Social media as a tool of promoting city tourism
Kingston upon Hull

Bachelor thesis

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Affirmation:

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted is wholly the work of Blanka Steinerová. Any other contributors or sources have either been referenced in the prescribed manner or are listed in the acknowledgements together with the nature and scope of their contribution.

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Annotation

This Bachelor thesis focuses on social media as a tool of promoting city tourism, demonstrated on a case study of the city of Kingston upon Hull. It aims to evaluate the level of the city's online presence on social media through a series of two structured interviews and a questionnaire survey. The results of this thesis show the differences between the local point of view and the view of a visitor regarding the city's online promotion. They indicate the importance of promoting cities online and attribute the highest value to social media engagement between the Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and the audience. Based on these findings, the Bachelor thesis formulates a set of recommendations for the city's DMOs and the local University of Hull.

Key words: social media, city tourism, tools of promotion, Kingston upon Hull, leisure time

Anotace

Titul: Sociální media jako prostředek propagace městského cestovního ruchu

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá problematikou sociálních médií v propagaci městského cestovního ruchu, demonstrovanou na případové studii města Kingston upon Hull. Má za cíl zhodnotit současnou úroveň působení města online za použití série dvou strukturovaných rozhovorů a dotazníkového šetření. Výsledky šetření poukazují na rozdíly ve vnímání míry propagace města na sociálních sítích místních obyvatel a návštěvníků. Dále zdůrazňují důležitost propagace měst na internetu a přisuzují největší důležitost aktivní komunikaci mezi organizacemi destinačního managementu a jejich odběrateli na sociálních sítích. Na základě těchto poznatků tato bakalářská práce formuluje několik doporučení pro organizace destinačního managementu působící v tomto městě a pro místní univerzitu – the University of Hull.

Klíčová slova: sociální média, městský cestovní ruch, způsoby propagace, Kingston upon Hull, volný čas

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1. Introduction

"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."
- R. Buckminster Fuller (Sieden, 2012)

In the last few years, social media has become a significant part of our day to day lives – people spend the majority of their time connected to others through social network sites. Their friends and family are virtually at their fingertips only a few clicks away. They share their experiences, opinions, and feelings online and use the internet as a source of information and as a valuable tool.

Social media permeates every aspect of our lives – from the way we feel about ourselves and others to the way we choose what to buy or what to believe. That is why social media has become one of the major newly emerged and trendy marketing tools of the last decade (Dollwet, 2019). While social media has an increasing role in many aspects of life, it also plays a particularly central role in the tourism industry (Gretzel, 2018).

Tourism, one of the fastest-growing sectors, is inextricably linked with the world economy (Lock, 2020). Undoubtedly social media can be effectively utilised in marketing tourism due to its many advantages. This way of promoting is almost costless and especially efficient due to the sheer number of users and the wide accessibility to the majority of the developed world's population. Notably, it can be beneficial in advertising cities and towns to visitors, no matter whether their stay is work-related or for pleasure. Furthermore, the process of recording, recalling, sharing and talking about travel experiences is an enjoyable and socially important activity (Gretzel, 2018).

Tourists have always relied on personal sources of information (i.e., word-of-mouth) to aid them in making a decision. Social media provides a unique way to connect with other travellers online (i.e., electronic word-of-mouth). For this reason, social media plays a key role in destination management. Furthermore, a well-crafted social media promotion strategy ensures that tourism in a particular area is sustainable in the long term. If not, the misuse of this tool can hinder the development of tourism in the area and damage the destination's image.

This thesis aims to evaluate the level of the online presence of a city demonstrated in the case study of Kingston upon Hull in the United Kingdom. This city has been carefully chosen based on the author's personal experience studying at the University of Hull as a part of an Erasmus+ exchange programme. Based on this experience, the thesis studies the approach of the local destination management organisations (DMOs) to the promotion of this city and draws attention to their social media platforms. The objective is to determine how the city of Kingston upon Hull is represented on social media – in particular, on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Youtube. The point is to showcase a social media promotion strategy in a medium-sized city in the British environment. The thesis aims to collect beneficial data for the local authorities, DMOs and the University of Hull. It creates a set of recommendations for the University of Hull on how to improve their approach to social media communication.

1.1 The rationale for choosing the topic

Personal

The author has chosen the topic for her research based on her personal experience. She has spent the academic year of 2019/2020 as an exchange student in Kingston upon Hull, the United Kingdom as a part of an Erasmus+ programme at the University of Hull Business School department.

Academic

Social media is an integral part of promoting a city for tourists. This promotion tool is subject to rapid change, and it is constantly evolving. Kingston upon Hull is a relatively small port city located in the East Riding of Yorkshire on the Humber River, in the northeast of England. The city is not a typical tourist destination and is not widely visited by foreigners. This makes it interesting to study – to see how social media helps promote local tourism and what the city of Kingston upon Hull lacks in terms of online promotion. Urban tourism offers unique experiences that differentiate it from other forms of tourism (Kolb, 2017) and thus making this subject compelling to research.

2. Research aims and objectives and methodology

2.1 Research aims and objectives

The aim of the research is cognitive (Žižlavský, 2003) - it intends to describe and map the current policy and approach to the promotion of city tourism in Kingston upon Hull on social media and other online promotional material.

To achieve the aim of the research, the following objectives were set:

    a. to evaluate the city's level of online presence on social media and the awareness of the various activities the city offers among locals and tourists from abroad,

    b. to suggest a recommendation on how to improve the city's image on social media and its attractiveness to tourists,

    c. to compile research data beneficial for the University of Hull institution to aid them in promoting the city and the university to students.

The following research questions have been set for this thesis:

Research question 1: In what ways does the city of Kingston upon Hull utilise social media to promote tourism of both domestic and foreign visitors?

Research question 2: Does social media play a significant role in promoting city tourism to the Hull region?

Research question 3: In what ways can the city of Kingston upon Hull improve its image on social media to attract more visitors?

2.2 Methodology

This Bachelor thesis is divided into two parts: theoretical and practical. The first part acquaints the reader with the basic definitions and concepts from theory as well as with the general context of the research. The other part of the thesis deals directly with the research. The research has been conducted partly in-situ. Most of the research has been conducted distantly due to the prevailing coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, which greatly disrupted the in-situ

research. Several methods of research were applied in pursuance of fulfilling the objectives and aims, most of which were qualitative. However, the thesis takes a pragmatic approach by including one quantitative method in the form of a questionnaire survey, making it a mixed-method research. The research has been divided into four sequential stages, which are non-participant observation, secondary data research, structured interview and a questionnaire survey, see Figure 1.

| Non-participant observation | → | Secondary data research | → | Structured interview | → | Questionnaire survey |

Figure 1: Sequential stages of the research (Source: Steinerová, 2021)

2.2.1 Qualitative methods

The qualitative approach to research is described by Zháněl and Hellenbrandt (2014) as focused on words rather than numbers, depth rather than breadth. It is effective in capturing the opinions, thoughts, and feelings of respondents. The thesis uses 3 qualitative methods: non-participant observation, secondary data study and two structured interviews, described below.

- **Non-participant observation**

Non-participant observation is a type of qualitative research. It is a research technique that involves watching and observing the subjects of the study without actively participating in the situation (encyclopedia.com). Encyclopedia.com (2020) states that there is a possibility of influencing the subject's behaviour by the very fact of being observed.

The non-participant observation was implemented as the initial part of the research. It was conducted by monitoring the type of posts which are published by residents and visitors about the city of Kingston upon Hull on 2 main social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook). The non-participant observation was later utilised in the collection of the necessary data for future research, the creation of the structured interviews and the questionnaire survey in particular. This approach studies how residents and visitors of Kingston upon Hull communicate their experiences of the city.

- **Secondary data study**

Vartanian (2010) states that secondary data typically covers a broad sample of individuals or other entities and is, therefore, more representative than the primary data research (data obtained consulting the primary origin or source), which tends not to be as comprehensive as many large secondary data sets. Secondary data is usually publicly available.

For this thesis, the following secondary data has been used: available literature and documents on the topic of social media, social media in city marketing, city tourism, tourism and Kingston upon Hull history. Additionally, the already available promotional material of the city and the University of Hull, as well as their social media accounts. The study of secondary data coupled with the non-participant observation carried out beforehand has been used in the creation of the subsequent structured interviews and the questionnaire survey.

- **Structured interview**

The practical part of this thesis uses the method of a structured interview with open-ended questions as defined by Trousil (2015). He describes this method as having a certain thematic structure within which the interviewer sets questions. Questions in the structured interviews pertain to the interviewee's personal experiences with the subject, their behaviour and opinions, feelings around the subject, knowledge, or perceptions of the issue at hand (Hendl, 2005).

This type of interview offers a valuable source of authentic information, which is one of its biggest advantages. This method grants a unique insight into the issue from the perspective of the interviewee. Therefore, the method was chosen. Diversely, there are some drawbacks to this method – preparation of the questions tends to be time-consuming, as well as the analysis of the data collected. Due to the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19, the interviews conducted for this research had to be administered using the online platform Zoom as opposed to the optimal in-person interviews. Questions have been prepared based on non-participant observation in-situ. Both participants consented to be audio-recorded during the interview for the purpose of later transcription, one of them wished to remain anonymous.

2.2.2 Quantitative methods

Zháněl and Hellenbrandt (2014) describe quantitative research as a method, which is relatively fast and straightforward in data collection and provides accurate numerical information and is

suitable for verification of prior hypotheses. The thesis uses a sole quantitative method in the form of a questionnaire survey.

- **Questionnaire survey**

The thesis also includes a questionnaire survey which was designed to accompany the conducted interviews. The survey was created to further demonstrate the importance of social media promotion of urban tourism. The questionnaire survey is the sole quantitative method of research used in this bachelor thesis.   A questionnaire, as defined by Zháněl and Hellenbrandt (2014), is a tool of data collection filled in by the observed individual. They suggest that questionnaire surveys function to collect and compile information about the participant's way of thinking, their experience, feelings, attitudes, opinions, knowledge, values, and intents (Zháněl and Hellenbrandt, 2014).

The survey was created to demonstrate social media use among tourists while travelling and to further specify the decision-making process. The structured interviews were carried out before the survey distribution. In this thesis, a questionnaire survey with a mix of closed and open-ended questions was used.   The questionnaire uses 2 identifying questions, 6 closed and 1 open-ended question. The questionnaire survey was conducted fully online using Google Forms and distributed among the author's friends and family as well as put online for two months on the author's social media profiles and survey exchange groups on Facebook. It was designed this way to ensure the simplicity of counting the frequency of responses (researchconnections.org, 2020). Questions have been selected after consulting texts from Jiránek (2017), Scholz (2015) and Stefjuk (2019).

