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Travel vloggers as a source of information about tourist destinations

Abstract

Travel vlogger is a relatively new phenomenon that appeared around 2016. These are travellers who share their experiences in a video format, mostly on YouTube. Whereas their motives for sharing content might be out of self-interest - in reality they market the destinations they are in, drawing attention to new potential destinations for the viewer.

The aim of this study is to examine the relevance of travel vloggers as a tourist research method. More specifically regarding tourists visiting Georgia, if travel vloggers are being used before departure, if it influences the tourists' perception of Georgia and what they want to experience when they visit. The study also intends to examine what travel vloggers show in their videos of Georgia. To analyze the results theories regarding guided tourism, cognitive distance and youth tourism will be used.

The results indicate that travel vloggers are established as a tourist research method and that it does affect what tourists want to experience when they visit. It also shows that what travel vloggers show what is considered not typical tourist attractions, differentiating them from more traditional means of research. The result could also be linked with the theories regarding guided- and youth tourism, however not with cognitive distance.

Keywords: *Travel Vloggers, tourism information source, destination information, destination marketing, marketing tool, YouTube, social media*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The tourist industry is one of the industries that is growing in many parts of the world, and an important precondition for travel is the access to information. Before information was much more limited. Historically as maps were less developed, people - even armies - would rely on local guides for navigation help. It wasn't even until the scramble for Africa that Africa was fully mapped (University of Illinois, 2007). On an individual level, people tend to have a "mental obstacle" to travel to unknown places. This mental obstacle can be expressed in different ways, for example fear for personal safety or even dislike of different people/cultures. To counter this people use information to prepare for their journey, this is especially important when travelling for the first time, and the further the distance – tourists are more likely to use tourist information sources (Zillinger, 2007). This source of information was historically explorers who paved the way for people to change their view of a place. They would go to places and share their experiences, either writing about it or sharing it directly with people. People would hear or read stories about distant places they had been to, changing their perception of the place. These stories would in reality function as a sort of guidebook. Another obstacle was (and still is in many places) language. Previously access to education was also more limited, and there was no common world lingua franca like English is today. So when people travelled to new places, they relied more heavily on guides who spoke a common language for information and introduction to the destination.

Following explorers and with the technological and social benefits of the industrial revolution another important thing happened, the evolution of the travel agencies. While also providing information like explorers and guides, travel agencies could also organize the trips for the traveller, making it more convenient. They would also have resources to explore and research the destination, build contact networks and ability to bundle prices that most individual travellers didn't have. Because of this, they became very relevant for tourists who wanted to travel, further increasing tourism. A good example is that already in the year 1845 the travel agency Thomas Cook arranged travel for 165 000 people (Phocuswire, 2013). With the growing tourism industry, governments also started initiating governmental and municipal tourism boards who aimed at developing and marketing the destinations. These could operate as a social network for business, a helping hand, a knowledge bank and invested in things specifically to benefit the tourism industry. Eventually events also grew more common - and international - with music festivals as an example.

In the 1990:s another revolution came about with the spread and commercialization of the internet. As the scale and extent for usage grew over time any person with access to the internet could access vast sources of information. By simply typing a few words into Google, you could find information about almost anything, and databases like Wikipedia were established. Businesses moved over to the new digital platforms, and so did the airlines, travel agencies and governmental tourism boards. With this shift, came new businesses opportunities. Meta search engines like Booking.com and Skyscanner launched, with a new business model, based on commissions and advertisement. Review sites such as TripAdvisor also emerged, that enabled people to publically share and review their experiences. All these new type of businesses gave the customer access to more information as it combined it into one place, but it also gave the customer much better basis on which to make a decision. Google Maps also opened up the world

in a new way, now you could go and get a street view of a vast amount of places in the world, with individuals being able to upload their own photos as well. People started their own bloggs sharing their experiences about their travels. Social media, for example Facebook and Instagram grew where people could also share their experiences. YouTuber also became a new visual platform for businesses and destinations to market themselves in a video format. But also for individuals to share their experiences/interests about anything from cooking to musical performances, and even something as simple as walking down a street with a camera, just showing what the street looks like. YouTube also became a means of making a living, where the content producer would get paid by YouTube based on what kind and how many viewers a video has.

Another important thing that happened was the creation of support sites, like Patreon. A site where individuals can choose to freely donate money to their favorite content producers through a subscription fee. This fee could be a fixed amount or chosen by the subscriber or a fee per episode (Patreon, 2020). This extra revenue stream made it easier for content producers to support themselves, and also to take risks, such as leaving their jobs to try a new career as YouTuber.

Then a new phenomenon appeared – travel vloggers. It's hard to find sources indicating exactly when they began to increase in numbers, but searching in YouTube indicates that it was around 2016. This was similar to a blogg, but it was in a video format, mainly on YouTube. Tourists would start filming themselves, what they did and experiences during their travells and then share it on social media (again, mainly YouTube). Although these tourists might have started sharing their videos out of personal interests, seeing the potential to make money from YouTubes monetization and possible Patreon subscribers to fund their future travells – what happens in reality is that they act as a form of destination marketer. They promote the location, show what there is to experience and do it with their personal opinions, making them appear less business orientated. They also show things that travel agencies and governmental boards don't. They tend to interact more with the locals, they show both the good – and the bad, the nice areas – and the poor "unattractive" areas. They also go to less visited places, having the same function like past time explorers – breaking down barriers. They show – with video – that places often tend to be different than portrayed in media, for example that it is safer to visit than the general consensus might suggest. Being such a new form of media, there hasn't been much (if any) research done as their relevance as a tourist source of information.

1.3 Problem definition

Change is constant, and with change comes new circumstances on which to operate. No matter in what area, evolution, politics, business, technology – the ability to adapt to new situations is key to surviving and thriving. There are countless examples when there has been a failure to adapt, where it has meant the end. In business for example the record labels in the music industry is a good example, which failed to adapt to the technological advances of digitalization and torrenting and streaming. A very recent – still noticeable today - example in politics is the fall of the Soviet Union, as a consequence of a failed economical structure, lack of democracy, lack of self determination and corruption among other things.

With the technological advances of the internet, the tourism industry also changed. Travel agencies had a new platform to market themselves, but also to compete with others. Travel agencies who adapted fast were given an edge, while those who didn't disfavored themselves. Today, the relevance of travel agencies is less than what it used to be, and it seems that the trend is continuing downwards. The most recent example being the bankruptcy of the travel agency company Thomas Cook in 2019. With the spread of the internet and new technologies came great opportunities, but also great challenges. How do travel agencies, governmental tourism bodies etc. stay relevant when customers can very easily – for free - access a great deal of information themselves and compare alternatives through meta search and review sites. How do they keep their jobs? Are their jobs still needed? Or do they need to create new jobs to stay relevant?

A problem with change is that it's hard to know what it around the corner, especially when it's a big change. Vlogging is a new form of marketing, and as such there has been very little (if any) research done about their relevance as a tourist research method. This also makes it hard to know whether it's something that is important for a destinations and businesses to develop. Is it a big risk with little reward? Or is it a small risk with potentially great reward?

As businesses in general focus more on branding, products and services have tended to become more personalized, selling a lifestyle rather than a service or product. A noticeable example being Oatly, who claims that there is a "post milk generation" they are contributing to (Oatly, 2020). Vlogging can be seen as a much more personalized form of marketing than running ads or promotions. The success of a Vlogger is much heavier emphasized on their personality, rather than the product content in the videos they deliver – in comparison to travel agencies, as they show their emotions and share their personal opinions.

A notable thing for travel Vloggers is they also go to less discovered destinations, for example Georgia. When they market new destinations, those new destinations have more potential tourists coming there. This means that the competition for potential customers between destinations has been given a new platform. Because tourists sometimes change one destination for another, destinations need to maximize their efforts to retain their customers – and to generate new ones. As Georgia is - at least from a westerners point of view – a less popular tourist destination, vloggers could be a good tool to spread knowledge about the country. However as it's unclear whether or not there has been research done regarding their relevance as a tourist source of information, it's hard to know how important they are, making this study more relevant.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relevance of travel vloggers as a source of information about Georgia as a tourist destination. If the videos are of relevance for the tourists coming to visit, what they want to experience and if the relevance varies depending on origin, age and gender. The purpose is also to analyze what content is shown in vloggs of Georgia on YouTube. The purpose can be summarized in three main questions:

- What do travel vloggers producing content in Georgia typically show in their videos?
- Do vloggers have an impact on tourists' decision to visit Georgia?
- Do vloggers have an impact on what tourists want to experience in Georgia?

2. Theories, concepts and previous studies

In this part theories, concepts and previous studies will be presented which has been used to give a theoretical insight on the subject, and also to give an understanding of how this study contributes to the subject. These theories will later be used to analyze the result. These are guided tourism, cognitive distances, youth tourism and previous studies regarding vloggers in other areas will also be presented.

