourism. (FOCUS, 2019; Gasser, 2019; Jurinak, 2019; Krzikalla, 2019). The inauthenticity especially of travel related pictures on Instagram can be partly explained by the human branding theory. People use Instagram to show themselves and their life. Therefore, it is clear that only nice and good pictures are shown (O Brien, 2019).

2.3.9 Instagram and overtourism

Instagram is seen as one main driver of overtourism by many authors and especially international newspapers (FOCUS, 2019; Gasser, 2019; Jurinak, 2019; Krzikalla, 2019). Through Instagram places can become famous overnight. One picture of a person with millions of followers can make a place famous within hours. As for instance it happened with the sunflower farm 'Bogle seeds' in Canada where after a few pictures

of some famous Instagrammers a week later more than 5000 people tried to get the perfect shot of 'Bogle seeds' (White, 2018).

Additionally, with the geotagging function of Instagram everybody can see immediately where a certain spot is exactly located. As Instagram satisfies and pushes the human need of self-display, people choose places not only for their beauty, but also for their message. Remote places that are difficult to find suggest an explorative and adventurous character. Among the most hyped places that became places of pilgrimage through Instagram resulting in overtourism are the Trolltunga rock in Norway, the 'fjadrargliufur' canyon in Iceland and last but not least the Lago di Braies in the Italian dolomites (Ewert, 2015; Fischer and Goldwich, 2018).

2.3.10 'Instagrammability' is key

Instagrammability describes the fact if a place or destination is good for taking pictures on Instagram. A recent survey by 'Schofields Insurance' asked over 1.000 UK millennials (age 18 – 35) what was most important when choosing a holiday destination, and how 'instagrammable' the holiday would be, has been identified as the number one motivator. Classic attributes like value for money, nature, weather, beautiful hotel and food are seen as secondary (Arnold, 2018; Hosie, 2017; Miler, 2017).

There can be identified different factors why 'instagrammability' is of such importance for young travelers
- Receiving attention and recognition via likes and shares
- Instagram acts as a bit of a travel guide. People see beautiful destinations that have earned lots of attention, and they want to experience themselves.
- Instagram pictures are perceived as more credible and authentic than traditional marketing tools (Arnold, 2018).

The seek for 'instagrammability' and likes changed the travel experience people are seeking and getting substantially as it is more important to get good pictures and the satisfaction comes not from living the moment, but from the likes the posted picture is getting.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter includes an overview of the methods selected to enforce this dissertation and thus achieve the aim and objectives of this research. Firstly, the research philosophy will be explained, then the research approach and a detailed outline of the methods of data analysis will be introduced. Finally, the research quality including aspects such as validity, reliability, ethical concerns and limitations are discussed. According to Singh et al (2003), tourism today is one of the biggest 'phenomena' and even though a huge amount of research has already been done in this sector, there are still many areas of research to be studied and developed. To summarise, this thesis employed a qualitative approach including semi-structured interviews. The applied qualitative methodology seemed to be the most appropriate approach to answer the research question.

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

There exist two types of research philosophies: interpretivism and positivism (Saunders et al., 2009). While positivism focuses on objectively measurable facts from an external point of view, deductions and hypotheses, interpretivism concentrates on people's experiences and relationships based on the fact that the world is perceived to be subjective and socially constructed. To understand the chosen method of this study better, it is necessary to explain the philosophical approaches first, because these have an influence on the result of the study (Saunders et al.,2009). The research philosophy adopted for this research is the interpretivist approach. According to Bryman et al. (2011) positivism concentrates on objective and measurable facts from external sources, whereas interpretivism focuses mainly on people's experiences and relationships in a subjective and social world. Since the research for this study is mainly based on qualitative data collection, the research follows the interpretivism philosophy to improve the understanding of specific results. Subjectivity is central for this ideology and believes that every person creates his or her own connotations of actions coherent with their individual view of the world (Silverman, 2011)

3.2.2 Research Strategy

Within the fields of tourism and business research there has been huge discussion regarding the best research methodology to use (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The two main strategies that are generally used to gather primary data are quantitative and qualitative. On the one hand qualitative research is described as a strategy that tends to highlight words rather than quantification and is commonly linked to an inductive approach and the rejection of positivism. In contrast, quantitative research focuses on quantification in the collection as well as analysis of data, generally following a deductive approach and positivism (Bryman and Bell,2011). Moreover, quantitative research has the objective to test theories, whereas qualitative research serves the generation of theories.

After comparing the different research strategies, the qualitative research method will be adopted for this research question. In general, qualitative research aims to get a deeper understanding of a more detailed description that leads to theory building. It is generally based on a smaller sample size and can therefore simplify a faster turnaround of outcomes (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Additionally, qualitative research allows to shape valuable recommendations, even though it does not permit to draw final generalisations and conclusions (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

To gather primary data as a source of analysis and potential recommendations interviews were conducted for this research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013). This method is of an inductive nature (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Following this approach, the researcher uses empirical data to create theories through the collection of data in the real world (Jacobsen and Sandin, 2002).

Even though qualitative research has been criticised to be less scientific and more subjective, the author chose this approach to gather rich data through individual experiences (Adams, 2012; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Moreover, qualitative research depends more on the researcher, hence it is the researcher's assignment to attain meaning from the interviews, interpret them and thus transform them into useful information (Zikmund, 2010).

3.3 Research and Data Collection Methods

3.3.1 Sampling

For this research the author uses the volunteer sampling method to gain qualitative data, which is a non-probability sampling method (Creswell, 2003). Although non-probability sampling has been criticized in the past to be less representative and thus possibly based on judgement of the author, it seems to be the most suitable technique for this study. The interviewees were selected while visiting the destination, reaching 20 interviews also let to the saturation point of this study. Participants and are free to decide whether they want to participate in the study or not (Saunders et al. 2009). The Interviewees where conducted in 3 languages (Italian, German, English) depending on the wishes of the interviewees. The interviews followed 10 main questions and a serious of sub questions (Appendix 1).

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2013), semi-structured interviews facilitate an inductive and interpretivist approach. The primary data of this research derive from 20 semi-structured interviews conducted in Summer 2019 with random tourists visiting Lago di Braies.

Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews can be used more flexible and focus more on the interviewee's point of view (Bryman and Bell, 2011). As a result, the interviews will help the author to understand the interlinks between overtourism and social media from the view of tourists visiting Lago di Braies.
(Zigmund, 2010).

Nonetheless, there is some criticism regarding this approach of being too subjective and thus not consistent, due to the fact that the findings focus more on unmethodological opinions of a relatively small sample size (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The researcher audio-recorded the interviews to fully capture the data. The data was then transcripted, to be able to fully analyse it (Saunders et al, 2009).

Conclusively, the answers had to be coded carefully to allow the researcher to receive meaningful answers and background facts (Saunders et al, 2009).

3.3.3 Pilot study

Piloting is the necessary method to find out that the chosen research method works appropriately (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Literature review together with piloting ensures that the research questions are correctly designed to make sure that they include all aspects of the investigative question. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), test interviews provide the researcher with interview experience and help further to understand if the questions are correctly understood. The pilot interviews were conducted with random people from the area, but also with tourists. Overall, 5 test interviews were conducted. The pilot underlined that all questions were understandable, nonetheless question 3 and 10 needed further explanation. Generally, pilot studies help to guarantee that chosen methods are valid and thereby measure the result of the research (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.4 Validity, Reliability, Limitations and Ethical Considerations

3.4.1 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability need to be guaranteed to ensure the quality of the data due to their influence on the interpretation. One way to reinforce validity is the possibility of the interviewee to view the transcription after the interviews. According to Klenke et al. (2008), the transcription process should be transparent by underlining the interpretive appeal.