3. Theoretical part

The theoretical part of this thesis consists of explaining the key terms used later in the practical part. It aims to introduce and familiarize the reader with the topic of city tourism marketing on social media and prepares the ground for practical research by indicating some of the specifics of the British environment as it pertains to the marketing of city tourism. This part is divided into three distinct sections – the description and definition of tourism and city tourism, the explanation of social media and its use in online promotion and finally the connection of the two topics from a managerial standpoint – how can social media be utilised in promotion of towns and cities. The basic function and the benefits of social media as a promotion tool is especially highlighted.

3.1 The definition of city tourism

3.1.1 Tourism

The World Tourism Organisation (2020) defines tourism as "*a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors [...] and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure.*" They further divide visitors into tourists, excursionists, residents and non-residents. A tourist is a visitor whose trip includes an overnight stay, otherwise, they are classed as an excursionist and can be domestic, inbound or outbound (United Nations, 2010).

Still, tourism as an industry is hard to define, because unlike with other industries, there is not one singular product (Lock, 2020b). Rather, this is an industry that incorporates various industries such as lodging, transport, attractions, and travel companies (Lock, 2020b). Lock (2020b) reports that travel and tourism's direct contribution to GDP was approximately 2.9 trillion U.S. dollars in 2019. According to his report, the tourism industry grows very fast - both leisure and business travel spending has seen year-over-year growth in the past five years. For instance, the ease and increasing affordability of travel have allowed international tourist arrivals in Europe to double between the years 1995 and 2015 (Statista, 2020a). This growth has, however, been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic onset in 2020 and the global travel and tourism market is predicted to see a loss of 100 million jobs worldwide in 2020 (Lock, 2020b).

Štýrský and Šípek (2011) draw attention to the fact that tourism is an ever-evolving social phenomenon – what started as a luxury for the rich has now become accessible to all classes of society. Mokhtarian, Salomon and Singer (2015) support the idea by illustrating tourism's necessity on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. They claim that travel permeates every need on the pyramid – beginning from travelling to obtain sustenance and ending with travel that aids the individual's self-actualization and achieving their full potential. This is one of the reasons for the recent growth of this sector.

To give an illustration of this, following the 2008 economic crisis, the tourism industry has been seen by the United Kingdom's government as a potential growth sector that should bring money back into the British economy (Kennell and Chaperon, 2018). David Cameron, the former UK prime minister, clearly supported this claim in one of his first official policy statement speeches, following his election, saying that the Government believes tourism could provide many new jobs and growth to the economy (UK Prime Minister's office, 2010). In 2017 the industry made a total contribution of approximately 213.8 billion British pounds to the GDP in the United Kingdom alone and continued to grow afterwards (Statista research department, 2020b) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Travel and Tourism in the United Kingdom in 2017

Total contribution of tourism to UK GDP	213.8bn GBP
Direct tourism gross value added in the UK	71.7bn GBP
Direct contribution of tourism to UK employment	1.72m jobs

(Source: Statista research department, 2020b)

The United Kingdom's recent departure from the EU and the single market could negatively affect the flows of British tourists toward European member countries to a great extent. Research conducted by Perles-Ribes et al., (2018) studying the immediate impact of Brexit on British tourism abroad has shown that the UK's decision to leave the European Union has not produced any initial negative effect on the arrival of British tourists or their spending. Perles-Ribes et al., (2018) demonstrate this on the example of Spain, where the United Kingdom constitutes the principal tourist source market; no significant change in arrivals or spending habits has been observed. However, Balassa (1961) suggests that the long-term effects of an

economic disintegration process, such as Brexit, may cause a potential decline in trade and economic growth.

3.1.2 Marketing of tourism

Kotler (2001, p. 24) defines marketing as "*the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires. It defines, measures and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential.*" Kotler (2001, p. 24) further describes marketing as "*an art of selling products*" and as a scientific method of defining target segments, gaining, and maintaining growth in customers by delivering them a high value.

The promotion of tourism is a very specific area of marketing. It still adheres to these general principles of marketing, however, the methods and approaches to marketing are tailored to certain factors. These are defined by Vaníček and Křesťan (2007) as:

- sociodemographic (i.e., population ageing, non-traditional families, blending of cultures and the creation of new regions),
- economic (i.e., tourism is considered a luxury, raised living standards),
- political (i.e., political situation in the destination) and
- technical factors (i.e., improvement of infrastructure, increased cooperation due to the internet).

Tourism is predominantly a service-based industry. Its service-based nature suggests certain specifics such as immateriality, inseparability from the provider, variability, absence of ownership and transience (Jakubíková, 2009).

The key driver of tourism to a specific destination is a destination management organisation (DMO). DMO's main function is that of being responsible for the marketing of a particular destination (Elbe et al., 2009). The local DMO is often a publicly funded body, which coordinates the marketing activities within the destination's boundaries (Pearce, 1992; Pike, 2004). As per Elbe et al. (2009), DMOs have little financial resources available, which gives them the incentive to strive for a high level of cooperation. Cooperation among service providers is typical for the tourism industry – together they create an innovative and complex service i.e., "*package*", which is then subsequently marketed to the consumer (Sodomková,

2017). The internet plays a major role in marketing communication in general, but especially in promoting tourism.

Holloway (2004) points out some of the specifics of marketing in the British tourism industry. He sees a shift in the approach to marketing – nowadays marketing is much more of a team effort. He further states that marketing is no longer limited to the extroverted and dynamic salesperson who possesses an "*entrepreneurial flair*", but also includes the efforts of the less visible parts of a good marketing team – those who are able to collect statistical data, come to rational conclusions and interpret tourist behaviour, needs and patterns. They are just as important if not more for a successful marketing strategy (Holloway, 2004).

Holloway (2004) demonstrates this on the example of Freddie Laker (of Laker Airways), noted for his flair and enterprise, who helped the expansion of foreign travel to and from Britain in the post-Second World War period. Holloway (2004) agrees that these skills are still valuable but points out that large travel corporations take a more sober approach – their marketers are lower-profile. In 2013, VisitBritain launched its long-term tourism growth strategy for inbound tourism (2012-2020) by introducing four key elements designed to drive future success (VisitBritain, 2018). These were according to VisitBritain (2018) to build on Britain's image, to increase distribution through the travel trade, to ease the visa process and broaden the product offering, and lastly to increase aviation capacity by promoting new air routes.

3.1.3 City tourism

Photo 1: *Aerial view of London city centre* (Steinerová, 2019)

City tourism is a distinct form of tourism. Kolb (2017) characterizes urban tourism, synonymous with city tourism, in her publication *Tourism marketing for cities and towns* as including "*unique experiences that differentiate it from other types of tourism.*" She further states that:*"When visitors travel to a city or town, they want to not only find enjoyment, but they also want to experience the unique urban culture*." Similarly, Zelenka and Pásková (2012) describe city tourism as "*a type of tourism, whose participants are motivated by visiting cities and their sights and services (historical and cultural sights, shopping, business trips, social contacts, gastronomy etc.)*".

Vystoupil and Šauer (2006) indicate that urban tourism is usually of a short-term character and the key motivating factor for tourists apart from visiting cities and their attractions is also the observation of local way of living.

Europe is largely urbanized – Eurostat (2018) data suggests that over 75% of the European population lives in cities as opposed to rural areas, the trend being towards further urbanization. Because so much of Europe's population is urbanized the main tourist destinations are also situated in these urban locations – cities.

Cities and their surroundings have seen a large growth as a segment of tourism in the past 20 years (Kotíková and Vystoupil, 2017). Europe as the world's leading travel destination forms an essential part of the global tourism industry – international tourist arrivals in Europe amounted to 745.2 million visitors in 2019 (Statista research department, 2020a). According to the Statista research department's (2020a) data, the most visited countries in Europe were traditionally France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom, while Paris was the most visited European city.

3.2 Social media

Merriam-Webster (2018) defines social media as forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content. The Cambridge Dictionary (2019) describes the term as "*websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone*".

3.2.1 The social media marketing paradigm

The sharing of thoughts and opinions is now much more accessible to individuals due to technological advances and the creation of the Internet and its development to its current state (Hays, Page and Buhalis, 2013) (see Table 2). The World Wide Web was created by Tim Berners-Lee in 1991 when he managed to connect hypertext technology to the Internet (Dijck, 2013). Before the creation of Web 2.0, the Internet worked based on a 'read-only' format (Borges, 2009).

Upon its introduction in the late 1990s, Web 2.0 changed the status quo by introducing user-generated content in the form of social network sites and social media (Safko and Brake, 2009). As early as 2006 the term Web 3.0 has been mentioned by John Markoff (2006) of The New York Times – in essence, the websites learn the user's behaviour and are becoming more intelligent. The website receives information from the user and gives new information and data back (Markoff, 2006).

Table 2: Versions of web and their properties

Version of the Web	Properties
1.0	Functions in one direction, 'read-only' interface, offers static information
2.0	User-generated content – social media and social network sites
3.0	Intelligent and responsive website, content customised for the user

(Source: Borges, 2009; Safko and Brake, 2009; Markoff, 2006)

Barefoot and Szabo (2010) define social media marketing as "*using social media channels to promote a company and its products*". In essence, when marketing on social media building a relationship with the audience is crucial to a successful marketing strategy (Barefoot and Szabo, 2010). To create relationships with their customers, marketers need to enable and shape conversations – social media marketing is therefore concerned with how to prompt, promote, and monetize conversations (Safko and Brake, 2009). Web 2.0 creates by its nature an opportunity for the company to engage with their audience and through their online participation promote its products online. The consumers together with marketers co-create value through the exchange of information and resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

3.2.2 Types of social media

There are many ways to classify social media. This categorization of social media can aid marketers when trying to define marketing segments for their product. For instance, Janouch (2014) classifies social media by marketing tactics as follows:

- Social media sites (Facebook, LinkedIn),
- Blogs, videoblogs, microblogs (Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram),
- Discussion forums, Q&A portals (Quora, Yahoo! Answers),
- Wikis (Wikipedia),
- Social bookmarking sites (Pinterest, Reddit),
- Shared multimedia (YouTube) and
- Virtual worlds (SecondLife, Hubs).

Kaplan and Heanlein (2010) categorize social media according to the following criteria:

- The level of social presence, which pertains to confidentiality (between two or more users) and directness (synchronous and asynchronous communication).
- The level of social presence of oneself (what type of information the user wishes to share about themselves).