2.1 Guided tourism

The tourism system consists of three parts, the traveller generating region, the transit route region and the tourist destination region (Leiper 1990, from Zillinger 2007). As tourists live in the traveller generating region, this is where they usually do their research before they travel to the tourist destination. The traveller generating region is also where tourist organizations market themselves and promote their destinations. Factors such as personal preferences, past experiences and motivations will affect how they receive information and ultimately make their decisions. This means that it is not only the destination that affects how tourists make their decisions, but also the region that they live in. (Zillinger, 2007)

How tourists make their decisions where to go and how they behave in the tourist destination is also much dependent on access to information (Zillinger, 2007). When planning holidays, tourists also want to minimize risks and insecurity (Fodness & Murray, 1997). Doing research is a way to prepare for the journey and is especially important when travelling to a place for the first time (Zillinger, 2007). The most important sources of information is friends and family, guidebooks, media and travel consultants, however usually different sources of information is used for researching the same trip. (Snepenger & Snepenger, 1993 from Zillinger, 2007)

Distance also affects the amount of research done before a journey. The further away the destination is, the more likely tourists are to research their destination. (Zillinger, 2007) Also, younger and more educated people tend to do more of their research on sight (Richards, 2002).

A study done by Zillinger (2007) also showed that using tourist information increased the amount of planning done before departure. It also increased the amount of activities tourists participated in on sight, the most influential being guidebooks.

2.2 Cognitive distance

Cognitive distance, or subjective distance - is a measure of distance not of physical distance or time, but rather a combined measure of factors such as knowledge of the place, political-cultural- and religious differences as well as personal experiences combined with physical distance and distance in time. Cognitive distances affect our movement patters in our daily lives, and may sometimes explain where we choose to spend our holiday better than physical distances. (Bailly, 1986)

Because of the complexity and variations of the different environments we live in, to gain a complete understanding of our decision making our feelings must be taken into consideration (Golledge and Rayner, 1982). As cognitive distance is a summary of many different factors, it

means that different people can have different perceptions of the same place (Cadwallader, 1979).

Spatial information is categorized as being part of different hierarchies or regions in our brain, for example countries (Stevens and Coupe 1978, from Ankomah & Crompton 1992). In 1986 a study was conducted by McNamara that showed that people underestimate distance between objects in the same region and overestimates distance between objects in different regions (from Ankomah & Crompton 1992). Another study required participants to estimate distances between objects in a room from memory. The results showed that distances between objects that had some form of barrier places in between them tended to be overestimated. (Kosslyn, Pick & Fariello, 1974)

The availability of information can have an effect on this, and we tend to (subconsiously) divide locations in locations of ignorance, desireable- and preffered locations. A study showed that people living in Inverness in northern Scotland viewed cities in southern England as more preferential places to live than any other place in England, even though many other cities in central of northern England would be more similar to Inverness. The study concluded that this was likely a result of media exposure, as British media is predominantly based in southern England. (Gould & White 1986, from Ankomah & Crompton 1992)

Lee (1973, from Ankomah & Crompton 1992) also reported that people tend to underestimate distances from a reference point to the city center, while overestimating the distance from the city center to a reference point. He suggested it was a result of respondents perceiving the city center as more attractive than the periphery.

2.3 Youth tourism

The World Tourism Organization generally defines travels by young people aged 15-29 as youth tourism. In 1995 the European Travel Commission published a study covering 26 countries (ATI, 1995 from Novelli, 2005) that showed that people aged 15-26 represented a fifth of all international trips and a quarter of all holiday travel. Youth travel is also focused on less traditional tourism, such as the four S's (Sellars, 1998). Novelli (2005) argues that student travelers is a segment with significant growing demands calling for a change in infrastructure, such as accommodating for more youth niche markets, such as music, adventure och volunteer tourism.

In 2002 a survey was conducted by the International Student Travel Confederation showing that students didn't prefer to see themselves as tourists, but rather backpackers or travellers. Their main reasons for travel were "to explore other cultures", excitement" and "increasing knowledge". The study also showed that the average trip usually included at least two countries, and the longer the trip the more countries they visited. The average trip being 60 days and 74 days for backpackers. For those who defined themselves as backpackers regions such as South East Asia, Australasia and South America were most common. They also had the highest average of total money spent per trip with 2200 USD. The most common source of information while planning the trip was internet with 71 %. Guidebooks was used by 37 % as the main research method, however backpackers used guidebooks more than other groups, and was used as the

main research method 46 % while in the destination. Backpackers were also more likely to use specialist travel agencies, rather than mainstream ones. (Richards & Wilson, 2003)

2.4 Vloggers

Searching in the library my university have access to, and I have not been able to find any previous studies regarding travel vlogger specifically, previous studies regarding vloggers in other areas such as fashion has shown a number of notable things. Choi and Lee (2019) talk about how travel vloggers communicate with audiences in the same ways as celebrities, but since they are considered everyday people they have the same role as a friend or acquaintance of the viewer. As such the relationship between the vlogger and viewer can be seen as virtual friendship, a para-social interaction – relationship between audience and media. Rubin (1985) argues that if interactive relationship persists the media side will be considered a more reliable source of information.

Lee and Watkins (2016) also argue that because vloggers upload personal content they have increased attraction to themselves and are therefore today "opinion leaders or important information sources on social media". Further Safko (2010) says that vlogging is an effective way of communicating because the viewer can notice body language, emotions and tone. Intention for sharing content also affects the audience's attitude, and if the audience has a positive attitude regarding the intention the content will be more likely to be exposed in media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

A study conducted by Hill, Troshani & Chandrasekar (2020) showed that vlogging has more effect on the customer regarding experience products (book or wine) which is the category that tourism would fit in to, rather than search products (computer or TV). It also showed that the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the vlogger was influenced by the amount of viewers and subscribers.

3. Method

3.1 Research method

I came up with the idea to study this subject after I had watched a travel Vlogger and realized that I after wanted to go to that location more than before. Hence before the study began I had an assumption about the expected outcomes, based on my subjective experience. In that sense the research approach in study is a deductive one. (Research Methodology, 2019)

For this study I have used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative part of the study was made through thematical analysis in order to find out what questions would be relevant for the survey this study is based on. I choose to do the thematical analysis because I wanted my questions to be as relevant and meaningful as possible. Thematic analyzes are good when you want to identify, analyze and find patterns in the empiric material (Braune & Clarke, 2008), as such it was a good way to understand what was needed for the survey. The second part – the main part of the study – is based on a quantitative method – an internet based survey. I choose this method because I wanted as big an outreach as possible, and for this a survey was my best choice. I wanted as big an outreach as possible because this type of study hasn't been conducted earlier to my knowledge, as thus I want an overview of the situation. The alternative, a qualitative method, for example interviews, would have been an interesting opportunity to get a

deeper understanding of how people view travel vloggers. However as my study has a time constraint of ten weeks, it would be problematic since it does require a lot more time because of the complexity linking all the answers together. Also I consider an overview of the topic a more valuable piece of information, considering as I mentioned at I don't know whether previous studies has been done.

The first step was to choose what study area I wanted my study to be about. As I couldn't find any previous study about this subject there was an open field of angels and target groups for me to choose from. Before I made my choice I considered what sample group would be interesting to study. However first I had to choose what subject or what country I wanted to study. I wanted to study a country that is generally less visited and seen as a less popular tourist destination (at least through a westeners point of view). As travel vloggers often go to less visited countries there were many to choose from, but in the end I chose to conduct the study about Georgia. It is a small country that many people outside the former USSR presumably have little knowledge about. I therefore saw it as an interesting opportunity to see if it has benefited by being shown in the travel vloggs.

Next step was to analyze what content travel vloggers show in their videos of Georgia. For this, I observerd 72 videos from nine different YouTubers, these were *bald and bankrupt, Kara and Nate, Drew Binsky, Tolt around the world, Gabriel Traveler, Indigo Traveller, Way away, Travelling beard* and *Flying to world*. Together these videos amounted to more than 20 million views as of March 2020. These YouTubers combine for close to six million subscribers as well. The content of the video was categorized thematically, with nine main categories, these were: urban areas, transportation, socializing with locals, culture, border crossing, historic sight, promotion video, other and accommodation. This was then further divided into sub categories which will be presented in the results. I watched the videos and categorized what was shown, then I wrote down the amount of views that video had. I then did this for all the videos and then added up the number of views for each category and sub category. This result shows how many views a certain topic has, and how many times a category was featured in the videos. I choose to do it this way because I would rather focus on the result in terms of views as I think it's a better indication of what the viewer wants to see, rather than what the content producer wants to produce. Of course, there is a problem here as well, since the amount of views travel vloggers get also is much dependent on their personalities and regular viewers who might not be particularly interested in a specific topic. However in the end I still decided that this was the best way to do it as I think it gives a better indication of what it more appreciated to see. My results also doesn't show how big a part of the videos is focused on specific topics, just if it is featured or not. I choose to do it this way because of the difficulty of measuring it that way. For example there might be a part of a video where they eat, and at the same time talk about how to rent a car, then later they drive a car and talk about food and restaurants. How to categorize this might not be so clear. Also this would be much more time consuming, time which I simply don't have in the given timeframe for this study.