To achieve internal validity, the interview questions should reflect the literature review (Saunders et al, 2009). In opposition to internal validity, it is more difficult to guarantee external validity, due to the small sample size, thus generalizations should not be presented (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

3.4.2 Limitations of the Study

Likewise, the advantages of qualitative research methods, there are some limitations regarding interview techniques. An issue possibly arising while conducting interviews, is the tendency of the researcher to influence the interviewee (Saunders et al., 2009). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), a common problem of primary data collection is the fact that there is no control above the quality of the analysed data. However, the author tries to conduct the interviews as objective as possible to prevent the findings to be influenced.

3.4.3 Ethical Issues

Since this research is of primary nature in terms of interviews, it is crucial to consider ethical behaviour and awareness (Saunders et al., 2009). Consequently, the researcher has to rely on the goodwill of all participants. Thus, this research follows ethical principles and guidelines of general University's Code of Practice on Research Ethics and Governance' (Saunders et al. 2012).

All interviewees are voluntary and will be treated confidentially, hence there is no need to develop specific agreements. Furthermore, all participants of the research have the choice to remain anonymous (Bryman and Bell, 2011). To avoid plagiarism during the research process, all sources are referenced in a correct way (Saunders et al, 2012).

3.5 Research Summary

This chapter provides relevant information about how the questions identified following the analysis of relevant literature are administered in the primary research. Key concepts of the chosen methodology and methods are explained and discussed. The primary research follows an interpretivist approach and the qualitative methods chosen are semi-structured interviews.

4. DATA DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to present, analyze and discuss the results from the primary research. The primary data was gathered over two weeks in August 2019 directly on the Lago di Braies. The interviews were held in German, Italian and English to get a wide range of respondents. The answers were translated and interpreted by the interviewer. Subsequently, the author clustered main findings and coded these in main themes on the basis of frequency given answers to get deeper insights and core messages. In order to get meaningful results, the data will be linked back to the key literature. As all the data is confidential, instead of the real names of the participants, letter identifiers will be used in order to use quotes and maintain anonymity.

4.1 Lago di Braies

Lago di Braies in the Dolomites in Northern Italy is chosen as the research location. Lago di Braies - "Pragser Wildsee" in German, is situated at almost 1,500 m a.s.l. at the end of the Braies Vally, a side valley of the Pusteria valley. Lake Braies is the starting point for numerous hiking tours, as well as for the Dolomite High Route no. 1. The surrounding mountains offer a splendid view on the "Pearl among the Dolomite lakes", considered to be one of the most beautiful lakes in the Alps.

In Italy, Lago di Braies has become famous in the last years through the Italian television series "Un passo dal cielo" (One step from heaven), one of the most famous Italian TV series. Besides, the lake was awarded to be one of the most beautiful lakes in the Alps by different newspaper and magazines.

The German magazine 'Focus' describes the lake as breath-taking with small boats sailing in front of the mountains mirrored in the crystal-clear water, an oasis in the middle of the South Tyrolean Alps (FOCUS 2019) . Even though the lake seems to be hidden between the mountains, it is no longer a hidden gem. On Instagram there can be found more than 150.000 pictures of the scenery under the hashtag #lagodibraies. Through Instagram, idyllic places like Lago di Braies become popular, such places of pilgrimage can be the beginning of a nightmare for locals who often do not know how to handle the masses of tourists (FOCUS 2019, Figure 1).

Figure 1. Lago di Braies (FOCUS, 2019)

In fact, the lake Braies and its surroundings have become an important centre of tourism. In order to protect nature in the 'Fanes-Sennes-Braies Natural Park' and due to traffic jams during the high Summer season, the street from the locality of 'Ferrara' to the lake is closed from 10 AM to 3 PM. A bus, as well as a shuttle service take people directly to the lake in Braies - alternatively the hiking path no. 1 leads from Ferrara in a 1.5-hour walk to the lake.

Altitude: 1,469 m a.s.l.

Surface: 31 hectares

Depth: max. 36 m

(Pragser Wildsee – Südtirol, 2019)

4.2 Respondents Profile

The response rate was 100%, meaning everybody who was asked to participate in the interviews was happy to answer the questions. The interviewer found out why people were willing to answer the questions:

- Anonymity
- No language barriers
- Shortness of the interview

- Relaxing atmosphere as people are on holiday, everybody seemed to have time
- Kind and personal approach of the interviewer

4.3 Profile of Respondents

By including personal and factual questions, a profile of all participants was obtained. In total 20 people participated in the interviews. While the age distribution varied, the majority were millennials between 25 and 35 Years.
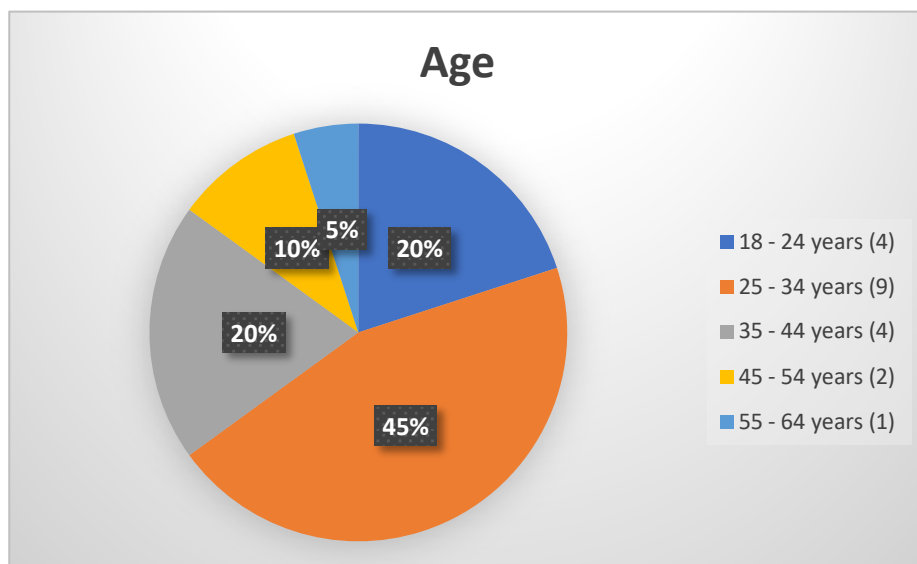
Figure 2: Age of participants