Table 3: Classification of social media according to the level of social presence and the degree of self-presentation

Level of confidentiality and directness				
Level of presence of one self		**low**	**intermediate**	**high**
	low	Collaborative webs (i.e., Wikipedia)	Content communities (i.e., Vimeo, YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (i.e., Minecraft, Fortnite)
	high	Blogs	Social media (i.e., Instagram)	Virtual social worlds (i.e., Second Life)

(Source: Kaplan and Heanlein, 2010)

Social media sites are quickly evolving and changing. New social media sites are emerging almost constantly. For this reason, both aforementioned classifications are slightly outdated. These classifications are still useful, but do not account for new types of emerging social media platforms. Sharma and Verma (2018) map the evolution and change in social media marketing and point out a shift in social media. According to them, social media is moving away from the mass model towards a customised model with the user as a focal point. The role of social media in brand-consumer relationships needs to be further explored and altered (Sharma and Verma, 2018).

3.2.3 Most popular social media

There are countless social media sites available to internet users, which provide them with almost limitless entertainment and ways to connect with other people. New social media applications and sites are developed each day, but only very few of them are allowed to rise to the top.

With over 4.14 billion active global social media population worldwide (Clement, 2020) social media marketing has immense potential. The most popular social network based on global audience size as of July 2020 is by far Facebook with 2.6 billion active users, closely followed by YouTube and Whatsapp both ranking at 2 billion (Clement, 2020). Platforms Instagram and TikTok are used by 1.15 billion and 689 million people respectively (Clement, 2020). Other popular social media sites as of July 2020 include WeChat, QQ, Snapchat, Douyin, QZone, Reddit, Pinterest, Twitter and Quora (Clement, 2020; Tankovska, 2021) as indicated in Table 4.

The most popular social media site, Facebook, serves its users in creating their profile on which they can share photos, videos, links and text posts. In 2017, Facebook changed its mission statement – the company is no longer just about "*connecting the world*" (Frier and Chafkin, 2017). Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO and creator of Facebook, has written a new statement – the company now seeks to "*give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together*" (Frier and Chafkin, 2017). The main purpose of Facebook is to connect with friends and family, but it also provides its users with the ability to search for and RSVP to events, join fan pages, niche groups and much more.

Instagram, on the other hand, is much more visual. The main focus is the photo or video added by the user, and the captions are secondary. Instagram users tend to curate their feed very carefully to send the right message to their audience – the key is to make their profiles visually pleasing and cohesive. Generally, social media platforms that focus on the visual tend to dominate the market (Dollwet, 2019). Twitter comprises mainly of short 280-character long messages, which are mostly publicly available, whilst Snapchat serves as a messaging system where its users communicate with one another by sending captioned photos.

In recent years a new social media has emerged – TikTok. TikTok allows its users to post short lip-synced, music, talent, or comedy videos (Hughes, 2019). Hughes (2019) suggests that TikTok, is especially popular amongst the younger generation, generation Z (people born between 1997 and 2012) and points at the app's algorithm which enables the videos on the app to go viral with relative ease. Despite being very new, TikTok rivals social media giants Facebook, Instagram and Twitter in terms of users and popularity (Clement, 2020; Tankovska, 2021) (see Table 4).

Table 4: Social media monthly active users 2020/21

Social media platform	Monthly active users (MAU)
Facebook	2.6 billion
Youtube, Whatsapp	2 billion
Instagram	1+ billion
TikTok	689 million

(Source: Clement, 2020; Tankovska, 2021.)

Virtually any social media can be used by tourists when travelling – people can search for things to do on Pinterest, at photos from the destination on Instagram, join special travel-related groups on Facebook and share their experiences on Twitter to name a few. However, some social media sites are specially created for travellers – travel is their focus. These are usually based on providing useful information to the tourist or reviewing destinations and certain services such as lodging, transport, restaurants, bars, clubs, and sights. The most prominent travel platform is TripAdvisor (2019).

TripAdvisor (2019) describes themselves on their website as "*the world's largest travel platform, which helps hundreds of millions of travellers each month make every trip their best trip. Travellers across the globe use the TripAdvisor site and app to browse more than 878 million reviews and opinions of 8.8 million accommodations, restaurants, experiences, airlines and cruises.*" The portal works based on user-generated content mixed with other functionalities such as online hotel reservations and bookings for lodging, transportation, restaurants and travel experiences. Users are encouraged to rate their experience at various establishments. A good rating on this platform can aid the establishment in gaining new customers.

Certain travel sites are predominantly used to find accommodation or book travel experiences. These are traditionally Booking.com, Trivago and other booking sites. Sites such as CouchSurfing and AirBnB bring out the social aspect of travelling, as it is a way to connect and stay with people local to the area.

3.3 Social media promotion of city tourism

Social media have infiltrated all aspects of tourism and have contributed to crucial changes in the way tourism experiences are planned, marketed, consumed, and consequently evaluated (Gretzel, 2018). Gretzel (2018) suggests that "*social media provide significant research opportunities but also substantial challenges in terms of methods, ethics and data quality*".

Social media promotion permeates into the advertising of urban tourism as well. It keeps gaining prominence as an element of DMOs' strategies – it is a valuable tool used to reach a global audience with limited resources (Hays, Page and Buhalis, 2013). Social media is increasingly more important to the tourism and hospitality sectors. Sigala et al., (2012) accredit this to the intangible and experiential nature of tourism, as well as the lowering of technological barriers for the average traveller.

Not only does social media change the way tourists behave during a trip it has also altered the way consumers decide upon their preferred destination (Kolb, 2017). Nadda et al., (2015) further state that: "*The decision-making process includes stages such as need identification, information search, evaluation of alternatives and selection, purchasing, and post-purchase behaviour.*"

Tourists can utilise social networks at every stage in this process to ease their decision-making whilst travelling (Nadda et al., 2015; Kolb, 2017). Businesses profit from social media while planning and developing a tourist product, during its production and marketing and when giving post-purchase support to their customers (Nadda et al., 2015). Furthermore, social media provides a two-way communication between consumers (Sigala et al., 2012), which allows the travellers to make their decisions based on opinions of a larger population. As per Kolb (2017) social media "*now gives the potential visitor an opportunity to directly access accurate and unbiased information on what a destination has to offer.*"

Social platforms have the advantage that they provide good conditions for the exact purpose of a high level of consumer involvement – tourists can engage easily with the service or the product (Nadda et al., 2015) and give feedback directly to the company. As per Nadda et al., (2015), social media also plays a pivotal role in the product launch – the word-of-mouth information regarding a brand, service or product can in itself serve as a form of advertisement.

That's why marketers need to focus on their online image during the whole life cycle of their company, as well as on creating and maintaining strong relationships with their online audience (Barefoot and Szabo, 2010). They also need to focus on building audience trust. While tourists tend to consider consumer-based word-of-mouth trustworthy, marketers need to actively work on establishing the same in the social media space online through open and authentic communication (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008). Kolb (2017) states that this is due to the fact that tourists are not always provided with the most reliable information – tourism organisations tend to highlight more favourable reviews in order to earn a commission. Similarly, she adds that a bad review online can potentially damage the reputation of a destination, causing a loss in prospective visitors.

3.3.1 New trends in social media promotion

Traditional marketing has seen a decline for a while now and is progressively less and less effective – it is "*broken*" (Brown and Hayes, 2008). Marketing is sales-oriented – if it doesn't initiate, assist or close sales it no longer does its job and is effectively failing (Brown and Hayes, 2008). For this reason, DMOs must adapt and reinvent their approach to advertising city tourism.

In the last few years, a new trend on social media has emerged in the form of influencers – an internet personality who has the power to affect others in the purchase decisions using their knowledge, authority, position or relationship with their followers (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2020). Brands (i.e., hotels, DMOs, restaurants) can collaborate with these influencers to achieve their marketing objectives (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2020) – to increase tourism to a particular city or destination, to grow awareness of the region and deliver a positive economic impact. Dollwet (2019) especially emphasises the importance of micro-influencers (with about 40 thousand followers), who may not have as wide of a reach, but their audience is more engaged, and they are therefore valuable to the brands.

Dollwet (2019) also highlights the importance of *stories* – content shot in vertical format, that usually stays online for 24 hours. *Stories* are most popular on Instagram, but they are also available on Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, WhatsApp and even LinkedIn. *Stories* have also been introduced to Twitter in November 2020. In 2019 about 400 million people watched

stories daily on Instagram alone (Dollwet, 2019). This feature can be utilised when influencers collaborate with brands – i.e., the influencer is paid when they post a certain number of *stories* with a pre-agreed hashtag. *Stories* allow the creator to connect with their audience on an immediate basis and provides the option of sharing content that will not stay permanently on the creator's profile.

Lastly, there is also a shift towards the eradication of so-called "*fake followers*" – inactive accounts created for the sole purpose of increasing a brand's or influencer's follower count on social media platforms (Dollwet, 2019). Popularity boosted in this artificial way is not valuable to marketers and brands. Certain social media platforms, such as Instagram, have taken steps to deactivate such accounts to promote true engagement and maintain their reputation as a popular social media platform (Dollwet, 2019).

Tourism and social media are linked. Social media platforms are one of the major marketing tools which are on the rise in the last decade. DMOs are increasingly turning to online promotion and are encouraging tourists to engage with their social media accounts.

This way of promoting is especially efficient due to the sheer number of users online and the wide accessibility to the majority of the developed world's population. Similarly, like other brands, DMOs are trying to build a relationship with their online audience – to attract potential new visitors, to encourage tourists to revisit the location or to promote local tourism and spending.