Next step was to create a survey, based on the results of my observations. Surveys as a research method is more or less valuable depending on the subject studied and the purpose of the study. The purpose of the survey however is to collect information which then can be further analyzed (Denscombe, 2018). For this, it is important that the survey is clear in it's purpose so that the

respondents can understand the questions and the reason behind them. Surveys are also a good method of choice for time constraints and limited resources. My original plan was to conduct the survey in situ, however due to the situation with COVID-19 I choose to conduct my survey online. Conducting the survey online made it harder for me to target specific groups, as I couldn't control who participated. Another problem with online surveys is that it increases the risk of coverage errors (Toepoel, 2016), as everyone might not be represented as they might not use the platform where the survey is, in this case Facebook. However during the current circumstances I saw it as a good backup plan since these days most international travellers have access to the internet and use social media.

The survey was created with Google Docs. Google Docs can be used for many different purposes, documents, powerpoints etc and hence I used Google Docs because of it's familiarity – both for myself and for many others. It was also free for me to use, and summarized the answers for me in a convenient way (Google, 2020). Google Docs also enables respondents to participate anonymously, which makes is more convenient and less of a barrier for them. It also made it easier and more convenient for me to convince people to participate. Google also has a good reputation as a secure site where the information will remain safe.

Important to consider was the length of the survey. It's important that there isn't too many questions so that it's not off-putting to start or continue with the survey (Denscombe, 2018). It's also important that the questions aren't too long and complicated. It was a challenge to decide how many questions to include, and how to formulate them, since depending on how you formulate the questions you get the result from different angels. Another thing was to consider what information would actually be relevant to me, some questions might be of interest for me personally, or for other purposes – but might not be valuable for the purpose of this paper. Questions of this sort had to be removed. There was one question included however that wasn't directly relevant for the result I decided to include anyway because I noticed that some people I had spoken to had watched travel vloggers without even realizing it, thus that question would serve as a reminder. The survey ended up consisting of 17 questions, with an option at the end to add any comment in regards to the questions. It was a mix of yes/no-, multiple option- and multiple answer questions.

3.2 Study sample

I wanted to study a group that I thought could show some results, and where it felt natural this study would be relevant. Therefore I wanted to conduct the study focusing on a group that uses internet and YouTuber in particular more often. Another criteria for me was that the respondents were in Georgia at the time of the survey, as this would be a better indication of actual results, rather than "future maybes" if I chose to include people who hadn't been to Georgia. I therefore chose international backpackers staying at hostels as my sample group. However as the COVID-19 situation evolved I chose to conduct my survey online. This meant that it would be much harder for me to specifically find backpackers to participate in my study, and hence I decided that anyone could participate– as long as they stated they had been to or were in Georgia at the time.

To find the relevant people to participate in my study – tourists who had actually been to Georgia I published my survey on all Georgia travel related sites I could find that had at least 1000 likes

on Facebook, these were: *Wow Batumi, Spend 4 Season in Georgia(two sites with same name), Georgia tours, Advantour Caucasus, Tbilisi Travel, Embassy of Georgia to Sweden, Embassy of Sweden in Tbilisi, Tbilisi Free Walking Tours, Georgian Journal, Travel in Georgia, Car Rent With Driver, Vacation in GEORGIA, Georgia & South Caucasus, Foreigners living in Georgia, Welcome to Georgia, Georgian Wanderers, VisitGeorgia* and five other sites that are now not accessible.

It was also published in groups for foreigners in Georgia, second hand sites etc. I also published my survey as a comment on other Georgian newspaper websites. A good thing about my method is it ensured everyone who participated were not individually selected. However I still had to make sure that I got replies from the right people, and for the right people to answer the right questions. For this I divided the survey into sections, so if a person said they had never been to Georgia – they cannot proceed to the next section. Also, if a person said they didn't watch travel Vloggs before they went to Georgia they couldn't proceed to the next section, as these questions would be irrelevant to them. For the first section I had 136 valid replies, second 41 and third 36. It was also mandatory to fill out country of origin, which made it possible for me to delete answers from Georgians, as some decided to participate even though I stated they shouldn't.

3.3 Survey questions

To see the full survey see the appendix where the link to the survey is.

Before the respondents started to reply to the actual questions of the survey they were asked to fill in their country of origin, age and gender. From there the survey was divided into two main parts. Part one included a number of yes/no, multiple option- and multiple answer questions. The first questions were multiple answer questions about what methods the tourists use when they research their destination, the multiple answer was needed as most people use multiple different ways of research, and don't just rely on one source. These questions were:

1. When I research my tourist destinations I use
2. I use social media when I research my tourist destination

The next two questions were regarding frequency.

3. I use YouTube when I research my tourist destination
4. I watch Travel Vloggers / Travel YouTubers for inspiration about destinations I want to travel to

For question 3. and 4. I decided to use a multiple option as the answer would be somewhere on a continuum where they could chose just one. The question provided six different reply options:

Never | Not so often | Sometimes | Often | Very often | Always

I also included a question which is not of great value for the results themselves, however it server as a reminder to people who might have watched travel vloggers without realizing it, or have forgotten that they did.

5. I've watched videos from these Travel Vloggers / Travel YouTubers

For question 5. The respondents were given multiple options to choose from. The travel vloggers listed were the nine I had analyzed, so I knew they videos in Georgia.

Part one ended with:

6. I have been to Georgia / I am in Georgia

This was a yes or no question. If they replied no to this question they did not continue to the remaining questions and instead submitted the form.

Part two of the survey was focused on the relevance of travel vloggers. Question seven and eight were yes or no questions. To continue to question eight they had to answer yes to question seven, and to continue to question nine they had to answer yes to question eight. Like with question six, if they answered no they were instead given the option to submit the form.

7. I watched Travel Vloggers / Travel YouTubers about Georgia before my visit in Georgia
8. Watching Travel Vloggs made me more interested in visiting Georgia

The rest of the questions were a mix of yes or no and multiple option questions. The yes or no questions were:

9. It made me feel more safe about visiting Georgia
13. It made me more interested in exploring the Caucasus mountains
14. It also made me more interested in hiking in the mountains
17. I've recommended my friends to watch Travel Vloggers / Travel YouTubers

The rest of the questions were multiple option questions, these were:

10. It made me more interested in urban areas in Georgia
11. It made me more interested in historic sights in Georgia
12. It made me more interested in Georgian culture
15. It made me feel more prepared for transportation with
16. It gave me a good understanding of

Finally in the they were given the option add a comment about anything related to the questions.

3.4 Analysis

To analyze the relevance of travel vloggers the respondents were divided into different groups dependent on origin, these groups were: western Europe, eastern Europe & former USSR republics, distant western countries, middle east & Africa and east & south east Asia. They were also divided by age, these groups were: 18-30 and 36+ for question four, and 18-30, 31-45 and 46+ for question seven. I chose to divide the age groups this way since some age groups gave very similar responses. I also considered it easier to view and keep track of the results if there

were fewer age groups. The results were also divided by gender to see if there as any difference in that regard. To present my results I mainly used diagrams and tables as I think it is an effective and easy visual way to present and understand the results.

3.5 Limitations

The study was conducted over a ten week period hence I had to limit the study to fit in the given timeframe. Another issue was the COVID-19 situation which also put further limitations and made me change my approach. I had to focus on the most relevant topics and target groups. I chose to publish my survey in groups on social media that were all related to Georgia. Most of them were either travel / tourist groups, or groups for foreigners living in Georgia. But some of them were also second hand sites, newspapers etc. Where I couldn't publish it on the main page I commented on the most recent posts. Due to the time constraint, and to the limited amount of Georgia related travel groups on social media it confined my ability to get more replies. With a larger amount of respondents the reliability of the results would have been higher, especially for part two of the survey which had significantly less respondents. Another interesting aspect would be to see how the vloggs affect the average viewer, including those who haven't been to Georgia. A good way to research this would be in cooperation with the vloggers so they could encourage their followers to participate in the survey. I did reach out to all the vloggers I analyzed, however it didn't result in any cooperation. Perhaps with more time this could be achieved.

Another thing I originally considered was to conduct interviews with representatives from travel agencies, governmental boards, tourists and also travel vloggers themselves. This would have been interesting to get a deeper understanding of all the different perspectives. However again due to the time constraints I decided to not do this, as a project like that would have been big enough by itself to need all my focus. Hopefully someone can conduct this type of study, as a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods leads to a better understanding of the subject.