Therefore, it can be said that the research is more representative for younger tourists. Since the study was internationally, the current place of residence is shown below.
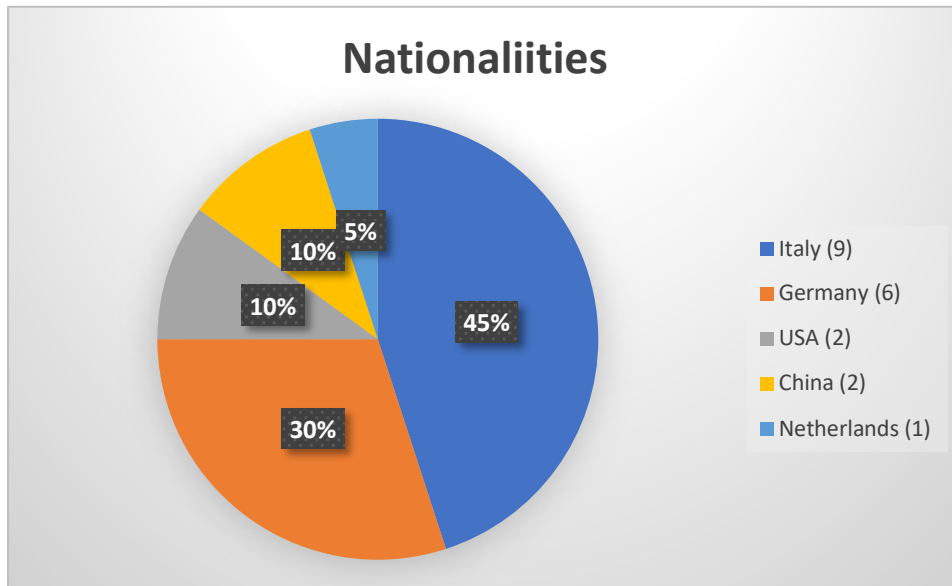
Figure 3: Nationaliities of participants

It can be observed that most respondents are from Italy and Germany. This result confirms the data of local statistic entity that shows that most Summer tourists in the area come from these two countries, thus it can be said that the sample of this study is reasonably representative in terms of nationality. The slightly higher number of Italians can also be justified by the fact that the interviews were held in August. August is known to be the month with the highest number of Italian tourists as mid of August is Italian's preferred public holiday time. Some respondents were also from the US and China, which shows that the Lago di Braies has international popularity.

Gender wise, the data is pretty equally spread with 12 men and 8 women.

From 20 people asked, 15 use Instagram. All participants under 35 use Instagram, besides 2 aged from 45 to 55. This result confirms the fact that mostly younger people use Instagram, but that the older generation was slower to adapt.

Interviewee	Age	Nationality	Instagram Users	Gender
1	18 – 24	IT	X	M
2	18 – 24	IT	X	F
3	18 – 24	DE	X	M
4	18 – 24	IT	X	M
5	25 – 34	NL	X	M
6	25 – 34	CHN	X	F
7	25 – 34	US	X	F
8	25 – 34	DE	X	M
9	25 – 34	IT	X	F
10	25 – 34	DE	X	F
11	25 – 34	CHN	X	M
12	25 – 34	DE	X	M
13	25 – 34	IT	X	F
14	35 – 44	IT		F
15	35 – 44	IT	x	M
16	35 – 44	IT		M
17	35 – 44	DE	x	M
18	45 – 54	IT		M
19	45 – 54	US		F
20	55 – 64	DE		M

Figure 3: Profile of participants

4.4 Lago di Braies - overtourism from a tourist's place

Overtourism has many indicators and parameters. Most of the time the phenomenon is observed from a supplier's side. Therefore, most parameters should explain and measure overtourism from a local people's perspective. As already mentioned, this thesis focuses on the tourist's side. Literatures have identified the feeling of crowding as the number one parameter for identifying over tourism from a tourist point of view (Bell et al., 2011; Klanjscek et al., 2018; Neuts et al., 2012; Li et al., 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017).

Crowding is defined as a negative evaluation of a certain density or number of encounters with other visitors (Shelby et al, 1989).

All interviewees admitted that they experienced crowding and that it negatively impacted their experience:

I14: *"I never saw a picture of the lake before, but my friends at home told me that it is beautiful, and I need to see it. They told me it's a lake in the middle of the mountains, so I was expecting not too many people when I came here this morning. I was shocked how many cars were on the parking space.*

I2*: "The parking space was already full at 9 in the morning, I thought there would be some people, but not as many."*

I13*:" I saw some pictures of it, so I expected that I am not the only one that wants to see it, but I was really surprised about the masses of people that are here. It's definitely too much, they should limit the number of day visitors."*

These findings are consistent with the assumption of Krzikalla (2019); Jurinak, (2019) and most other journalists' writings about overtourism at Lago di Braies. These statements show clearly that both the local population and visitors feel the negative effect of overtourism, overcrowding in general.

4.5 Roots of overtourism at Lago di Braies

There are many distinctive roots and contributing factors to overtourism and they vary from place to place (Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Milano 2019).

There are some global factors like new and better methods of travel or the global tourism growth paradigm that affects the global tourism industry and indirectly every destination. According to some authors, there can be identified with two main drivers for overtourism in rural destinations:

- Easy accessibility of destinations and affordable travel
- Sharing economy

Social media is not yet seen as major driver for overtourism by the academic world **(**Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Milano 2019; Peeters et al., 2018; World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2018).

Yet in the last years, many international journalist and local newspapers write about social media as a major driver for overtourism. Recently, some even argue that social media and especially Instagram is the most important driver for overtourism in rural

destinations (FOCUS, 2019; Gasser, 2019; Hosie, 2017; Jurinak, 2019; Mclean, 2017; Sampson, 2019; Smith, 2018; Spiegel Online, 2018; Tageszeitung.it, 2019; Wetzel, 2019).The answers and feelings of the interviewees were carefully analyzed and compared to findings from secondary research in order to find out which of these factors and to which extend they apply to Lago di Braies.

(i) The easy accessibility and affordable travel

Easy accessibility and affordability are seen as a prerequisite for overtourism (Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018). Interestingly, this factor is not applicable for Lago di Braies,. Geographically, the physical characteristics of Lago di Braies are a clear indicator that the place is difficult to reach.

Firstly, there is no close international airport. The two closest international airports are Munich in Germany and Venice on the Adriatic Sea, both more than 300 kilometers away (Google Maps, 2019).

Secondly, there is no direct access to a motorway. Actually, the closest entrance to a motorway is more than 60 km away (Appendix 5). Furthermore, the location of the lake at the end of a small mountain valley makes it also difficult to access by public transport (Google Maps, 2019).

Lastly, there is also no high-speed train. Hence, the lake is only accessible by bus. The difficult accessibility was confirmed by all interviewees, especially by the ones not coming from Italy.

> I3*:" It was not difficult to find the place but coming here was a nightmare. As they close the street for normal cars at 10AM, we had to take a shuttle that runs only every 30 minutes and has a maximum capacity for 50 people, so we had to wait 1 hour at the bus stop"*

> I8: "*I read on the Internet that we had to be there before ten, since afterwards the road will be closed, so we had to get up very early to come here. At 9 there was already so much traffic to come here, because everybody wants to be there before."*

> I19: "*We flew in to Munich, first of all coming from the US it was pretty hard to understand that we have to fly to Germany and then take the train going through*

Austria to make holiday in Italy. The train and bus from Munch were really
expensive and we had to change three times coming here, it was a nightmare
but worth it. "

The study besides reveals that a big part of the interviewees found that accessing the lake was pretty expensive, even though there is no entrance fee.

I6*: "We first spend a few days in Florence, the train and bus coming up here*
was quite expensive."

I9 *"I was really shocked about the prices of the parking space. I was not*
expecting it to be so much."

It can be summarized that Lago di Braies is everything else than easily and cheaply accessible. The remote location and physical circumstances already suggest that the lake is difficult to access, and this is also felt by the tourists visiting the lake.