4. Practical part

The practical part deals with the case study of the city of Kingston Upon Hull. It describes the level of its online presence through a series of two structured interviews. The interview outcomes are supported by a questionnaire survey, designed to further demonstrate the importance of social media promotion of urban tourism. The practical part aims to describe the current state of the city's online promotion. Based on the findings gained from the interviews and the survey a set of recommendations was elaborated for the local university to demonstrate an example of how particular actions may increase the effectivity of online promotion as shown on a specific organisation. Similar actions may be applied by the local DMOs.
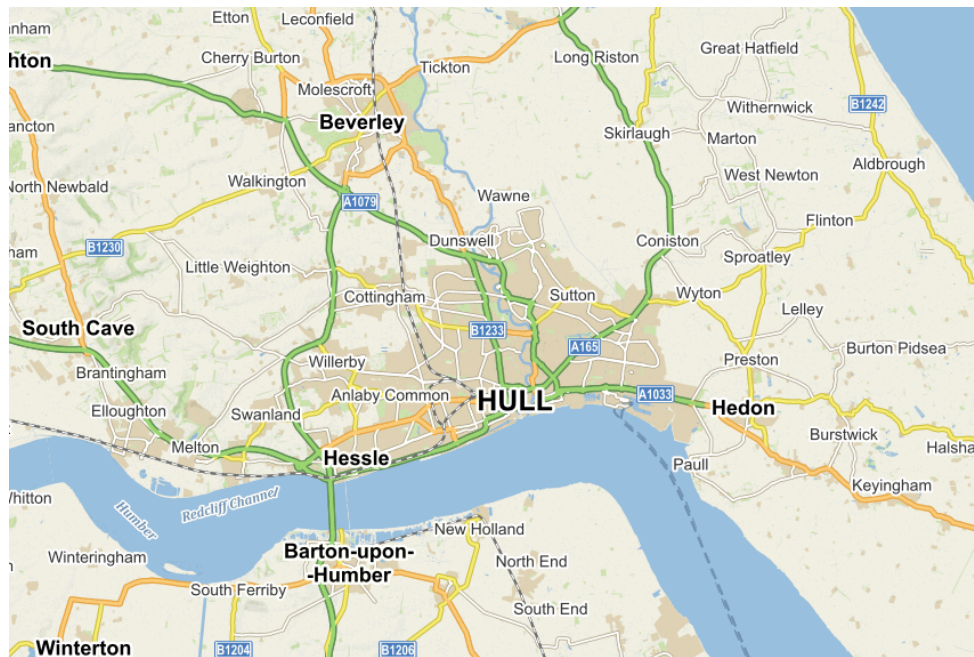
4.1 Kingston upon Hull

Photo 2*: Kingston upon Hull map* (Mapy.cz, 2021)

Kingston upon Hull (commonly abbreviated to Hull) is a port city in the north-east of England located on the confluence of the River Hull and the Humber estuary in the East Riding of Yorkshire. With a population of near 260 000 inhabitants (Hull City Council, 2019) it is the fourth largest city in the Yorkshire and Humber region. Additionally, the city is dubbed "*Yorkshire's only maritime city*" (Yorkshire.com, 2021a). It is also home to a large European migrant population, ranking at about 5% of the total due to its port nature, sometimes branding itself as the Gateway to Europe (Evans, 2017).

The history of the city dates back to the 12th century and played many key roles in history – a market town, trading hub, whaling centre and a military supply port (Hull City Council, 2008). One of the most famous residents of Kingston upon Hull was William Wilberforce, an 18th-century Member of Parliament, who took a prominent part in the abolition of the slave trade in Britain and became an MP for the county of York (Swift, 2009).

The city retains several historic buildings, namely the birthplace of William Wilberforce, the Parish Church of Holy Trinity, Trinity House (a navigation school), the Maritime and Ferens Museums, the University of Hull in the north and many others (Britannica, 2021). The city is connected to the south of Humber by the Humber Bridge – the longest suspension bridge in the United Kingdom (Britannica, 2021).

Tourism in the city has largely increased in the last few years. This is mainly due to Kingston upon Hull being named the 2017 UK City of Culture - a title awarded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to a city in the United Kingdom every four years (British Council, 2017). This award tries to emulate the success of Liverpool being awarded the European Capital of Culture in 2008, a programme designed by the European Union to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and an attempt at increasing the citizens' sense of belonging to a common European cultural area (European Commission, 2016). The UK City of Culture has previously only been awarded to Derry-Londonderry in its inaugural year in 2013.

Following receiving the title in 2017, Kingston upon Hull hosted a year-long programme of cultural events celebrating the city's uniqueness and opened up its cultural life to the rest of the world (British Council, 2017). Coventry is set to take over the title in May 2021 (Coventry UK City of Culture, 2021). Yorkshire.com (2021a) describes Kingston upon Hull as an up-and-coming tourist destination and an ideal place for a city break.

Photo 3: *Kingston upon Hull city centre* (Steinerová, 2020)

4.2 Current level of online promotion of Kingston upon Hull

The city of Kingston upon Hull is represented online on various sites and social media. DMOs are given a central role in promoting a city and are specifically created to take the overall responsibility for attracting visitors to the place or region defined as their domain (Pearce, 1992). The most prominent DMOs in East Riding of Yorkshire are organisations called Visit Yorkshire (yorkshire.com), Visit East Yorkshire (visiteastyorkshire.co.uk) and Visit Hull (visithull.org).

Visit Hull (2021) is operated by the Hull City Council. Their website, Visithull.org, caters to visitors to the city – it offers tips for trips, what to do, where to dine and drink as well as information about cultural events, local sights and accommodation. Visit Yorkshire's website (2021) works on a similar basis but provides information about the whole county. Both websites accompany tips and information with high-quality photo and video content. Yorkshire.com (2021b) additionally offers the content translated into various languages. Visit Hull, similarly to Hull City Council, is active on social media – especially on Instagram (@visithulluk) where they focus on promoting cultural events, local businesses and sights and are followed by 15.4 thousand users (March 2021). Visit Hull often tags local attractions (i.e., @hullbonusarena, @thedeephull, @hullminstergram, @hull_museums) in their posts. VisitHull is also very active on their Twitter account (@visithull), which they update several times a day. This account is followed by over 71 thousand users (March 2021).

Additionally, the official government body of Hull, Hull City Council (2021), provides information on their website, hull.gov.uk. This website is mainly useful to residents of Hull as it is a source of key information about housing, infrastructure, education and offers advice & support. Hull City Council is also active on Facebook (as @hullccnews) where they add new posts multiple times a day and are followed by more than 8 thousand users (January 2021).

Another key organisation, which promotes the city is the local university. The University of Hull has a great online presence. Their official website, hull.ac.uk, serves as a primary source of information for students, staff and everyone else. This is where the university offers key information to current and prospective students, businesses and business partners and informs about the ongoing research conducted by the university students and staff. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (March 2021), the website also updates its visitors on the currently applicable on-campus guidelines on the main page.

More in-depth information is provided on the University's social media accounts, namely Instagram (@universityofhull) and Facebook (@universityofhull) pages, where they are very active – they post daily content, respond to comments, and update their followers on current events. The university often features student-created content on their social media sites – often in the form of a Q&A session or a 24-hour *stories* takeover. The university shares student-created content in a video form as well, mainly on their Facebook. This content is predominantly shared in the form of permanent posts. The University frequently posts *stories* on its Instagram page and engages with the online audience. It however does not utilise this feature on other social media sites effectively.

The University also runs a Youtube channel, which currently contains 250+ high quality videos. In these, the University posts feature their students and showcase the campus. Despite the high quality, the videos amass very little engagement – each video is viewed by 200-900 people and the channel is followed by only 2.5 thousand users (March 2021). This can be attributed to the low level of cross-promotion on other social media.
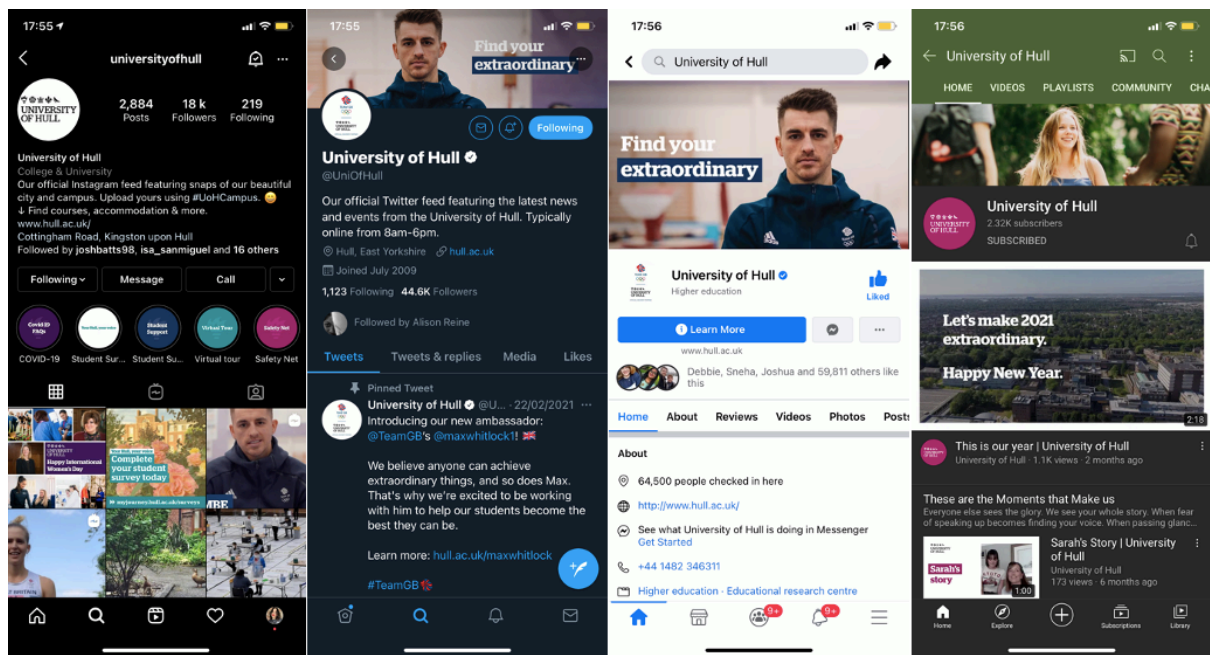
Photo 4: *University of Hull on social media* (Steinerová, 2021)

4.3 Interviews

Two structured interviews were conducted in the form of a video call on 2 October 2020 through Zoom. Both of the interviewees consented to being recorded, however, one of them wished to remain anonymous. The two interviews were conducted to portray the contrast between a local point of view and the opinions of a visitor to the city. It was also aimed at mapping the respondents' social media marketing awareness, specifically about the city of Kingston upon Hull. Both interviewees were given the same set of questions.

4.3.1 Interview with a local

The first interview was conducted with a lecturer working for the University of Hull, who wished not to disclose their name. They have been working for the University for 12 years and are living near Kingston upon Hull. They have travelled extensively for their job as a lecturer. The unedited transcript of the interview is attached in the appendices.

The lecturer (2020) considers social media a vital tool when travelling. They consider social media a necessity for promoting urban tourism. In their own experience, they enjoy seeing the "*real version*" of the city as viewed by the locals and the tourists alike. Whilst they appreciate the content created by the local DMOs, they prefer getting information from a different source. They point out that the information provided by DMOs tends to be skewed and shows only the

best parts of the destination. If reviews are included on the website, negative feedback is often omitted.

The lecturer (2020) does not view the city of Kingston upon Hull as a tourist destination, because they work there and live in the area. They rarely look up Hull on social media and only follow the university on various platforms, but do not actively seek the posted content. In their opinion, the University of Hull is well portrayed on social media platforms. They believe that the institution is adequately represented online. The lecturer (2020) thinks that the content is overly focused on the students and tends to forget about the university staff.