It's important to understand that depending on what group you choose to analyze, the results vary (Denscombe, 2018). For this study it is likely that the results would have been different had the survey been conducted in situ with backpackers in Georgia, as backpackers generally are younger than what my respondents ended up being. Younger people generally use internet and social media more than older people which also would have an impact here. Older people also tend to pay more for information (for example through travel agencies or guides) as they have more recourses.

3.6 Reliability

The term reliability describes how reliable the results are. Higher probability means it's more likely that the results would be the same if someone else conducted the study.

When conducting a survey online there is always a possibility that you get fake or invalid answers. To avoid this I only published in groups that were relevant for Georgia, and I made sure that what questions the respondents were asked was based on their previous answers. I did also remove 20 responses as they were from respondents who reported they either hadn't been to Georgia, or were Georgians.

As to how representative this study is, this study should be seen as a pilot for future studies. As the sample size is only 136 for part one and 41/36 for part two, there is limitations on how much one can generalize the results, especially for part two. Considering how many people visit Georgia every year, and that millions of people watch travel vloggers, this study would be more representative if it had a bigger sample size (Kvale, Brinkman & Torhel, 2014).

Another thing that needs consideration is that is the difficulty of knowing what is more important, wheter it's the content itself – what is being showed, or rather the personality of the travel vlogger. The success of the vlogger does not only depend on their ability to show the right (desired) content, but also is heavily dependent on their personality, editing skills and so forth. There are many videos from other vloggers that show similar content to the videos I analyzed, yet they had very few views. Even amongst the vloggers I analyzed some of their videos had very few views, a good example being Kara and Nate who had over five million views, but one of their videos alone had over four million views. Another example being Tolt around the world, who generated around 1,3 million views, and one of his videos had 1,18 million views. This means that if a study like this is conducted in a different country the results might be different if different vloggers created the vloggs.

3.7 Validity

The term validity describes whether the study achieves it's purpose or not. The purpose of this study was to find out travel vloggers' relevance as a tourist research method. Considering that there has been no previous study done on the subject, it's hard to know whether or not these results are accurate, since there are no previous reference points. Also because of the small sample size. The original plan was to conduct the study in situ with backpackers in Georgia because of the COVID-19 situation this wasn't possible. However I do consider that I did achieve my purpose, as I shaped the survey so there wouldn't be any invalid/fake answers, posted it only in groups relevant to Georgia and had a big enough sample size for at least part one of the survey to be able to make some generalizations. At the same time I hope that in the future there will be further studies conducted on the subject to give a better and more accurate understanding.

3.8 Ethic considerations

For this study there were no major ethic considerations as the subject is uncontroversial in itself. Neither did I include any controversial questions, and didn't ask for any opinions on controversial subjects, such as disputed territories in Georgia, rather I just asked if they were more interested in the subject after watching travel vloggers. I also felt obligated to make sure all survey answers were anonymous, which was done. It's important for people to feel safe in order for them to share their personal opinions about something (Denscombe, 2018). Both in my posts and comments I introduced myself as a student writing my dissertation, explained the purpose of the study and that it would be completely anonymous. The purpose was again reiterated on the first page on the survey. There was however comments on my post whether or not the survey was for research for university or market research, which I then had to explain the situation in more detail.

3.9 Method discussion

Using the web based survey made way for me to quickly get my responses. It was also very smooth considering the limitations of the COVID-19 situation. As mentioned previously adding interviews to research this subject would likely provide a better understanding and more accurate results (Hay, 2017). However the scope of the project would have been to big for the given timeframe. Using the survey allowed me to get an overview of the relevance of vloggers. I could have also included questions regarding more direct motives for watching travel vloggers, if it is mainly for entertainment or as destination research. Also questions relating to motives of travel, if they consider themselves tourists, backpackers or travellers. This was however something I didn't think of until I started analyzing the results. This might however be more suitable for an interview study.

4. Study area

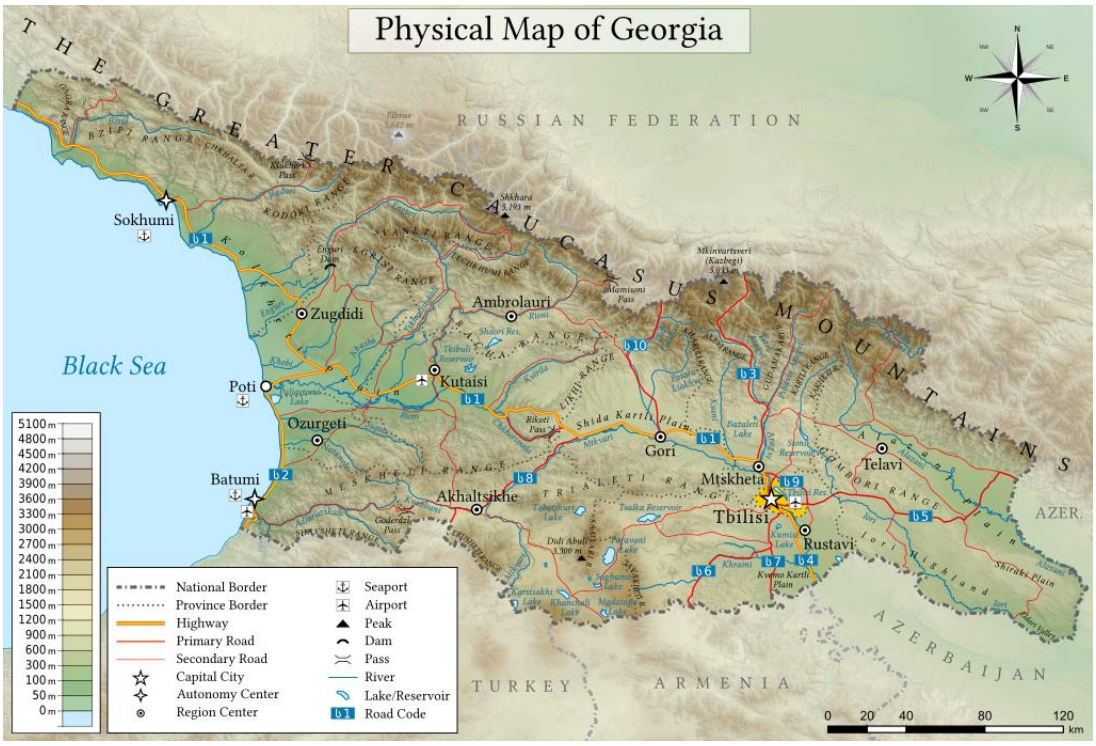

Figure 1. Physical map of Georgia

Georgia is a small mountainous country located in the Caucasus mountain range between Russia and Turkey. It was the second country in the world to adapt Christianity as the state religion and religion still has an important influence in both personal and societal context. During history it has been conquered by big empires, such as Roman, Mongol and Persian empires. More recently, in the 19th century, whilst being a part of the Ottoman empire, a war broke out between the Ottomans and the Russians resulting in the incorporation of Georgia into the Russian Empire. Then, during the first world war as the October revolution broke out in Russia in 1917, Georgia declared its independence. However the independence was short lived and in 1921 the red army invaded and Georgia was incorporated into the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Union dissolved, Georgia again became an independent state in 1991. Tough it remained under Russian influence

until 2003 when the current president was deposed in the rose revolution and the country started orienting itself towards the west and the EU. In 2008 following a Russian invasion, two de facto sovereign states were created, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These states are however still today considered de jour part of Georgia by majority of the international community.

Today the geopolitical situation of the country is interesting for a few reasons. First, within the de jour borders of Georgia there are two de facto independent states, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As mentioned this was a result of Russian intervention in the area. The relationship with Russia is an interesting one because despite the conflict, it remains Georgia's largest trading partner. The other biggest trading partner is Turkey, and as a result of the Syria conflict, the relationship between Russia and Turkey (NATO member) has worsened significantly, which makes Georgia's localization potentially problematic. Another reason is the pipeline from Azerbaijan going through Georgia to be exported to the EU and USA, which means they also have their own interests in the region. Another is their relationship with Armenia, which has closed borders with both Turkey and Azerbaijan, and having just a tiny open border with Iran. This means that they are greatly reliant on Georgia for imports.

Regarding tourism Georgia was a major tourist location for soviet citizens during the soviet era. It had many ski resorts and sanatoriums, being famous for its cuisine, wine and hospitality. Following their independence there was a period of instability and the tourism industry suffered. Today however the tourism industry is growing (Geostat, 2020a). As it's no longer behind the iron curtain, as the country has stabilized, it's much more accessible for tourists. This can clearly be seen when looking at who visits Georgia. In 2015, 77 % of the inbound visits were from the neighboring countries Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia, while 4,7 % were from EU countries and 4,7 % were from other countries. In 2019 those numbers had been remarkably changed in such a short time, with 67, 6 % coming from the neighboring countries, and 7,3 from EU countries and 10 % coming from other countries. (Geostat, 2020b) It is still today however perceived as more exotic and even unsafe by some.