This means Lago di Braies is unlike many other places hit by overtourism, that it is not easily accessible, very much in contrast to the general theory (Francis, 2018; Goodwin, 2019; Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2018; Milano 2019; Muler, et al 2018; Peeters et al., 2018; World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2018). In recent years, there are other places (except cities) hit by overtourism where it is nowhere easy and cheaply accessible, possibly creating a different trend. Famous examples like Trolltunga rock in Norway, the Verzasca valley in Switzerland or Roy's Peak in New Zealand are all difficult to reach spots and yet they dominate the overtourism discussion (Gasser, 2019; Hosie, 2017; Mclean, 2017; Sampson, 2019; Smith, 2018; Wetzel, 2019).

(ii) Sharing economy

In many destinations, Airbnb is very much associated with overtourism and seen as one of its biggest facilitators (Goodwin, 2019; Laage, 2019; Urban, Thanh Thuy Schwertner, 2019; 2019; Wetzel, 2019). In line with many interviewees, it is interesting to point out that the age group under 35 revealed that it was their initial intention to book an Airbnb.

I5*: "When I am traveling, I am normally only staying in Airbnb's but this time I had to take a hotel because there were no Airbnb's available, even though I looked for it nearly 8 months before"*

I10*: "I usually stay in Airbnb's because it's just more my style, I like the freedom. But when I checked, there were only 10 Airbnb's listed for Lago di Braies and there was simply no apartment that I liked. "*

These revelations suggest that Airbnb actually is not a big influencer for overtourism at Lago di Braies, not because there is no request but because there is no serious offering. In fact, most interviewees who were interested in booking an Airbnb but were not able to find anything suitable. A quick research confirmed the findings of many interviewees that there is no serious Airbnb offering. Actually, in August 2019 only 21 Airbnb's were listed close to the Lago di Braies (Airbnb, 2019).

It can be concluded that Airbnb and the sharing economy has basically no influence on the overtourism problem on Lago di Braies.

(iii) Instagram

All interviewees that used Instagram agreed upon the fact that Instagram was the main driver to visit Lago di Braies.

I1*:"I saw some pictures of the lake on Instagram, it really looked like a fairytale, that's the reason why I came here."*

I4*:"I saw it on Instagram it's a great spot for pictures, and it's really a must see, everybody who's in the area, posts a picture from here."*

I3*"All the famous travel Instagrammers posted pictures about this place. It's really as beautiful as on the pictures. "*

These statements emphasized a result from a recent survey by Schofield's Insurance that found millennials' perception of 'Instagrammabilty' as a number one travel motivation (Arnold, 2018; Hosie, 2017; Miler, 2017). Moreover, the results suggested that the final motivation can be quite different. Some tourists just came because they were inspired by Instagram pictures; others came with the intention to take pictures

and post them on Instagram. No matter the motivation, the common theme that drove them to the lake was Instagram. This shows how powerful Instagram is and what a big role it plays in the overtourism discussion of the 21st century. These findings support the view of many journalist that Instagram is the most important driver when it comes to overtourism in remote rural areas (FOCUS, 2019; Gasser, 2019; Hosie, 2017; Jurinak, 2019; Mclean, 2017; Sampson, 2019; Smith, 2018; Spiegel Online, 2018; Tageszeitung.it, 2019; Wetzel, 2019).

4.6 Instagram pushes overtourism

4.6.1 Instagram as a prerequisite for overtourism

The results from the interviews suggest that Instagram, besides being the number one reason to come to the lake, is the reason why many people even know that the lake exists.

> I15: *"Before I saw pictures on Instagram about the lake, I didn't even know about its existence."*

> I2: *"I saw pictures of the lake on the profile of a girl I follow, I thought it looks like paradise, I couldn't imagine that something like this even exists."*

> I17: *"I found out about the existence of the lake because a friend of mine uploaded some pictures of the boat house. If you come here, you need to take some pictures of this magical spot, on the picture it looks like from another time."*

These statements induce the idea that many people without Instagram did not even know that the lake exists. This emphasizes the theory of Cao, Yu &Tian Tian, (2017) that social media is of major importance during all stages of travel. Meaning that from the inspiration until the post, travel experience is in the center of attention for many travelers.

These statements additionally support the idea of Alton (2019) that Instagram pictures spread with the silent word of mouth model (WOM). This means everybody who uploads pictures potentially acquires new visitors. Through the massive global

reach and easy access of Instagram, everybody who uploads pictures of a place, is a potential influencer.

In the context of overtourism, these results can also be interpreted that Instagram is not only a push factor for overtourism but also somehow a prerequisite. Without the instant global reach of Instagram, places could never be hyped and overrun as fast as it is happening now.

4.6.2 Honeypots

Many participants especially the international ones, stated that they have just limited time in the area, thus they only visit the highlights like Lago di Braise and Three Peaks. This confirms that the honeypot theory discussed in chapter two plays also a major role in overtourism at Lago di Braies. Honeypots describe the fact that most people just visit the most important spots in a destination.

> I7:*"I saw a couple of pictures on Instagram of the lake, so I came all the way from the US to see this magic place. To be honest, I came here just to take a nice picture and tomorrow I go to visit 'Three peaks' and then we drive to Germany to see the castles in Bavaria."*

Many participants agreed upon the idea that Instagram defines the most important sights of a destination. Meaning, many people visit places and spots according to the number of pictures on Instagram. These results support the idea that Instagram creates honeypots and besides new sights that have not been on radar of tourist before Instagram (Ewert, 2015; FOCUS, 2019).

Another interviewee mentioned that his time is limited and therefore he is just focusing on the highlights as a "must see"

> I10*: "I'm here for two days and I came to visit lago di braies and three peaks. I don't have that much time to see everything, so I just focus on the highlights, which I discovered on Instagram."*

These findings are consistent with Peeters et al., (2018) that see the reduction to the average length of holidays as driver for overtourism, since people just visit the most

important places, which facilitates overtourism as everybody wants to see the same things.

Additionally, one interviewee motioned that most people are gathering around the same spot to take pictures.

> I3 : "*I saw the pictures of the lake on Instagram. I knew I wanted to take a picture in front of this boat house where basically most pictures about the lake on Instagram are shot. I cued for 10 minutes, but the picture looks great, it got already 100 likes after 2 hours. So, it was definitely worth it. "*

This statement suggests a new Idea, namely that Instagram pushes not just the honeypot theory, but it goes even further and creates 'Honeyposts'.
This means that tourists visit a certain spot in the honeypot places just to take a picture on the same spot and angle as they have already seen on other pictures about the place on Instagram. On Lago di Braies, the boat house can be such a 'Honeypot' in a Honeypot place. This theory is supported by thousands of pictures of this house under the Geotag 'Lago di Braies' on Instagram. Furthermore, another interviewee that did not use Instagram, commented the situation on the lake as such:

> I 20: "*I wanted to do the round of the lake, at the bridge I wanted to go left as I could not pass all the people that were cuing to take a picture at this boat house. So, I had to go the other way around. It's funny on the other side there were not that many people anymore. It seems that everybody comes here just to take a picture at the exact same spot. "*

The 'honeypot in honeypot' theory is not yet discussed in academic literature or newspaper articles. In contrast to the honeypot theory, it seems to be a rather new phenomenon created by Instagram induced travel. Other international examples support the idea of 'Honeypots" including examples like the Trolltunga rock in Norway, or the Roys Peak in New Zealand (Mclean, 2017; (Krzikalla, 2019; Jurinak, 2019; Spiegel Online, 2018; Pousset, 2019).

4.7 Instagram helps to cope with overtourism

As already discussed from the findings, it became clear that Instagram is a big trigger and push factor for pushing overtourism. Interestingly, the study also shows that Instagram at the same time helps tourists to cope with the effects of overtourism. For tourists, overtourism manifests a negative feeling for overcrowding. It is defined as a negative evaluation of a certain density or number of encounters with other visitors (Shelby et al, 1989).