They consider the university website well designed and organised. They often refer their students to the website. On the other hand, they believe that the website lacks a section dedicated to city life and a few pieces of general information about the surrounding area. The lecturer (2020) says: *"I'd add more information about the city in general. The majority of students and staff are not originally from the general Hull area, myself included, and I feel as though a few more sections dedicated to the city life would be greatly appreciated by many visitors of the website."*

4.3.2 Interview with a foreign student

The second interview was conducted as a contrast to the local point of view with a recent Erasmus+ exchange student from Italy, Simona De Bellis, who spent a full academic year (2019/2020) in Kingston upon Hull at the University of Hull as a part of her master's degree. English is not the student's first language, therefore the grammatical errors in the transcript were corrected whilst maintaining the message intact. The edited transcript of the interview is attached in the appendices.

De Bellis (2020) also believes that social media plays a key role in the marketing of urban tourism. She points out that social media is a great tool when marketers want to reach a younger audience. She considers social media her primary source of information when she travels. During her time in Kingston upon Hull, she actively used social media to stay up to date on local cultural events and happenings.

Similarly, to the lecturer, she also believes that the online representation of the city of Kingston upon Hull is somewhat inaccurate. De Bellis (2020) says: "*I had a very romantic idea of the city prior to my arrival, which may have been unrealistic in some respects.*" She also thinks that the local DMOs tend to only show the positive sides of the city. De Bellis (2020) proposes the DMOs "*to post more realistic photos, include all seasons and weather. As banal as it may sound, I would really appreciate it if they showed how often the weather is not the nicest, because it was quite jarring when I first arrived.*"

De Bellis (2020) believes that the University of Hull sets a good example, and she perceives the university's online presence very positively. In her opinion, the university website is well structured, organised and contains all the important information. She mentions the fact that the university has many diverse accounts on the same social media platform. De Bellis (2020) adds: "*The Student Union has two accounts on Instagram, the sports centre too… I wish I could find all of them in one place so I wouldn't be second-guessing myself on where to find the most relevant information.*"

4.3.3 Interview summary

The interviews offered a valuable and authentic insight into the topic. Both interviewees were closely familiar with the workings of the University of Hull and both have lived in the city of Kingston upon Hull for some time. They have both agreed that social media promotion of cities is very important in the digital age and shared their opinions on Kingston upon Hull's online presence. Whilst the foreigner expressed a great interest in cultural events happening in the city and showed enthusiasm in actively keeping up to date, the local took these events for granted and learnt about them only "*accidentally*" or passively from friends and acquaintances.

They each appreciated how the University of Hull is portrayed online but saw room for improvement. Their insights have been taken into consideration and used in the creation of suggestions for this thesis. They highlighted the University's level of involvement on social media. Both the lecturer and the foreign student concurred that a destination greatly benefits form a well thought out social media marketing strategy. In their eyes, the destination has to be realistically portrayed, well represented and show the true image of the place. They expressed that they perceive a gap between the "*real*" Hull and its representation online – according to them, social media tends to portray the city more favourably.

The outcome of the interviews was hindered by the fact that they could not be conducted in person due to the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions on free movement. A video call does not allow for the same level of observation of gestures, moods and feelings. Despite these difficulties, the interviews offer a valuable insight into the topic and give an authentic outlook from two very different points of view.

4.4 Questionnaire survey

A questionnaire survey was designed to accompany the conducted interviews to further demonstrate the importance of social media promotion of urban tourism. The survey was created to show how tourists use social media while travelling and to further specify the decision-making process. The structured interviews were carried out before the survey distribution. The survey was conducted fully online using Google Forms. The survey had been provided both in English and Czech – so that the respondents could choose their preferred language.

The questionnaire was distributed among the author's friends and family and online for two months (November–December 2020) on the author's social media (on a public Instagram and Twitter account and a private Facebook profile) as well as on survey exchange groups on Facebook (Survey Exchange 2020) and Reddit (on subreddits r/surveyexchange and r/SampleSize). All respondents remained anonymous, providing only their gender and age as an identifier. The interview contained 8 closed and one open-ended question – designed so that each participant took approximately 5 minutes to fill in the form.

4.4.1 Survey results

A total of 222 respondents took part in the online questionnaire survey conducted from the beginning of November 2020 until the end of December 2020.

42.8% of the participants chose to take the survey in Czech and the remainder preferred the English version. The majority of respondents identified as female (70.3%), 28.4% as male and 1.3% preferred not to specify their gender or chose the option "*other*".

The largest group of people were in their twenties at 78.4% followed by teenagers aged 15-19 at 9.5%. 13 people were in their thirties (5.8%), 3.2% in their forties, 1.3% fifties and 1.8% were aged above 60 years old (see Figure 8).

The most popular social media sites among the respondents were Facebook (83.3%) and YouTube (83.7%), closely followed by Instagram (79.2%) and WhatsApp (55%) as depicted in Figure 2. Some also answered that they regularly use Twitter (27.9%), TikTok (22.5%), LinkedIn (20.7%) and Pinterest (16.2%). The least used sites were Google+, Tumblr, Reddit, 9gag and Snapchat (all under 10%).
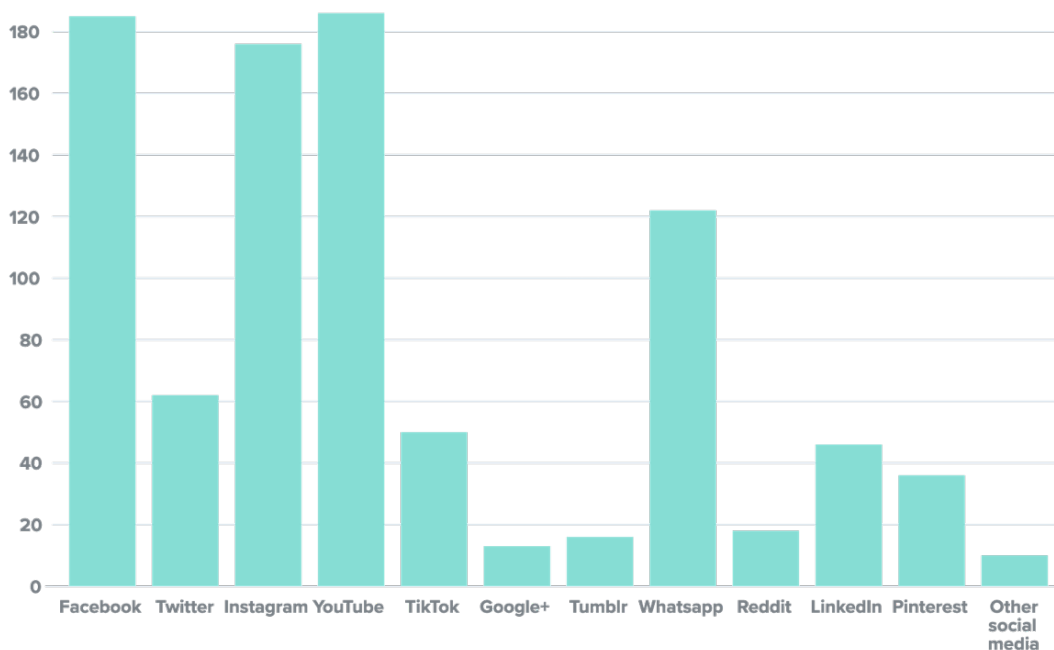
Figure 2: Social media use (Source: Steinerová, 2020)

When asked about what type of advertisement attracts their attention as shown in Figure 7, the respondents considered plain text the least effective form of advertisement (5% preferred it to other types). They regarded simple video as somewhat effective (14.7%). By far the most popular answer was an advertisement in the form of an image (44%). The combination of all three types (image, video and plain text) preferred only 36.3% of the respondents.

Answers to the question: "*When choosing your next destination, are opinions and recommendations of other social media users important to you?"* showed that people mostly value other social media users' opinions and viewpoints (see Figure 3). 51.3% answered mostly yes and 15.7% yes. The minority of people opted for no (7.2%) and mostly no (25.8%).

When choosing your next destination, are opinions of other social media users important to you?
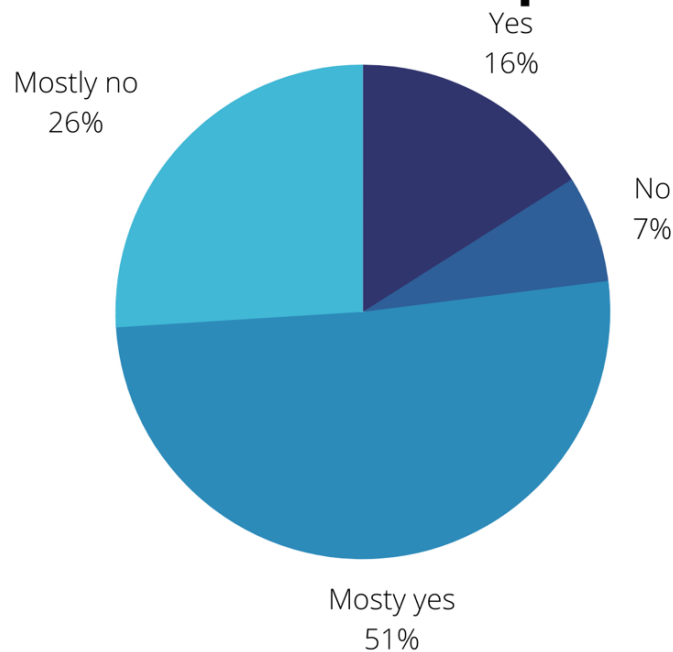

Figure 3: Social media user influence on opinion (Source: Steinerová, 2020)

The respondents were then asked about their habits when deciding the destination for their next holiday or trip (see Figure 5). The majority (61.7%) uses an internet search engine (i.e., Google, Yahoo, Bing). Specialized travel platforms, such as TripAdvisor, were the first choice for 14.8% of the respondents. Only 7.6% of people opted for social media as their main source of inspiration. Similarly, 7.6% chose travel agency websites. 8.9% stated other, mostly offline ways, of gaining inspiration for travelling, among which recommendations from friends, family and locals ranked the highest.

Respondents were asked to specify their preferred holiday type (see Figure 4). The majority of respondents stated that they prefer to spend their holiday visiting a large city/urban centre (37.4%). Seaside resorts were the second most popular option (29.2%). The rest chose countryside (20.8%), mountains (6.8%) and some chose to specify their answer, most of which

said that they tend to combine all four aforementioned answers (5.8%).