5. Result

5.1 What does travel vloggers show?

All results will be presented and referred to in the appendix. In the table will be shown the category, number of views the videos showing that category amounted to and also how many times this category appeared in any of the videos. These numbers were as of March 2020.

5.1.1 Summary of categories

I'll start by presenting the summary of categories (table 1 & figure 2). The most popular category by views was urban areas with 12 137 000 views and 24 %, followed by transportation with 11 507 000 views and 23 %. These were also the most popular by appearances with 48 and 49 respectively. Lower in appearances were socializing with locals and border crossings, however they were significantly overrepresented in terms of views, with 6 331 000 views and 11 % for socializing with locals and 4 558 000 and 9 % for border crossings. Though it should be noted that one of the videos for border crossings had over four million views by itself. The least popular category was accommodation with 916 000 views and 2 %.

5.1.2 Urban areas

Next we'll look at urban areas (table 2 & figure 3). Most popular by views was videos featuring Kutaisi and Chiatura with 2 250 000 and 33 % as well as 2 136 000 and 31 % respectively. Kutaisi was also the most overrepresented with four appearances. It should be noted however that one of the videos had 2 110 000 views by itself, this was bald and bankrupt walking outside the bus station in Kutaisi. Chiatura was the most featured town being featured seven times and everyone who went to there went to ride the old soviet cable cars. Tbilisi (the capital) was featured 18 times for 1 486 000 views and 22 %. Batumi was the most featured city outside the capital, appearing eight times. The most popular village was Sachkhere with 109 000 views and the most featured village was Signagi, appearing two times. The least featured and viewed towns were Bordzjomi with 24 000 views and Akhaltsikhe with 18 000 views. Least viewed villages were Ushguli and Mestia with 32 000 and 51 000 views respectively.

5.1.3 Transportation

The third most popular category was transportation (table 3 & figure 4). The most viewed category with great margin was train with 4 092 000 views and 36 %. It was only featured one time, and it should be noted that was the border crossing video from Georgia – Azerbaijan, same one as mentioned before. Also only featured one time but heavily over represented was bus station with 2 110 000 views and 18 %. This was bald and bankrupt giving a small tour of the bus station in Kutaisi, something he has done in other countries as well. The most featured were bus rides and road trips, being featured 15 and 17 times for 2 679 000 views and 23 % and 1 085 000 views and 9 % each. Least viewed, and most underrepresented category was hitchhiking with 217 000 views and 5 appearances.

5.1.4 Socializing with locals

As mentioned before socializing with locals was the second most featured category (table 4 & figure 5). Within the category the most overrepresented in socializing with refugees (Abkhazian) with two appearances and 1 800 000 views and 28 %, this was done by bald and bankrupt who has a niche for exploring abandoned places, where is this case the refugees lived. Socializing with locals is the most featured with eight and most viewed with 4 161 000 views and 66 %. Least featured and watched is "tells a locals story" being featured only one time with 370 000 views for 6 %. This video was done by Drew Binsky, he is the only one creating videos with this concept out of the vloggers I analyzed.

5.1.5 Culture

In the culture sub-category food was by far the most featured category, with all the vloggers bringing up the subject in at least one video (table 5 & figure 6). In total food was featured 26 times for a total of 2 469 000 views and 44 %. Witch doctor was most overrepresented, being featured only one time while getting 1 147 000 views for 20 %. This was also in one of bald and bankrupt's videos as he tends to showcase less typical touristy things (to a further extent than other vloggers). The language video was made by Drew Binsky and he is also the only one of the vloggers I analyzed who creates videos with this concept, a basic introduction to the language, this is something he has done for other languages as well. Least featured was nightlife (1), dance (2) and music (2). These categories also had the least amount of views with 46 000, 32 000 and 26 000 respectively.

5.1.6 Border crossing
As mentioned earlier border crossings is the least featured and most overrepresented category (table 6 & figure 7). The most viewed was Georgia – Azerbaijan with 4 110 000 views and 90 %. One of these (two in total) videos has been referred to earlier as the only train transportation video as well. This video was done by Kara and Nate with the headline "First Class OVERNIGHT TRAIN Georgia To Azerbaijan (scary border crossing)". In the video they explained about the situation between Azerbaijan and Armenia and how going to Azerbaijan after visiting Armenia might affect the border crossing.

5.1.7 Historic sights
For historic sights the most popular was Sanatoriums with 64 % and 2 771 000 views while also being the most overrepresented category (table 7 & figure 8). This was bald and bankrupt going in to three abandoned sanatoriums, where two of them he socialized with Abkhazian refugees. After Sanatoriums the most popular were Kastki pillar with 429 000 views and 10 % as well as castles with 491 000 views and 11 %. Castles were also the most featured category beeing featured eight times. The least viewed categories were vainakh towers with 14 000 views, Stalins birth home with 18 000 views and Uplishte also with 18 000 views, all being featured just once as well.

5.1.8 Promotion video
In the promotion video category the showcase videos were most featured and most viewed with 2 079 000 views for 66 % (table 8 & figure 9). This was more like a commercial rather than a vlogg, with footage typically showing beautiful/interesting scenery and some typical Georgian food. Second most popular was "what does money get you" with 865 000 and 27 %. These are videos where they explain costs of things such as accommodation, transportation and food. Least featured and viewed was experience summary, with only 30 000 views. Here there was no new footage, just the vlogger summarizing the experience in Georgia.

5.1.9 Other
The other sub-category includes that which didn't fall into any of the other main categories (table 9 & figure 10). Here the most featured category was driving in the mountains, being featured 10 times. However it was also the most overrepresented category with 228 000 views for 10 %. The two most popular categories were exploring abandoned hotel with 837 000 views and fishing with 831 000 views for 39 % each. Both these videos were done by bald and bankrupt and the fishing video was done with local fishermen. The least viewed category was hiking in the mountains with 58 000 views for 3 %, being featured only 3 times.

5.1.10 Accommodation
The last sub-category is accommodation (table 10 & figure 11). This means that the vlogger gives a virtual introduction to the accommodation, often also explaining price and booking process. This was featured 16 times for 902 000 views which was 98 % of this category. In one video there was a complaint instead of an introduction, where he explained a problem with the booking process and how it resulted in a bad experience.

5.2 Survey

Here also all results will be referred to in the appendix. The results from the survey will be shown and shown by age, origin and gender.

5.2.1 Sample description

The total number of valid responses for the first part of the survey was 136. There was a slight overrepresentation of women with 78 responses (57.4 %) compared to 58 (42.6 %) responses from men (figure 12). There was 158 responses in total, however 20 were deleted as they reported they either hadn't been to Georgia, or were Georgians.

Looking at the age distribution (figure 13) among respondents we see that the two biggest groups are 26-30 and 18-25 year olds with 34 (25 %) and 28 (20.6 %) responses respectively, combining for 62 and 46.6 % of the responses. From there, there is a gradual decrease in responses by higher age groups, an exception being 46-50 year olds where there was only 5 responses (4 %).

There was responses from a total of 46 different countries (table 11). The biggest group was Germany with 17 responses, followed by UK and USA with 13 each and Russia with 11. Some other noticeable groups in terms of numbers were France with 6 and Australia, Israel, Poland, South Africa and Sweden all with 4 responses each. If dividing by region, there was 53 (39 %) from western Europe, 33 (24 %) from eastern Europe and former USSR republics, 21 (15.5 %) from other western countries such as USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, 13 (9.5 %) from the middle east and north Africa, 10 (6.5 %) from east and south east Asia and 6 (4.5 %) from sub saharan Africa.

For the second part there was 41 responses for question eight and 36 responses for question nine and onwards.

5.2.2 Part 1

Starting of part one of the survey was some background questions regarding what methods the participants use when researching their destination. Question one showed that (figure 14) the most common was "Advice from family and friends" with 62.5 %, closely followed by Google Maps with 61 %. The other two big categories were travel documentaries with 47.1 % and books with 30.9 %. More "traditional/mainstream" ways like travel agencies or travel fairs was used by only 6.6 % and 3.7 % respectively.

Question two was regarding the important of social media. Most common was Facebook with 50.7 % followed by Instagram with 44.1 % (figure 15). The other options, Twitter and Snapchat showed to be irrelevant for the vast majority. 31.6 % also replied that they didn't use social media at all as a research method.

Question three was specifically regarding the use of YouTube as a research method (figure 16). Here 35, 3 % replied that they use YouTube either often 8.1 %, very often - 16.2 % or always - 11 %. The most common answer was sometimes with 27.2 %, and the second most common was not so often with 21.3 %. 16.2 % answered they never use YouTube as a research method. Dividing this by gender, (table 12) we can see that men tend to use YouTube more as a research

method, with 45 % of men saying they use it often, very often or always, compared to 29 % of women.