4.7.1 Factors that influence the crowding effect

Many authors argue that the crowding effect besides being a personal feeling and characterized by individual preference, has different influence factors like nationality and cultural background, demographics, characteristics of the area, motivation and type of activity and interaction with local community (Bell et al., 2011; Li et al., 2017; Neuts & Nijkamp, 2012; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017).

(i)Nationality and cultural background

Li et al., (2017) argue that nationality and cultural background have a strong influence on crowding. This argument could not be confirmed by the results of this study as it could not identify major replicable differences between the nationalities.

(ii)Age

Many authors suggest that age plays a major role when it comes to crowding. Confronting statements of the youngest and oldest interviewees, this theory seems to be supported by this research.

> I18*: "I came here to hike and enjoy the nature, but there were so many people,e it's worse than at the piazza duomo in Milan."*

> I11:" *I took some nice pictures; it was a good time on the lake despite all the people."*

A closer look to all answers suggests that the effect is much smaller than from Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017) proposed. Actually, besides the two extremes of youngest

and oldest, there are no identified clear differences in the feeling of crowding divided by age.

The findings actually suggest that the motivation of the visit is a much bigger influencer. This is in line with the findings of Jin et al. (2016).

(iii)Motivation

The motivation to visit a place is an important factor as it is closely linked to the perception and happiness with a travel experience. The motivation to visit the place again was strongly influenced by Instagram. For all interviewees who use Instagram, taking pictures was among the top two motivations to come to Lago di Braies, no matter what age, nationality or sex.

> I4*: "Of course, it would have been great if there were less people but honestly, I didn't care that much as I knew that in the area there are a lot of people and I came mostly to take some great pictures."*

> I8*: "I mean of course it would be better if there were less people, but I don't really care as I read on the Internet that there are a lot of people, so I knew that the place would be overcrowded."*

> I12*: "I didn't come here to enjoy the loneliness, so the other people didn't bother me."*

The above interviewee further emphasized that the major motivation for visiting Lago di Braies was not only to take some pictures, but also to post them on his Instagram channel to show his friends and family where he is. In fact, there is evidence that especially for younger travelers, it is important to get the confirmation that they are visiting the right spots by getting comments or likes on their travel pictures (Cao, Yu & Tian Tian, 2017 Nezakati et al., 2015).

The findings implied that even though Instagram users are also bothered by the masses and crowds, the study clearly shows who is using Instagram, comes with the motivation to take pictures and seems thus to be less bothered by the masses. Vice versa, the interviewees that do not use Instagram, came mostly with the intention for

outdoor sport and recreation and were more negatively affected by crowding as the following statement shows:

> I14*: "I did the hiking trail around the lake, but honestly it was more queuing than hiking as it was so crowded today. "*

The findings suggest that Instagram changes the motivation of travelers coming to Lago di Braies away from an active outdoor experience towards a more photo hunting sight-seeing experience, comparable to city holidays. Hence, it can be concluded that travelers who use Instagram are less bothered by the crowds and consequently by the negative effects of overtourism due to the fact that their motivation is not a nature seeking outdoor experience. These findings are conclusive with Jin et al, (2016) which pointed out that tourists seeking a nature-oriented experience, were found to be more sensitive to crowding.

(iv)Awareness and type of activity

The study shows that older people were annoyed as they are unaware about the masses of people, because they thought that it would be a quiet mountain place. On the other hand, the younger generation under 35 were also bothered by the masses of people but not to the same extent. This is likely the case because they expected many people and thus, they were somehow prepared:

> I16: "*Some friends told me about the lake and said that I have to visit it. I was hiking around the lake and there were so many people taking pictures and standing in the way that it was really hard to enjoy the nature. I really never thought that there are so many people. It was like in a city and not like I was expecting a hiking spot in the Dolomites to be.*"

> I12: "*I saw some pictures of the lake on my friends Instagram profile, so I really wanted to see the place, I mean it's really overcrowded, but I was expecting many people, so it's ok.*"

> I8: "*I saw thousands of pictures on Instagram, so I knew the place is no secret spot. Actually, I was expecting even more people.*"

The results of the study show that people who use Instagram are more aware about crowding, since they have seen multiple photos from Instagram. Even though those photos do not show big crowds, people seem to understand that the number of pictures on Instagram is a signal for a larger crowd.

> I10*:" It's clear that you are not alone in a place that is featured on thousands of pictures on Instagram."*

This connects with Cao, Yu &Tian Tian, (2017) which pointed out that many travelers use social media as major information source and therefore social media is among the major factors of awareness formation.

In conclusion, the study shows how Instagram strongly influenced all factors that influence the feeling of crowding. Hence, this also makes Instagram one of the major coping mechanisms when it comes to crowding. Per Li et al., (2017) states that tourists can adopt a strategy to minimize stress factors like crowding (Li et al., 2017; Popp, 2012). Interviewees who use Instagram stated that they came mainly to take some pictures and less for the nature and recreation experience. The answers of the interviewees suggest that the focus on the pictures minimized the effect of crowding.

> I13: *"I mainly came to enjoy the beautiful panorama and to take some great pictures."*

> I9: *"I came here because I saw some pictures on Instagram and it looked magic… I was expecting many people and also it*
> *was not a problem as you could still find some good spots for pictures."*

These statements confirm that Instagram does change the perspective tourists have on their experience. These findings connect to Popp, (2012) who argued that most tourists adopt a cognitive coping strategy which means that people will and can change the perspective of the experience to convince themselves that they are enjoying the experience more than they actually do.

In conclusion, it can be argued that common influence factors like nationality, cultural background and age have a relatively small influence on the feeling of crowding. In

contrast, a difference could be found for people that use Instagram vs people that do not. People that use Instagram have other motivations, and this made their experience less negatively influenced by crowding. Therefore, it can be said that this study clearly shows that Instagram is a major coping mechanism against for many people.

4.8 Observation and Implications

The results show that not only local people feel the negative effects of overtourism on Lago di Braies; tourists also feel the negative effects of overtourism. The interviewed tourists feel the negative effects of overtourism as identified in the literature review. From the main roots of overtourism presented in the literature review, social media and especially Instagram could be confirmed as the main factor.

The results of the study show that Instagram is not only a big influencer for overtourism but also a major coping strategy for tourists in order to minimize the negative effects of crowding.

The study shows that there are some key differences in the perception of overtourism and the negative effects of crowding between tourist that use Instagram and others that do not. Other factors like age and cultural background shown in the literature review, proofed to be less important.

4.8.1 Instagram users

Figure 3 demonstrates the main association interviewees that use Instagram have when thinking about the lake. The Instagram users describe the place mainly as good photo spot and must see in Italy. This is in line with the findings of the literature review. In addition, the literature shows that without Instagram most people would not even know that the lake exists. This shows that Instagram has a more fundamental influence as thought until now. Most Instagram users mentioned that they came primarily for the lake and just stay for a short time in the area. This is in line with the 'Honeypots' theory presented in the literature review. Actually, the findings even suggest an evolution from the classic 'Honeypots' theory namely the 'Honeypots in Honeypots' strategy. This means Instagram users visit not only the same attractions but post the same pictures. The study displays that Instagram users felt less negatively affected by overtourism. This is primarily because they had better information and different motivations to come to Lago di Braies, which is more or less in line with the coping mechanisms from the

literature review. In addition, awareness appeared as an important factor that helped Instagram users to cope with the negative effects of crowding.