What type of destination do you choose most often for your holiday?
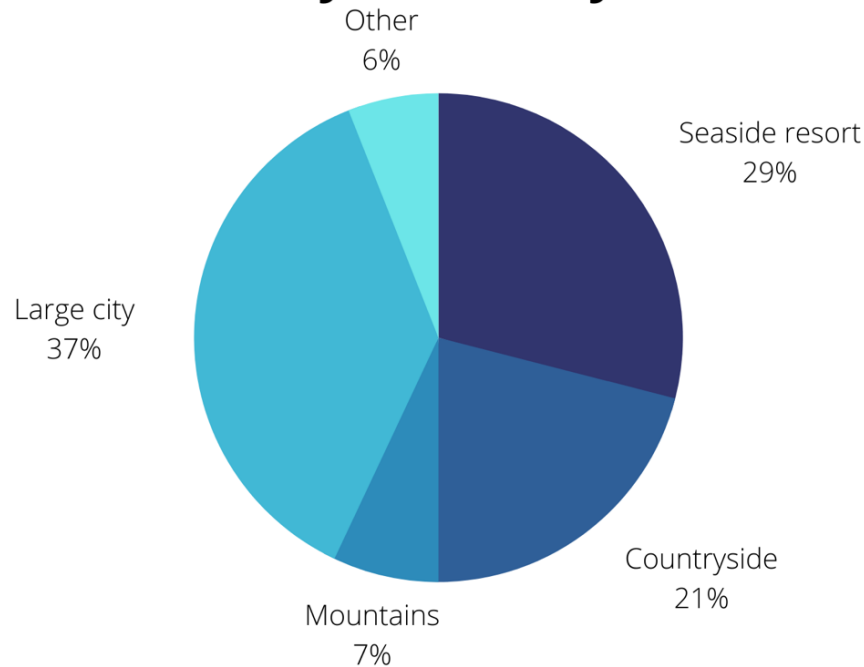

Figure 4: Holidays according to destination type (Source: Steinerová, 2020)

When visiting a new place, respondents tend to post about their travel on social media (36% posts always and 30.6% posts most of their visits) (see Figure 6). 33.3% does not post when travelling somewhere new.

Lastly, the respondents were asked in what ways they use social media whilst travelling. This was an open-ended question, and they were allowed to skip this question. The majority answered very briefly in a few words or short phrases. Most common answers included staying in touch with friends and family, navigating around the chosen location, communicating with locals, posting about their trip, looking up relevant information and reviews and finding ideas on what to do in the destination.

4.5 Questionnaire summary

The questionnaire survey completed the interviews by adding more insight into social media use during the decision-making process. Potential visitors to the destination care about the opinions of their peers and the opinions of other users of the internet. Both the interviews and

the questionnaire survey results point to the fact that tourists tend to do prior research before deciding where to go – research which is mostly conducted online and by consulting friends and acquaintances.

The results of the questionnaire were skewed due to the choice of the distribution channel – social media. Social media is more popular among younger generations and therefore the majority of respondents were in their teens and twenties. This group surveyed that they are active contributors to social media when they travel – they keep in touch with friends and family, post on stories across various platforms, add photos and videos. The collected data may serve as a starting point into further research into the topic.

4.6 Research findings

Research question 1: In what ways does the city of Kingston upon Hull utilise social media to promote tourism of both domestic and foreign visitors?

Kingston upon Hull uses various online tactics to advertise itself to visitors. The local DMOs in the East Riding of Yorkshire are organisations called Visit Yorkshire, Visit East Yorkshire and Visit Hull. They promote tourism to the area primarily on their respective websites. These websites are a valuable source of quality information ranging from travel inspiration to information about housing, infrastructure and education.

All of these organisations are very active on their social media sites and utilise this tool to promote tourism to the region of East Riding of Yorkshire. The DMOs promote tourism mainly on Instagram, Facebook, Youtube and Twitter. They engage with their audience by posting up to date content accompanied by quality photos and videos. The city is portrayed as a vibrant, community based cultural hub. Yorkshire.com (2021a) describes Kingston upon Hull as exciting, eclectic, and entertaining and "*Yorkshire's only maritime city*".

Research question 2: Does social media play a significant role in promoting city tourism to the Hull region?

Yes, it does. The results of the questionnaire survey point to the fact that travellers tend to seek authentic information about their desired destination. They mostly prefer sourcing this information from fellow visitors or from locals, who are not affiliated with the local DMOs. For this reason, social media promotion is just as important for Kingston upon Hull as it is for

other cities. It is evident from the conducted interviews that both locals and foreigners consider social media to be a useful promotional tool.

Since the DMOs in the East Riding of Yorkshire are very active on their social media platforms (namely Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Youtube) and post high-quality content they can serve the visitors as a great source of information about the city and the region. These accounts may serve the potential visitor to complete their research on the destination prior to their intended visit.

<u>Research question 3: In what ways can the city of Kingston upon Hull improve its image on social media to attract more visitors?</u>

The research shows that improved accuracy in the portrayal of the city would be beneficial to Kingston upon Hull. This would close the gap between the tourist expectation and the reality of the destination and thus generating more positive reviews – the tourists would know "what they are getting".

Based on the research findings a set of recommendations was created. These recommendations pertain to the local University of Hull. They were created in order to demonstrate an example of how specific actions could increase the effectivity of online promotion as shown on a specific organisation. Similar actions could potentially be applied by the local DMOs in the future. These recommendations are further elaborated in the section 4.7 of this thesis.

4.7 Recommendations

The results of the interviews and the survey point to the fact that social media presence is no longer an option for a city, but a necessity to be able to successfully advertise themselves as a travel destination and to increase tourism. Survey results showed that Facebook, Youtube, Instagram and Twitter are most popular among users, therefore any company should strive to build a following on these sites.

To illustrate the importance of a proactive social media marketing strategy a set of recommendations was created to aid the University of Hull in engaging with their online audience more effectively.

The first recommendation pertains to the lack of use of the *stories* feature across all social media platforms. The university is very active on social media – especially on Instagram, where they frequently post *stories*. *Stories* are a unique way to connect with one's audience in the form of a content shot in vertical format, that usually stays online for only 24 hours (Dollwet, 2019). The temporary nature of *stories* allows the creator to post less polished and more authentic content. Stories are also often the first point of contact on social media for the user. The University posts engaging *stories* on their Instagram and Facebook profiles but do not use the feature on other platforms. They should share posted *stories* on all other social media platforms – especially on Twitter.

The second recommendation focuses on the inclusion of staff on the University of Hull social media. The interviewed lecturer (2020) pointed out the lack of content aimed at the employees and the exclusion of staff. The content on Hull's social media is predominantly catered to current and prospective students as they make up most of the audience. The University would benefit from extending the social media coverage to staff as well. This could be done by allowing teaching staff to take over the *stories*, letting them post on the main feed or including them in the already established student projects. Firstly, this would allow prospective students to get to know their future lecturers and help them decide whether the University of Hull is the right choice for them. Secondly, featuring the staff would help them feel included.

The third recommendation pertains to the portrayal of the city on the University's social media platforms. Currently, the city is being featured only on the University's Instagram profile in the form of occasional posts which depict the city's sites and landmarks. As per the results of the interviews – the University would benefit from the increased promotion of the city across all their platforms. This means more frequent posts on Instagram and the introduction of these type of posts on Facebook and Twitter. This, again, would aid the prospective students, who are not residents of Kingston upon Hull to familiarize themselves with the city and help them decide to choose Hull. "Where" people study is often just as important as "what" they study. This action would also offer an opportunity for increased collaboration and cross-promotion between the University of Hull and the local businesses.

The last recommendation focuses on the effort to increase engagement on the University's Youtube channel. Video content is a very effective method of promotion (as per the results of the questionnaire). When used properly it serves as a source of valuable information to the

viewer. The University of Hull has a catalogue of 250+ high-quality videos published on their Youtube channel, but they struggle with a very low view count and engagement. To resolve this issue, the University should strive to increase the promotion of their Youtube channel on other social media sites. The aim should be to cross-promote this content as much as possible. Videos on this channel showcase the University in a unique way and accompany the information from other sources with beautiful visuals.

5. Conclusion

Building a destination's brand is always complex, challenging and encompasses various processes. These include setting clear goals – creating a precise vision, establishing the destination's identity, building a relationship with the destination's stakeholders as well as creating a well-thought-out social media marketing strategy targeted at specific groups of travellers and many more. Implementing a solid marketing strategy is crucial for winning a portion of the rapidly growing tourism market. Destination branding is the foundation that creates a positive image and unique identity of a place. The local destination management organisation must therefore utilise several different marketing tools to successfully promote and advertise a location to tourists.

This bachelor thesis focuses primarily on the use of social media as a promoting tool of urban tourism. Social media is one of the newly emerged major marketing tools which are on the rise in the last decade. Social media offers a unique opportunity to spread word-of-mouth information (i.e., electronic word-of-mouth) and therefore serves well in marketing tourism to large masses. Indubitably, promoting urban tourism this way is especially efficient due to the sheer number of users online. DMOs need to build a relationship with their audience on social media in order to attract visitors, encourage revisits to the location or to promote local tourism and spending.

This thesis evaluates the level of online presence with the focus on social media in the case study of Kingston upon Hull in the United Kingdom. As it is the 2017 UK City of Culture, Kingston upon Hull has a lot to offer to potential visitors. The thesis describes the strategy taken by the local DMOs pertaining to their online promotion. The findings showcase how an effective social media promotion strategy can positively influence the city's image online. The benefits of a proactive social media marketing strategy with the focus on personalization and engagement are especially highlighted.

The approach taken by the University of Hull to online promotion is a great example of a well-executed social media marketing strategy. The institution regularly engages with its online audience via various communication channels. The students are heavily involved in the

curation of the university's social media content. This thesis proposes a set of recommendations for the University of Hull to further enhance its current practices and to elevate its outreach on social media. Furthermore, the thesis compiles beneficial data for the institution and the city.

The research was limited by the currently ongoing restrictions on free movement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the research has been hindered by the inability to conduct the interviews and the questionnaire survey in person. Despite these difficulties, both the conducted interviews and the survey offered a valuable insight and provided an authentic outlook into the topic of social media promotion of urban tourism.

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7. Appendices

7.1 Interview with a local

The transcript of the interview is provided below (A = author of the research):

A: What is your relation to the city of Kingston upon Hull?

I am a lecturer at the University of Hull. Originally, I was born in Poland, but I've been living in the United Kingdom for 12 years now and I moved here to do my job. I live not far from Hull, actually, so I spend most of my time at the University in Hull campus or I occasionally lecture abroad. I still come back to Poland quite a lot. Granted – when there is no [Covid-19] pandemic going on.