The replies for question four (figure 17 & table 13) showed that 25.7 % used travel vloggers either often - 8.8 %, very often - 10.3 % or always - 6.6 %. 24.3 % said they use them sometimes, which combined with the previously mentioned categories amount to half of all the respondents. The other half of the respondents answered pretty much equally between not so often – 25.7 % and never – 24.3 %. If we also divide this by gender we see also here that men use travel vloggers more than women, with 29 % of men saying they use it often, very often or always compared to 23 % for women. Looking at the different age categories, we see that 18-35 year olds are the biggest users of travel vloggers, with 29 % saying they use them, compared to people 18 % aged 36 and upwards reporting to use them.

Question seven showed that 30.1 % watched travel vloggs before they visited Georgia (figure 18). 13.2 % answered they weren't sure, while 56.6 % said they didn't watch travel vloggers before their visit. The age group who watched the most before the came was 31-45, with 41 %, followed by 18-30 with 32 % (table 14). Out of people aged 46 and upwards there was significantly fewer who had watched – 13 %. Divided by gender there wasn't any noteworthy difference (table 15). However if we look as the results divided by region (table 16 & 17) we see that the people from east and south east Asia, as well as the middle east and Africa were the ones who had watched the most before their visit, both reporting 45 %. Western Europe and distant western countries with 21 % and 24 % respectively, while 35 % of people from eastern Europe and the former USSR said they had watched before they came.

5.4 Part 2

In part two of the survey all questions were related to travel vloggers in Georgia. The first question (figure 19) showed that 88 % (36) became more interested in visiting Georgia after watching travel vloggs, while it didn't have an effect on 10 % (4). There was also one person who wasn't sure.

Question nine showed that 80.6 % (29) felt more safe about visiting Georgia after seeing travel vloggs, while it didn't have an effect on 13.9 % (5). Also here 5.6 % (2) answered they weren't sure. (figure 20)

In question ten (figure 21) we see that Tbilisi was the urban area that had appealed the most for the viewers, with 77.8 % (28) saying the vloggs made them more interested in this area. Half of the respondents said they became interested in provincial cities like Batumi and Kutaisi, and almost half (47.2 %) said they became more interested in provincial villages. Among the urban areas the least attractive was provincial towns. Four people (11%) also answered they weren't made more interested in urban areas.

Among the historical sights (figure 22) the most popular were Vardzia caves, castles and churches with each around 50 %. The least popular sights were sanatoriums with 13.9 %, while 16.7 % said the videos didn't affect what historic sights they wanted to see.

In the culture category (figure 23) the most popular were food with 86.1 %, wine with 77.8 % and meeting the people with 63.9 %. The least popular were the Abkhazian situation and shamanistic rituals with 16.7 % and 8.3 % respectively.

For the questions regarding the mountains 88.9 % replied they became more interested in exploring the mountains, however only 72.2 % said they became more interested in hiking in the mountains. (figure 24 & 25)

With public transport (figure 26) around 30-40 % said felt more prepared with metro, bus, train, taxi and road trips. While they felt significantly less prepared for hitchhiking (13.9 %) and border crossings (11.1 %). 30 % also said they didn't feel more prepared at all.

Further (figure 27) with the preparation stage, 66.7 % said they it gave them a good understanding of food, transportation and accommodation, and 38.9 % said it gave them a good understanding of the standard of accommodation. However, 25 % answered they didn't feel it gave them a good understanding of either.

Finally the last question 75 % showed that 75 % of the respondents had recommended their friends to watch travel vloggers, while 25 % hadn't. (figure 28)

6. Discussion

If we start with looking at what they actually show in their videos, there are a few notable things that would differ them from more "mainstream" tourist research methods. Some examples are: Giving a small tour of a bus station. This gives an insight of something very casual and practical a tourist is likely to encounter. Something that most likely will make the viewer feel a bit more prepared for when they need to use transportation themselves, and based on the survey responses this appears to be the case. With transportation is the border crossing video is also interesting, where they explain the relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and how it might affect your border crossing experience from Georgia. Another example is socializing with locals, where they show how they are bonding and trying to overcome language barriers, or sometimes even speak a local language enabling them to communicate and show the locals from a whole different perspective. According to the results this had a big impact where 63.9 % said the vloggs made them more interested in meeting the locals. Particularly that the videos with the Abkhazian refugees are notable, as it is certainly not a typical tourist activity. Even going onto VisitGeorgia's website today there is no information about Abkhazia except that it's not temporarily controlled by the Georgian government. 16.7 % replied they became more interested in the Abkhazian situation, which was one of the categories where the vloggs had the least amount of influence - however due to the controversy and potential risk involved in exploring this subject it's arguable that the vloggs still had a significant influence. The same argument can be made for Sanatoriums where 13.9 % said they became interested. Sanatoriums were the most popular historic sight among the travel vloggers, yet they aren't featured on VisitGeorgia's website (most likely because they are abandoned or inhabited by refugees). In general, exploring abandoned buildings is something more unusual that was featured in the vloggs. A visit to the witch doctor (categorized as shamanistic rituals) was also a particular unusual thing that was featured, giving an insight to alternative spiritual beliefs. Regarding rural areas it was particularly noteworthy that every vlogger went to Chiatura – which also isn't featured on

VisitGeorgia, but was the second most popular urban area in the vloggs. Everyone went there to ride old soviet cable cars that were – and still are – used for mineworkers. Everyone emphasized how unstable the cable cars looked and how unsure they felt using them, but still did it. 38.9 % said the became more interested in provincial towns like Chiatura as a result of watching the travel vloggs. Another noteworthy thing that was featured was suburban residential areas and abandoned buildings in rural towns / villages along roads. Vloggers also tend to share a lot of their personal opinions, what is good, what is bad. They review everything from their experiences to the food they eat. They share their emotions, and give you tips on what to do and expect in Georgia, where to stay, what to eat, how much it costs. This seems to have influenced the survey respondents as 66.7 % said they got a better understanding of costs for accommodation, transport and food, while 38.9 % said they got a better understanding the general standard of accommodations.

How can we view their roles are guides? Well, the results looking at the results form question 4 we can see that at least half the respondents use travel vloggers for inspiration sometimes or more often, while 25.7 % use them often, very often or always. This is quite significant and shows that they indeed are considered an established research method. The results that men use YouTube and vloggers more as a research method which is likely because YouTube is used more by men (rivaliq, 2017). The results also show that younger people use vloggers more, this is likely because younger people use internet and social media more in general than older generations. But also likely because more young people view themselves as explorers or backpackers (Richards & Wilson, 2003) and they also view the vloggers as explorers, as vloggers go to less typical touristic places and this has affected the viewers as discussed in the previous paragraph. Travelers also use guidebooks and specialist travel agencies more than other tourists (Richards & Wilson, 2003), and travel vloggers can be seen as a representation of both these mediums in one.

But how come they are used as a information source at all? One important aspect is probably that they act as not only information, but also as entertainment, which means they are relevant and their videos are being watched – even when someone is not planning a vacation. The fact that they continually upload videos also allows them to make their viewers regular viewers and as Rubin (1985) argues the longer this relationship persists the more reliable as a source of information they will be considered. Another aspect is that they are being personal. They share experiences from their personal lives, and show you their personal emotions. They tell don't just tell you how good everything is - the also tell you the bad. This makes them more likely to have a relationship with the viewer as a friend rather than traditional research methods like Choi and Lee (2019) suggest as the viewers gets the sense that they know the vlogger not just on a professional level, but also personal. The motives are likely also something that affects their reliability, the fact that many of the vloggers started making videos with an expressed personal interest in different cultures and saying they want to promote less visited countries makes them appear more genuine, rather than companies which main motive is more likely to be seen as monetary. And as Mangold & Faulds (2009) argue this might also be a reason they get more media exposure. Another important reason people watch them is probably is the safety aspect, as tourists want to minimize risks and insecurity for their holiday (Fodness & Murray, 1997) they do their research beforehand. As travel vloggers often tend to go to countries perceived as more unsafe – and some of them also go to areas perceived to be the least safe in those countries –

vloggers are seen as a good source of information, as they expose themselves to the perceived danger. Zillinger (2007) argues that especially for the first time before visiting a country the research is extra important. Out of the survey respondents 30 % had watched travel vloggs before they came to Georgia, and out of those 80.6 % said they felt more safe about visiting Georgia. This means there is less of a barrier (in this case mental) to visit, and the cognitive distance has shrunk, which is also according to what Kosslyn, Pick & Fariello, (1974) say about cognitive distance. This shows their relevance in the safety aspect, which probably influenced their decision to visit Georgia.