4.8.2 Non-Instagram users

The non-Instagram users are the minority among the interviewees. The study shows that non-Instagram users feel more bothered by the crowds which is conclusive with the literature review. This can be led back to the different motivations why they visit the lake. Their primary motivation was recreation and hiking. These two activities are difficult when the place is overcrowded, which is broadly in line with the literature review. Furthermore, the author observed that non-Instagram users seemed to be less informed and unaware about the situation on Lago di Braies and therefore expected a totally different experience.

4.8.3 Communalities and Differences

In this section the author provides some communalities and differences of Instagram and non-Instagram users. This supports the aims and objectives of the dissertation in examining any possible connection of Instagram and overtourism.

    (i)   Communalities

- Both Instagram users and non-Instagram users stated that according to them, Lago di Braies is hit by overtourism and that their experience is negatively affected by crowding.
- Instagram and non-Instagram users mentioned that coming to Lago di Braies was pretty difficult and some of them found it rather expensive. This leads to the result that tourists in general find that the lake is difficult to access. This is conclusive with the findings from the literature review.

    (ii)   Differences

- First of all, most interviewees that use Instagram stated that without the pictures on Instagram they would not even know that the lake exists. Vice versa the non-Instagram users got to know about the lake mainly through traditional information sources like friends and tour guides,
- The motivation to come to the lake was the most fundamental difference between Instagram users and non-Instagram users. On one hand the main motivation to come to the lake for Instagram users was to see the place from the pictures and to take some pictures by themselves. For Instagram users

the lake has more a sight-seeing aspect. In contrast, visitors that did not use Instagram came to the lake mainly for hiking and recreation in nature.

- Instagram users stated that they were aware and somehow expected that the place would be crowded. As the thousands of pictures on Instagram suggest that the place will not be quiet. Non-Instagram users seemed to be less informed and aware about the fame of the lake and thus expected less people.

- Instagram users explained that they are not really bothered about the masses of people, hence they understood that they would be part of these masses anyway.

- Instagram users have other motivations than non-Instagram users, since their intention is to take a nice picture, not to enjoy the calmness and to hike like others.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four discusses the most important findings and insights from the reflection of the literature review and primary data. This chapter integrates and discusses the primary and secondary material addressing the core research objectives and questions. Any limitations are outlined and recommendations for future studies will be stated.

5.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this thesis is to examine the interlinks of 'overtourism' and social media from a tourist perspective with special focus on Instagram.

The assumption is that Instagram is a major push factor for overtourism, while at the same time Instagram minimizes the negative effects of overtourism on tourists that use Instagram. The research objectives formed the foundation for design and analysis of primary and secondary material.

5.2.1 Research questions

RQ1: *In which way do tourists feel that Lago di Braies is challenged by overtourism?*
In the existing literature about overtourism only the view of the local people was included. The discussion led by media and politicians focused on the negative effects on nature and local culture and did not touch the tourist view yet. The results of this study show how tourists and their experience are equally negatively influenced by overtourism. Both groups, people that use Instagram or do not use Instagram, think that Lago di Braies is hit by overtourism. Most interviewees further agreed that the crowds negatively affected their holiday experience and that it would be good to define a maximum capacity of people.

RQ2: *What are the main reasons for tourists to visit Lago di Braies, and what role did Instagram play in this?*

Most interviewees stated that they use social media and especially Instagram on a regular nonprofessional basis. Instagram plays a major role in all stages of the tourism experience. Actually, some interviewees stated that without Instagram they would not even know that the place exists. This means that these people only visited the place because of Instagram. Furthermore, all Instagram users explained that pictures on Instagram inspired them to visit the lake. Moreover, their prime motivation to come to the lake was rooted in taking pictures on Instagram. Hence, it can be argued that the results of the study show that many people visit places mainly because of Instagram.

RQ3: *In which way does Instagram help tourists to cope with the negative effects of overtourism while visiting such in this case Lago di Braies?*

As Lago di Braies is a remote mountain lake, traditional tourists come here for recreational outdoor activities like hiking and enjoying the nature. Instagram changed this purpose as people who use Instagram mainly come for taking pictures and see the place they saw on pictures before. This means that Instagram changes the type of purpose completely away from outdoor active tourism to a more sightseeing type of tourism.

RQ4: *What are the implications of an 'Instagrammable destination' of the tourist experience while being there?*

Instagram can be seen as a major coping mechanism, thus people that use Instagram are less bothered by crowding than tourists that do not use Instagram. These results can be rooted in the different motivation and purpose of the visit. Tourist that use Instagram come mainly to see the place and take some pictures. These activities are less disturbed by crowding than for recreation activities like hiking.

The findings of the study show that overtourism and Instagram are closely interlinked. Actually, the influence of Instagram on overtourism as push factor is bigger than assumed at the beginning. Instagram fundamentally changes holiday habits of tourists and consequently influences travel patterns. Furthermore, the way tourists consume and experience destinations is strongly influenced by Instagram.

5.3 Practical Implications

The author decided to undertake this research because the past literature on overtourism has been investigated solely from the perspective of the local population. Furthermore, the importance of social media and especially Instagram for overtourism has not been a major topic in the past. The findings show that overtourism is a major topic of Lago di Braies and its negative effects are not only felt by the local population, but also by tourists. In the future, there is a need to find some solutions to better manage the crowds in order to reduce the negative stress for the environment, local population and the tourists visiting Lago di Braies.

The roots for overtourism are individual from destination to destination. Nevertheless, the literature identified some major factors like easy and cheap accessibly and sharing economy. Recent examples and also Lago di Braies prove that these factors play a relatively small roll and that the main push factor for overtourism is Instagram.

The tourism and travel industry were always massively affected by advancements in technology. Therefore, it is not surprising that social media as it became a major part of people's life also changed the whole travel and tourism industry. Especially Instagram with its focus on visual content is the social media platform that appears to be the one with the strongest influence on the travel and tourism industry.

Instagram is especially common among millennials, but as the literature review induces and the study proves that older generations use Instagram increasingly. Instagram became a big part of people's life and changes how people interact with their environment. Consequently, Instagram is a big part of people's travel experience and has influence on all stages of travel.

The study showed that many people travel to certain places because they have been inspired by Instagram pictures shot by other people. This means everybody who uploads pictures of a place on Instagram is an influencer or in other words an ambassador for the place.
The fast and global reach of Instagram made it a big factor for overtourism. Actually, the results of the present study propose that it is the most important push factor for overtourism in rural areas.

Instagram is not only the big facilitator for overtourism, at the same time it is also an important coping mechanism. Meaning people that use Instagram are less bothered by the crowds and thus happier with their overall experience. Their main purpose is to take some pictures and see the place, thus this purpose is less disturbed by crowding. Vice versa recreation activities are much depending on quietness and isolation and thus people are more disturbed by crowding.

Instagram also impacted the 'Honeypots' theory further, meaning that people just visit the main attraction for a relatively short time. Actually, the results imply that this theory goes even further where people just visit certain good photo spots and angles not even the rest of a place.

(i) Suggestions for South Tyrol and Lago di Braies

Since overtourism on Lago di Braies is mainly induced and pushed by Instagram, the local DMOs have lost the power to demarket the place. Therefore, possible solutions need to be focused in managing the crowds. As this paper shows, overtourism is often only seen from a local people side and thus possible solutions often exclude the needs of tourists. This can be dangerous, as many regions including South Tyrol and Lago di Braies tourism is the main income generator. Possible solutions need to benefit local people but also tourist needs.