A: Do you believe that social media plays a key role in promoting tourism to a city? If so, in what ways? Does the destination benefit from being well-portrayed on social media?

Oh, it definitely does. I strongly believe that in today's climate social media presence is absolutely vital for a city if they want to increase tourism. I give lectures all around the world and like to search for the places I go to online. It is valuable because I see the city from the perspective of locals and visitors and am not being fed this fake version of the city by the [DMO]. Though sites like Instagram definitely do not portray the city in a credible way, at least I know that the majority of people are not being paid to post their photos. I am, of course, excluding influencers and such.

A: Can you think of a destination you've visited that was well promoted online and on social media?

Before the [Covid-19] pandemic started in March [2020] I was asked to come to Budapest, Hungary to give a few lectures. I had never been there before, so I wanted to see the main sites. I came across this website with information about the city [budapestinfo.hu], which I found very useful. I didn't rent a car, so I had to use public transport – the website had all the important info in one place, which I appreciated. It told you which train to take where, how much to pay, what to see. I noticed there was some practical info about health centres and embassies, though I luckily didn't need either of those.

A: What is your impression of Hull solely based on how it is portrayed on social media?

It is hard for me to say since I don't view Hull as a tourist destination. I work there and live very close, so I rarely look Hull up on social media. I enjoy the occasional post on our university Instagram profile [@univeristyofhull], but other than that I do not follow any local DMOs. I think that the people responsible for our social media accounts here at the university are doing a good job at promoting the school to students, though I wish there was more content targeted at the staff. I know Hull really well, so it is difficult to judge the city on how it is presented online.

A: Is it much different from what the city offers in real life? Do you feel that the city is truthfully represented online? Why?

It rains a fair bit more in real life than on social media. I can't speak for the whole city as I said, I don't follow [social media] accounts related to the city, but I think the University [University of Hull] portrays itself pretty accurately. They post many photos from the campus; students often take over the account and post their content. I suspect that Hull may be taking the same approach to social media promotion – they may tend to downplay the less representative parts of the city and try to highlight the best areas. There is nothing wrong with it, but it still creates a gap.

A: What would you improve about Hull's social media presence? Is there anything missing?

Before the interview I had a chance to briefly look at some social media profiles of the local DMOs. I like the way the city is portrayed on those, but I would appreciate it if the companies [VisitHull, Hull City Council] were more active on there. What I mean by that is – I wish they responded to comments more and tried actively to build a relationship with their followers. I also noticed that similarly to other destinations, these sites do not show any negative reviews about Hull, which I think may be misleading to tourists.

A: As a professor at the University of Hull do you feel that the institution is adequately represented on social media? What could be improved in your opinion?

As I said before, I think the University's image online is pretty accurate. I really like the way the website [hull.ac.uk] is designed – it's very clear and well organised. I also appreciate that the University is on most social media. I would prefer it if the content was also targeted at members of staff. Everything seems to be catered to current and prospective students, but rarely

to the staff, which is a shame in my opinion. I know some of my colleagues don't want to be on the university's Instagram [and other social media platforms] *because they don't understand how these sites work, but I think the younger staff would be eager to contribute on there. In my opinion, this would also help the students to get to know their lecturers better, which is never a bad thing.*

A: How would you describe the University website? What would you say is missing on the University (University of Hull) website? What would you add to it?

I'd say I'd add more information about the city in general. The majority of students and staff are not originally from the general Hull area, myself included, and I feel as though a few more sections dedicated to the city life would be greatly appreciated by many visitors of the website. Otherwise, I really like the website – it serves its purpose very well and I refer my students to it if they have an issue. I enjoy the visuals which the website provides, and I quite like the design in general. I appreciate that it is well organised and that the information on it is easily accessible to everyone.

A: Do you use social media to stay up to date on what is happening in the city (namely cultural events and events that draw tourists in)?

I do, but very rarely. I usually get my information about cultural events from friends and colleagues. I tend to RSVP to events I'm going to on Facebook since that's where the organisers tend to post last-minute changes in the programme or when they must reschedule or change the venue. I do not follow any local DMOs on social media, because I am not interested in their content as I live here.

7.2 Interview with a foreign student

The slightly modified transcript of the interview is provided below (A = author of the research):

A: What is your relation to the city of Kingston upon Hull?

My name is Simona De Bellis and I come from Bari – a city in the Italian region of Puglia. I came to Hull in September 2019 as a part of an Erasmus+ exchange in my last year of my master's degree. I already took part in this programme once before, in my bachelor's degree, when I went to Spain to study translation in Granada. I really wanted to go to the UK, but Hull was actually my second choice. Originally, I intended to go to Warwick in the Midlands, but was rejected.

A: Do you believe that social media plays a key role in promoting tourism to a city? If so, in what ways? Does the destination benefit from being well-portrayed on social media?

I am unsure how big of a role it plays for the general population, but I believe that my generation, gen-z [people born between 1997 and 2012], *finds social media very important. Personally, when I travel, I solely use social media to look information up about the destination. I used to buy printed books about the cities I wanted to visit, but I don't anymore. I tend not to look in them once I finish my trip and it also saves me money to look stuff up about the place online. In general, I think there's a big trend to visit a certain spot in a city just to take the best photo for Instagram, so I'd say that that also benefits the city.*

A: Can you think of a destination you've visited that was well promoted online and on social media?

That is a difficult question for me. On the spot, I can only think of Granada, where I spent 6 months in my bachelor's degree studies as a part of another student exchange. The Spanish are similarly disorganised as us Italians, but I think that the city of Granada was well-portrayed online. I love Spain and the Spanish culture, so I knew a lot of things before my departure. When I found out I was accepted for the programme I immediately followed all the social media with relevant information and also some local influencers.

A: What is your impression of Hull solely based on how it is portrayed on social media?

As I said, I was originally supposed to study in Warwick, so I primarily researched that area quite extensively, but once I opted for Hull, I started following all the university social media and some others. I was quite upset because I hadn't had as much time to research as I would have wanted. My impression of the city was that it is always sunny, and it looks like a paradise. To me, the streets looked like something out of a Harry Potter movie. I had a very romantic idea of the city prior to my arrival, which may have been unrealistic in some respects.

A: Is it much different from what the city offers in real life? Do you feel that the city is truthfully represented online? Why?

To a certain extent yes, it rained quite a lot during my stay (she laughs). The people were much warmer than I expected, and I made friends quite quickly. There were a lot of cultural things going on at all times. My stay was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March [2020], *but I stayed until the end of June. From that point on the city seemed to have shut down and I was in lockdown.*

A: What would you improve about Hull's social media presence? Is there anything missing?

I'd suggest them to post more realistic photos, include all seasons and weather. As banal as it may sound, I would really appreciate if they showed how often the weather is not the nicest, because it was quite jarring when I first arrived. That may have something to do with the fact that I am from Southern Italy. I'd loved if they showed all sides of Hull – autumn leaves, the snow and even rain can be portrayed beautifully and can look very presentable on social media.

A: As an exchange student at the University of Hull do you feel that the institution is adequately represented on social media? What could be improved in your opinion?

Yes, I like the way they present themselves on social media, but I have an issue with how scattered the information seems to be. The Student Union has two accounts on Instagram, the sports centre too… I wish I could find all of them in one place so I wouldn't be second-guessing myself on where to find the most relevant information. I really enjoy how the university involves their students – particularly on Instagram. They often do 24-hour takeovers on stories, which are always fun. The students often answer questions, which is very helpful. On one or two

occasions I used the question box provided on their stories and all of my questions ended up being featured on the university's stories.

A: How would you describe the University website? What would you say is missing on the University (University of Hull) website? What would you add to it?

I would put it like this – the website is functional and there is everything you need, which is nice. It is all nicely put in one place, so you don't have to search too hard to find what you want to know. We don't have that in Italy. My university's [Università di Genova] website is really bad, and stuff is hard to find, especially if you are a foreign student and don't speak Italian fluently. Hull's website is ok. The main issue I have with it is that it is visually unappealing. Some people may like it, but it just isn't my cup of tea – I have a weird taste in design so this may not be very telling. I used the website mainly before I arrived. Once I was all settled in Hull, I no longer needed it.

A: Do you use social media to stay up to date on what is happening in the city (namely cultural events and events that draw tourists in)?

When I was in Hull, I checked their social media daily – especially the university Instagram. I used it to stay up to date with all the events that were happening and the trips that they used to do. I found it very useful to turn on my notifications for the university accounts – they usually post things that are currently happening on the campus [i.e., food festival, societies fare]. *Now that I am back home, I only see what comes up on my feed. I sometimes look it up on my own when I am feeling nostalgic.*

7.3 Questionnaire survey

- **English Version**

1. **What is your gender?**

   Male, Female, Prefer not to say, other:_____.

2. **What is your age?**

   15-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70 and older.

3. **What social media sites do you use regularly (at least once a week)?**

   Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Youtube, TikTok, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr, Whatsapp, Reddit, other:_____.

4. **What type of advertisement attracts your attention the most?**

   Text, Image, Video, Combination of the above, other:_____.

5. **When choosing your next destination, are opinions and recommendations of your friends and other social media users important to you?**

   Yes, Mostly yes, Mostly no, No.

6. **How do you choose where to spend your next holiday most often?**

   Using an internet search engine (i.e. Google), Through a specialized travel platform (TripAdvisor), On Travel Agency websites, On social media, Other:_____.

7. **What type of destination do you choose most often for your holiday?** Large city, Seaside resort, Mountains, Countryside, Other:_____.

8. **When visiting a new place do you usually post about it on your social media?**

   Yes, Mostly yes, Mostly no, No.

9. **In what ways do you use social media whilst travelling?**

   (open-ended question)

- **Czech version**

1. **Vaše pohlaví:**

   Muž, Žena, Nechci uvést, Jiné:_____ .

2. **Jaký je Váš věk?**

   15-19 let, 20-29 let , 30-39 let, 40-49 let, 50-59 let, 60-69 let, 70 let a starší.

3. **Které sociální sítě navštěvujete pravidelně (aspoň jednou týdně)?**

   Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Youtube, TikTok, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr, Whatsapp, Reddit, other:_____ .

4. **Jaká forma reklamy Vás upoutá nejvíce?**

   Text, Obrázek, Video, Kombinace výše uvedených.

5. **Jsou názory a doporučení jiných uživatel sociálních sítí důležité při výběru destinace, kterou zvažujete navštívit?**

   Ano, Spíše ano, Spíše ne, Ne.