When looking at who watched travel vloggs before their visit to Georgia the results are quite interesting. The regions middle east & Africa and east and south east Asia has the highest percentage of people who did watch before they came, which is what you might assume as it is in accordance to the theory of cognitive distance, that since it is a further physical and cultural distance they would do more research. However, what is noteworthy is that people from eastern Europe & former USSR republics have a higher percentage of viewers than western countries, which is not according to the theory. The theory would suggest as western countries are less exposed to information regarding Georgia, and the cultural differences are larger – that there would be a higher percentage from those countries than those of eastern Europe & former USSR countries. A larger sample size would help to better make any conclusions regarding this.

The purpose of this paper was to examine the relevance of travel vloggers as a tourist research method when travelling to Georgia. While it's hard to put an exact number on how relevant they are, the result in this study shows that they are indeed are seen and used as a significant source of information. As this is a relatively new phenomenon, it's hard to see what will be in the future, but their relevance will likely increase. As social media is expending more across the world, profiling, personalizing and focusing on values become more important for cooperations the usage and influence of vloggers in many different areas will likely grow, as it is an extra tool for marketing. A few years ago the term "influencer" didn't exist, however today it's a well established profession and vloggers have great influence in many different areas, for example fashion, where influencers make their living of marketing products. Today there are travel vloggers who make their living of their videos, with revenue from monetization YouTube and donations. Would it be beneficial for destinations to invite and pay travel vloggers to create content in their countries? Maybe it is too early to tell. However there are areas which this is being tried, for example in Malmö, Sweden, the municipality decided to finance vloggers in different categories to come and create content that would benefit local businesses. Maybe, as physical offices are shutting down and jobs are disappearing, destination marketing companies will have to employ people to go out and vlogg for them, but this is just speculation. However it is clear that as more people from far away countries can afford to travel every year, using travel vloggers as a marketing tool might give an advantage to help further develop the destination.

Further studies

Due to the fact that this is such a new phenomenon, the small sample size and the vlogg sample it the results of this paper should not be viewed as set in stone, but rather as a pilot study as I've not been able to find any previous study regarding this subject. The results I have produced has shown underlines the relevance of travel vloggers, however further studies would need to be conducted to confirm my findings. Especially regarding cognitive distance. Here it would be

interesting to focus further on specific regions. It would also be interesting to conduct a qualitative study regarding this subject based on interviews. There are many angles yet to be explored, such as how businesses view travel vloggers and what opportunities they see, however that was beyond the scope of this paper. Hopefully this paper server as an introduction into the subject, which can generate further interest for further studies.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine what travel vloggers in Georgia typically show in their videos, whether or not they have an impact on tourists decision to visit and what they want to see in Georgia as well as find out if yes – why they are important. To do this 72 videos from nine different vloggers, combining for a total of 20 120 000 views was thematically analyzed and the content categorized. Based on the analysis a survey was conducted where which generated 136 responses for part one, and 41/36 for part two. The results were then organized categorically and presented using diagrams and tables.

The results show that the vloggs are relevant and did affect both their decision to come and what they wanted to see. It showed that viewers felt more prepared for their journey with things such as costs, transportation and accommodation, and also that the vloggs made them feel more safe. Most people became more interested in meeting the locals, however less typical tourists attractions such as sanatoriums and the Abkhazian situation also became more interesting after watching the videos. The results could be linked with previous studies regarding vloggers in different areas, such as how they could communicate on a more personal level. But also previous studies regarding youth tourism and guided tourism, however it could only partly be linked with theories regarding cognitive distance, and to clarify this further research needs to be made. Being such a new phenomenon and already having a significant impact on tourists decision-making as this study has shown, it's likely that their influence will increase in the future.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Link to survey

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1yvxoboSV5BkLsjWZ9jInXBbWwrWN-gtrWP5cPytSfnE/edit

Tables and figures for the thematical analysis of the travel vloggs

Table 2. Total amount of views & appearances per category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Category	Views	Appearances
Urban areas	12 137 000	48
Transportation	11 507 000	49
Socializing with locals	6 331 000	11
Culture	5 607 000	42
Border crossing	4 558 000	4
Historic sights	4 374 000	29
Promotion video	3 171 000	8
Other	2 145 000	17
Accomodation	916 000	17

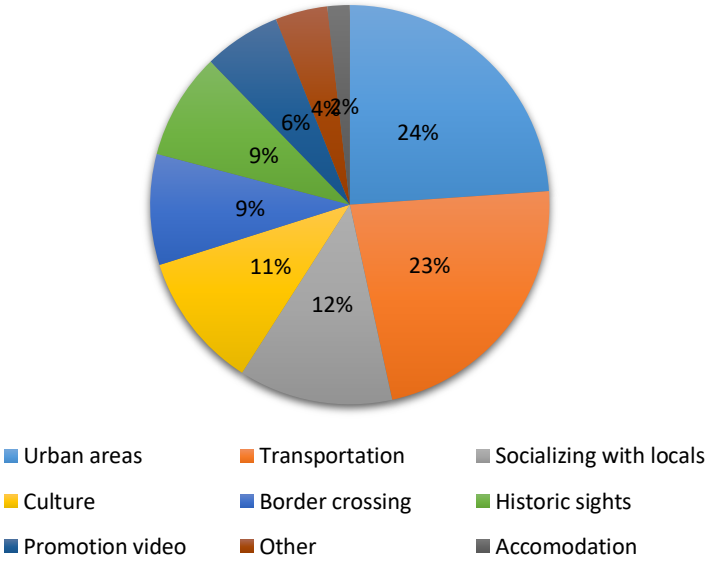

Figure 2. Total amount of views per category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Table 2. Total amount of views & appearances per urban area in travel vloggs about Georgia

Category	Views	Appearances
Kutaisi	2 250 000	4
Chiatura	2 136 000	7
Tbilisi	1 486 000	18
Batumi	527 000	8
Sachkhere	109 000	1
Signagi	104 000	2
Unknown	57 000	2
Mestia	51 000	2
Ushguli	32 000	2
Bordzjomi	24 000	1
Akhaltsikhe	18 000	1

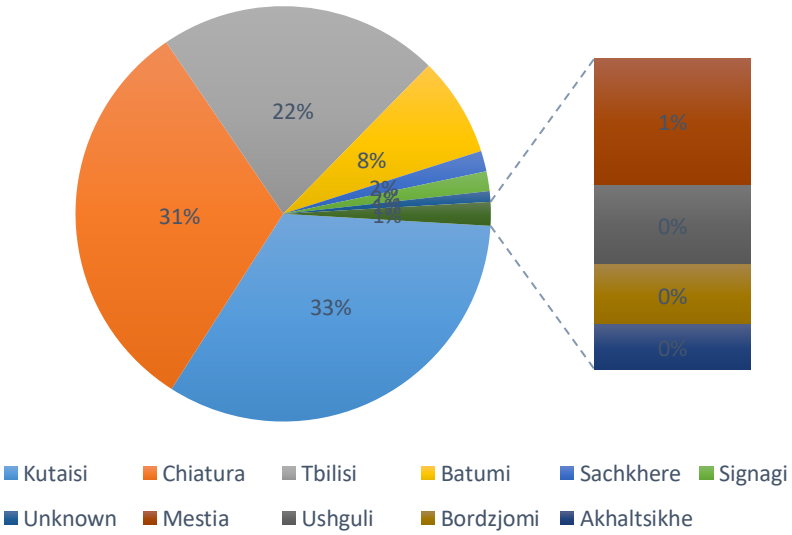

Figure 3. Total amount of views per urban area in travel vloggs about Georgia

Table 3. Total amount of views & appearances per transportation category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Category	Views	Appearances
Train	4 092 000	1
Bus	2 679 000	15
Bus station	2 110 000	1
Road trip	1 085 000	17
Taxi	982 000	8
Metro	342 000	2
Hitchhiking	217 000	5

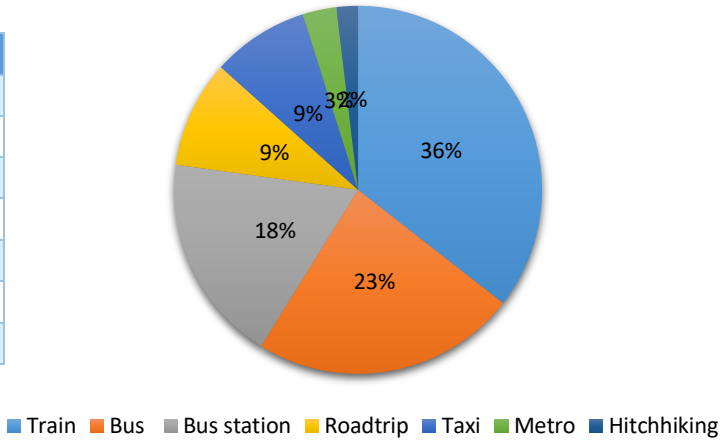

Figure 4. Total amount of views per transportation mode in travel vloggs about Georgia