Suggestions for lago di Braies:

- Entrance fee to the lake or entrance fee to the whole nature park area following the example of many nature attractions around the world like 'Großglockner Hochalpenstrasse', several nature park areas in Canada and the US and many more. Charging for entering and enjoying helps to regulate and reduce the stream of visitors and adds value to the Pragser Wildsee as attraction point. In addition, it generates money that can be used to manage, and better protect the area without using tax payer fonds, which helps to grow the acceptance for tourism among the local population.

- Limit the number of visitors
    Closely linked to an entrance fee is the reduction of visitor numbers to a certain number per day. This is the most effective method to reduce

overtourism to certain places in a short time. The tricky question is what the maximum number of visitors per day are.

- Online ticketing

  Overtourism is often a question of management. Introducing an online ticketing system, where people can book their visit in advance at home or in the accommodation helps to better manage the crowds, as it avoids waiting lines in front of the ticket counters and reduces traffic, because only people with a ticket go there. It also avoids tourist delusion as people do not need to be rejected at the ticket counter.

- Limiting transport options

  In the case of Lago di Braies this means closing the road for cars. This would take away the commodity of driving directly to the lake and hence reducing the amount of people coming to the lake. In addition, it would position the lake as nature green spot in the head of people as their experience would not be negatively influenced by massive traffic jams and overloaded parking spaces. Local people would benefit from this action as without the massive traffic jams the pressure of tourism is much less felt in the their daily life.

- Access only by public transport

  This is very much linked to limiting transport options. Obviously, the lake still needs to be accessible for a wide range of people meaning also people who cannot walk and hike. Thus, public transport, for instance shuttle buses from train stations and parking spaces to the lake should be offered. In order to avoid waiting times and confusion, tourists should be able to book spaces in the buses in advance.

- Push other areas

  Pushing other beautiful areas around the lake is an important but challenging step to reduce overtourism at the lake. By promoting other attractions, the tourist masses are wide spread in the area and a better balance is guaranteed. This is most effectively done by influencer marketing on social media.

(ii) Future Prospective

Instagram is a big part of today's social life and thus also a big part of the tourism industry. On one hand it seems that in the near future Instagram is getting even more important than it already is. On the other hand the history showed that many social media trends and platforms can be outdated as fast as they came to the market. Nevertheless, even if the platform Instagram should lose its attraction and importance, it can be argued that the power of pictures and videos will always be important in the tourism context. Therefore, even if the platform loses its power, another platform will take its place as picture and video sharing will always be a major part of people's holiday habits. Thus, it can be argued that user created pictures and videos will stay a major push factor for overtourism also in the future. Moreover, It can be claimed that Lago di Braies as every other destination, is subject of the destination life circle. As such, it will lose its massive attraction after a peak time and then after some time grow in popularity again. In the meantime it is important to take some actions like the proposed ones above in order to minimize the negative effects of overtourism for local population and tourists.

Regarding Instagram, a big question for the future will be the perceived authenticity and trustworthiness of Instagram content. The study shows that Instagram content very often is far away from reality. Therefore, this will be one of the major future questions how Instagram and its community will manage this challenge.

5.4 Limitations

There are some limitations of the research described in the dissertation.

Firstly, the gathering of qualitative data in terms of semi-structured interviews is influenced by the interviewer (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Similarly, subjectivity of the researcher reflects an additional issue, because it is difficult to determine the degree of influence that the author has over the collection and analysis of data. Thus, the data of this research contains numerous potential sources of bias, which may influence the degree of reliability.

Due to limited time and financial resources, the sample size was relatively small. Additionally, predominately younger people from Germany and Italy participated in the interviews. The findings and reflection of the researcher suggest that future results will be improved by a larger and more diverse sample. This would consequently reduce bias problems occurring by the use of non-probability sampling.

While the sample cannot be regarded as completely representative for the whole population of all tourists visiting Lago di Braies or other destinations hit by overtourism. the results nonetheless provide an overview of the interlinks of overtourism and Instagram and its importance for the global tourism industry.

5.5 Recommendations for future research

The use of a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews to obtain primary data turned out to be an appropriate approach for this research (Saunders et al., 2009). This instrument helped to obtain a deep inside into the topic and catch the feelings and emotions of the interviewees. Hence, the chosen research design and analysis tools allowed the author to gather meaningful insights of the tourist view on overtourism and Instagram and thereby obtain useful findings and further recommendations for the themes of this dissertation.

Nevertheless, for future studies a quantitative approach could also be interesting to find out if the patterns this study showed are reproduceable with a larger sample size. Surveys with simple close questions might be used to aggregate perceptions and views of greater numbers to facilitate statistical analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The following themes, generated from reflection on the findings and design might provide foundations for future research:

- The dissertation identified that knowledge of Instagram as major factor affecting overtourism on multiple levels was relatively sparse. This lack of knowledge possibly results from a scarcity of related recent literature. This knowledge gap provides a basis for further research that may be strengthened in attempting to identify how local tourism management agencies could use Instagram to manage the crowd better within the large destination and create new honeypots.

- The data was collected in August which is high season where predominately younger Italian families visit Lago di Braies. Throughout the year the crowd is changing in size and also demographics. It would be interesting to collect data throughout the whole year to see how much the feeling of crowding depends on seasonality.

- Due to limited time and financial resources, this research was only focused on Lago di Braies. There are many places in the world that have the same problem as Lago di Braies, a comparative study of two or three similar places would allow to see the communalities of such cases.

- It became clear how important social media is in the context of overtourism. This study focused on the tourist side. A further research could investigate if Instagram also has effects on local population in the context of overtourism.

- Instagram pictures are perceived as authentic. No pictures on Lago di Braies show the crowds. The themes of the pictures are always quietness, remoteness and loneliness. Even though most people seem to know that in reality it is different, they see the pictures as authentic. The paradox could be an additional input of further research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Guideline Interview Questions

1. Where are you from?

2. How old are you?

3. Where are you staying?
   a. Hotel or Airbnb ?
   b. Did you think about taking an Airbnb?
   c. How long are you staying in the region?

4. Do you use Instagram?

5. How did you find out about the lake?

6. How was your travel coming here?
   a. Do you think the lake is easily accessible?
   b. Do you think coming here is cheap?

7. What do you connect with the Lago di Braies
   a. What stands Lago di Braies for you?

8. Do you feel that the lake is overcrowded?
   a. Did you expect that many people?
   b. Would your experience have been better when the place would be less crowded?