6. **Jak si dovolenou nejčastěji vybíráte?**

   Přes vyhledavač na internetu (např. Google), Přes specializované cestovatelské webové stránky (např. TripAdvisor), Na webových stránkách cestovních kanceláří, Na sociálních sítích, Jinak:_____ .

7. **Jaký typ destinace nejčastěji volíte pro Vaší dovolenou?**

   Velké město, Přímořské letovisko, Hory, "Příroda" (tj. Lesy, jezera, CHKO atp.)

8. **Přidáváte příspěvky na Vaše sociální sítě při návštěvě nového místa?**

   Ano, Spíše ano, Spíše ne, Ne.

9. **Jakým způsobem využíváte sociální media, když cestujete?**

   (otevřená otázka)

7.4 Additional survey graphs

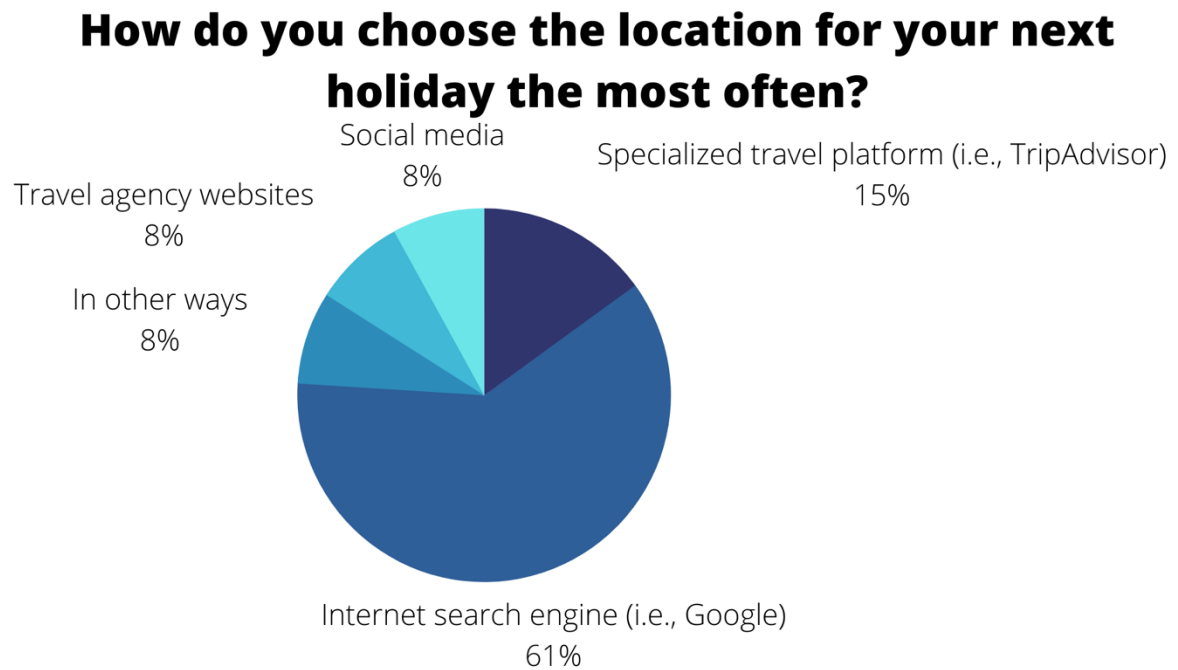### How do you choose the location for your next holiday the most often?

Figure 5: Frequent methods of choosing a holiday type (Source: Steinerová, 2020)

When travelling to a new place, do you usually post about the visit on your social media?
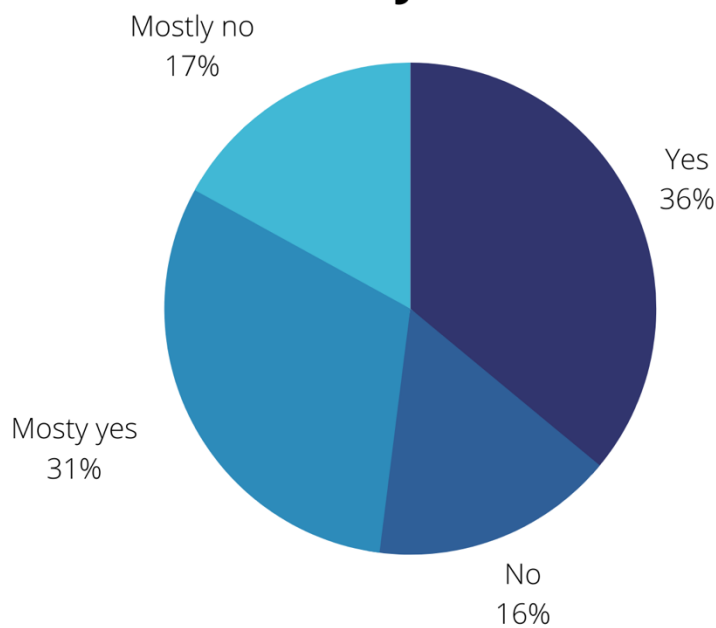

Figure 6: Social media use during a visit (Source: Steinerová, 2020)

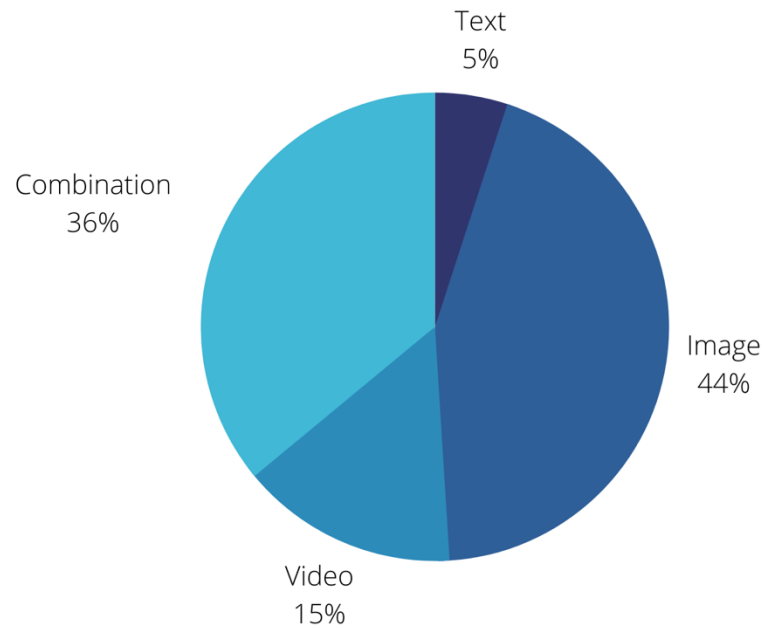## What type of advertisement attracts your attention the most?

Figure 7: Advertisement type effectivity (Steinerová, 2020)
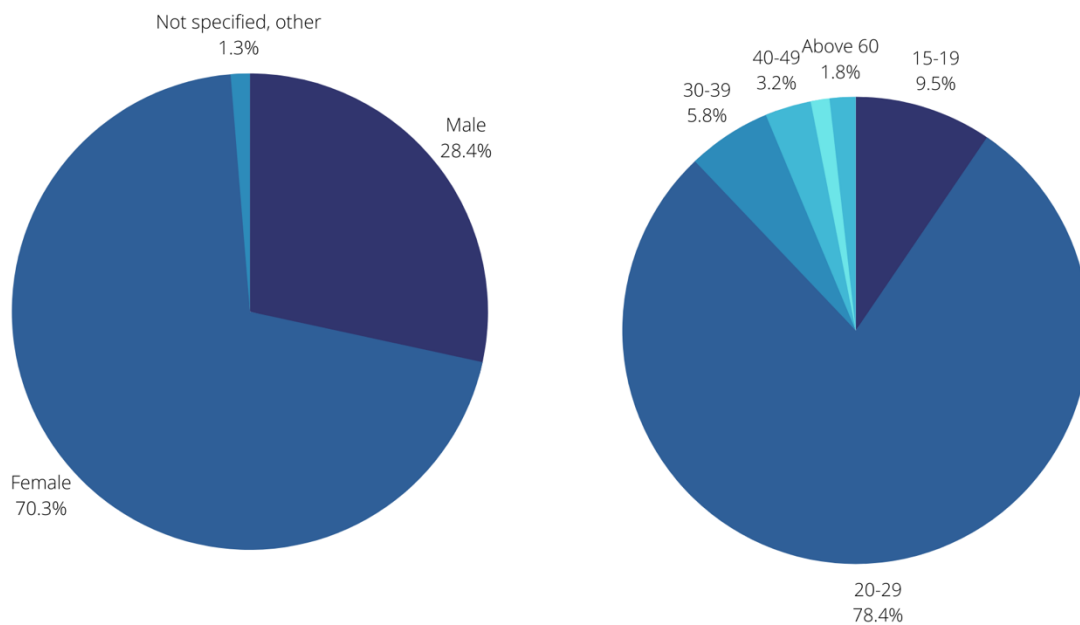
Questionnaire demographic

Figure 8: Questionnaire demographic (Source: Steinerová, 2020)

Univerzita Hradec Králové
Fakulta informatiky a managementu

Zadání bakalářské práce

Autor: **Blanka Steinerová**

Studium: I1800273

Studijní program: B6208 Ekonomika a management

Studijní obor: Management cestovního ruchu

Název bakalářské práce: **Sociální média jako prostředek propagace městského cestovního ruchu**

Název bakalářské práce AJ: Social media as a tool of promoting city tourism

Cíl, metody, literatura, předpoklady:

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá problematikou sociálních médií v propagaci městského cestovního ruchu zpracovanou na případové studii města Kingston upon Hull. Má za cíl zhodnotit současnou úroveň působení města online. Práce poukazuje na rozdíly ve vnímání míry propagace města na sociálních sítích místních obyvatel a návštěvníků a zdůrazňuje důležitost propagace měst na internetu.

This Bachelor thesis intends to describe and map the current policy and approach to the promotion of city tourism in Kingston upon Hull on social media and other online promotional material. It evaluates the city's level of online presence on social media and the awareness of the various activities the city offers among locals and tourists from abroad. It suggests a recommendation on how to improve the city's image on social media and compiles research data beneficial for the University of Hull institution to aid them in promoting the city and the university.

1. Introduction
2. Research aims and objectives
   1. Aims and objectives
   2. Methodology
3. Theoretical part
   1. City tourism
   2. Social media
   3. Social media promotion of city tourism
4. Practical part
   1. Kingston upon Hull
   2. Current level of online promotion
   3. Structured interviews
   4. Questionnaire survey
   5. Research findings and recommendations
5. Conclusion
6. References
7. Appendices

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