9. Did you feel bothered by the people?
   a. Was your experience negatively influenced by the crowds?

10. Why did you come to the lake? What did you do here?
    a. What was your primary motivation?
    b. How important was the fact that the spot is very Instagrammable?
    c. How was your experience at the lake?
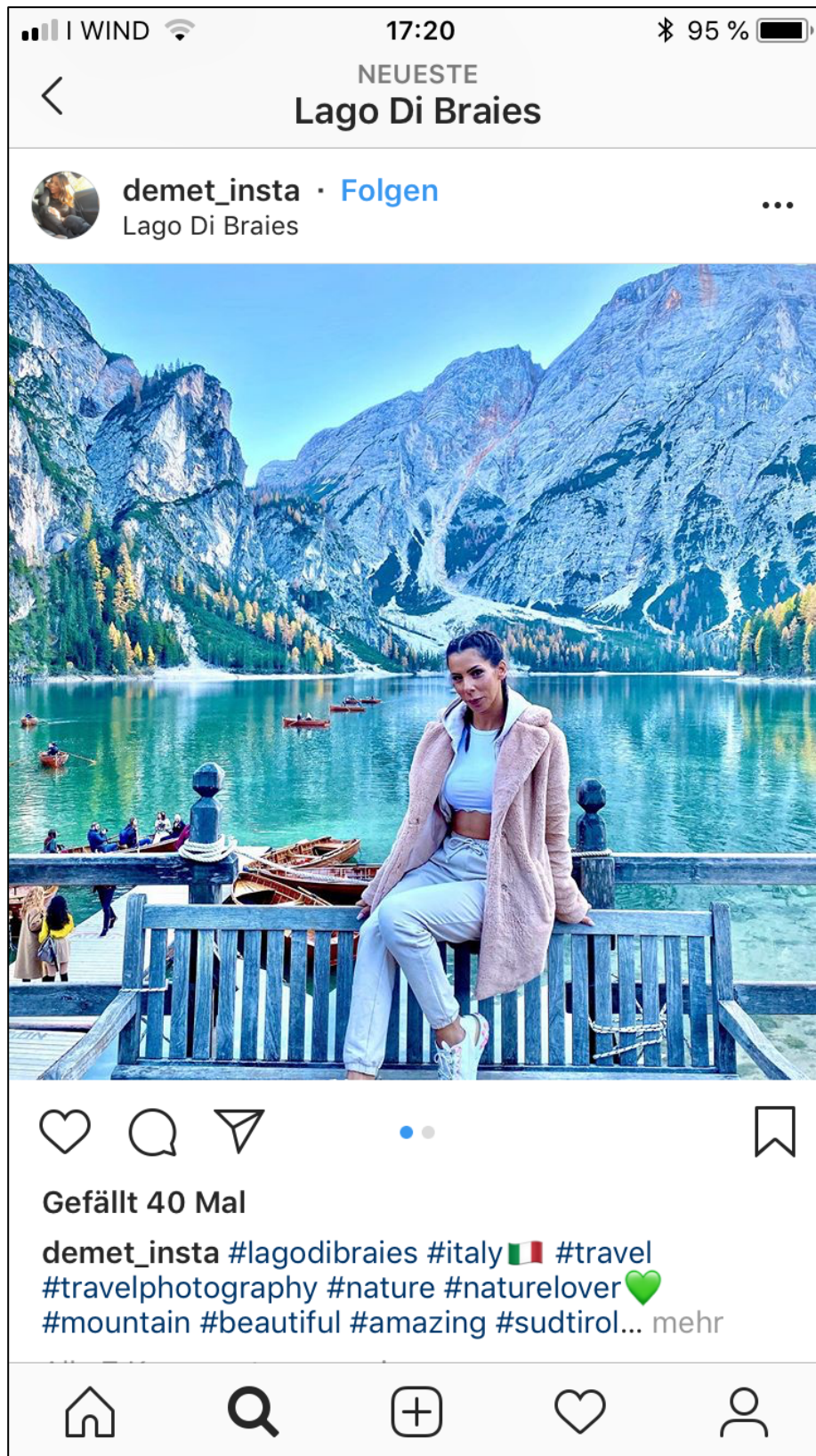   d. What do you think are all the other people doing here at the lake?

Appendix 2: Instagram Profile

Appendix 3 Instagram explorer
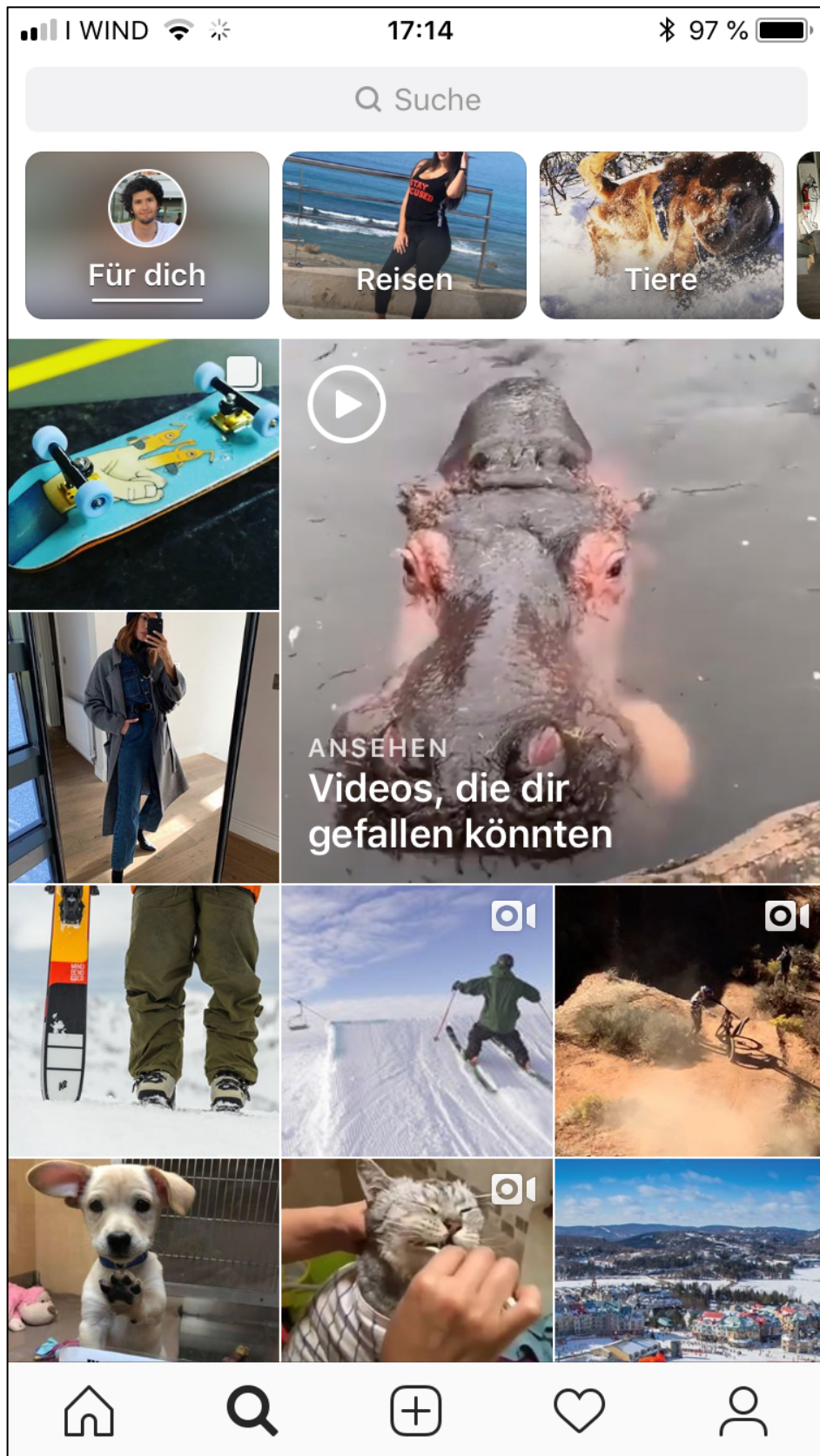
Appendix 4: Instagram post

Appendix 5: Lago di Braies location