Table 4. Total amount of views & appearances of videos featuring locals per category in travel vloggs

Category	Views	Appearances
Locals	4 161 000	8
Refugees	1 800 000	2
Tells a locals story	370 000	1

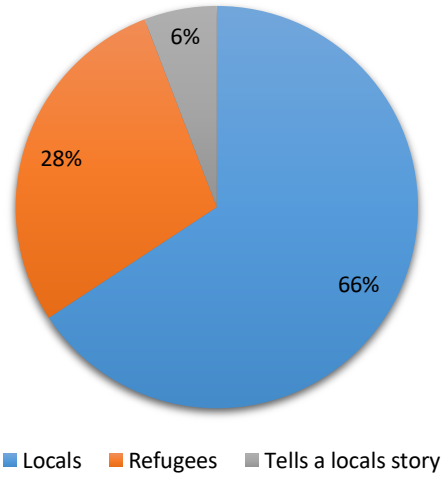

Figure 5. Total amount of views of videos featuring locals per category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Table 5. Total amount of views & appearances per culture category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Category	Views	Appearances
Food	2 469 000	26
Witch doctor	1 147 000	1
Language	976 000	1
Market	686 000	5
Wine	225 000	4
Nightlife	46 000	1
Dance	32 000	2
Music	26 000	2

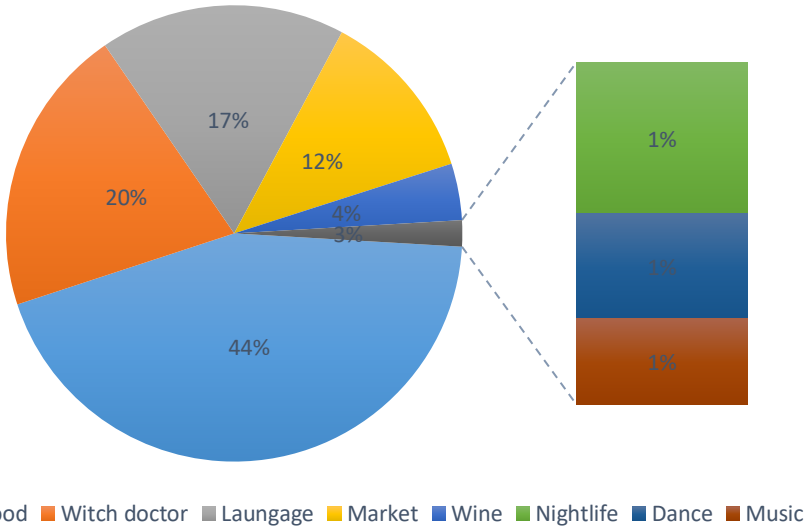

Figure 6. Total amount of views per culture category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Table 6. Total amount of views & appearances per border crossing category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Category	Views	Appearances
Georgia to Azerbaijan	4 110 000	2
Turkey to Georgia	256 000	1
Georgia to Armenia	192 000	1

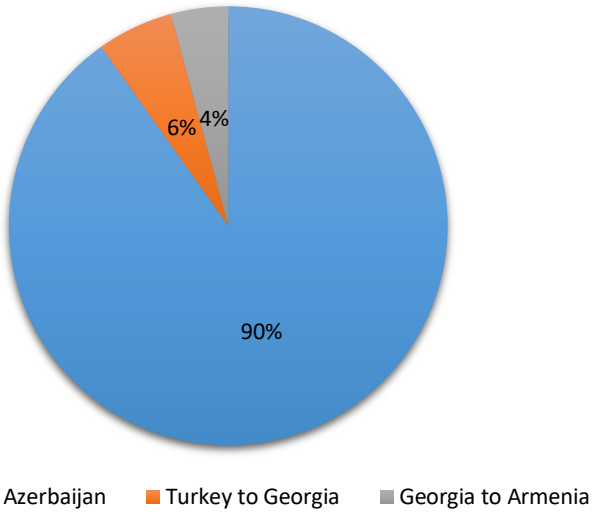

Figure 7. Total amount of views per border crossing category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Table 7. Total amount of views & appearances per historic sight in travel vloggs about Georgia

Category	Views	Appearances
Sanatoriums	2 771 000	3
Kastki pillar	429 000	3
Castles	491 000	8
Stalins print	147 000	1
Vardiza caves	142 000	4
Promethius cave	140 000	1
Churches	95 000	4
Georgia-Russia friendship monument	64 000	2
Uplishte	18 000	1
Stalins birthhome	18 000	1
Vainakh towers	14 000	1

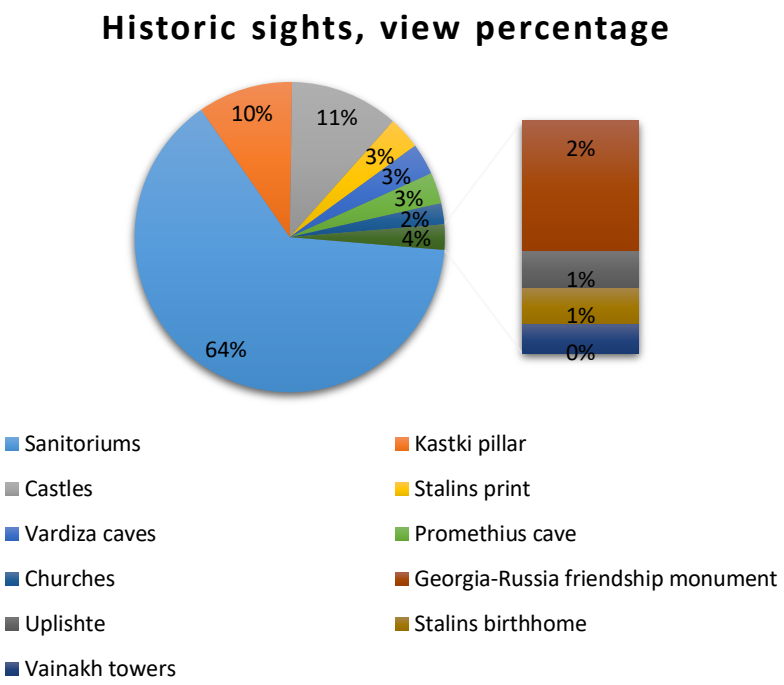

Figure 8. Total amount of views per historic sight in travel vloggs about Georgia

Table 8. Total amount of views & appearances per promotion video category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Category	Views	Appearances
Showcase	2 079 000	3
What does money get you	865 000	2
Top 5	197 000	2
Experience summary	30 000	1

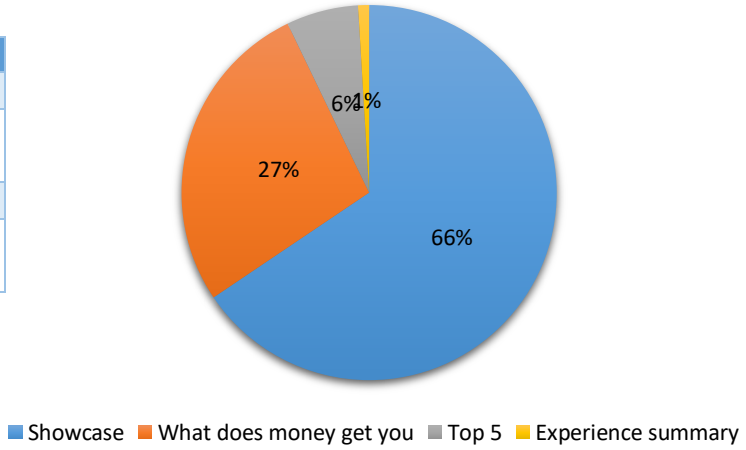

Figure 9. Total amount of views per promotion video category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Table 9. Total amount of views & appearances per other category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Category	Views	Appearances
Exploring abandoned hotel	837 000	1
Fishing	831 000	1
Driving in the mountains	228 000	10
Sulfur baths	191 000	2
Hiking in the mountains	58 000	3

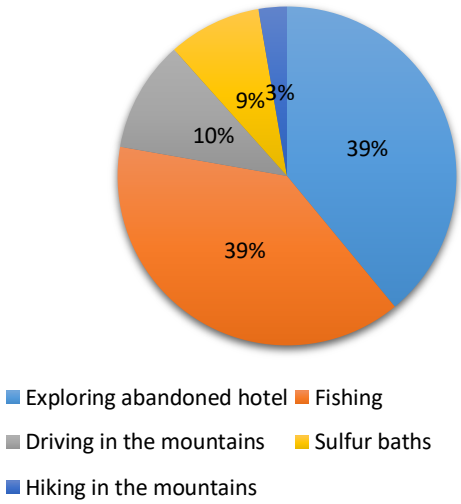

Figure 10. Total amount of views per other category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Table 10. Total amount of views & appearances per accomodation category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Category	Views	Appearances
Introduction	902 000	16
complaint	14 000	1

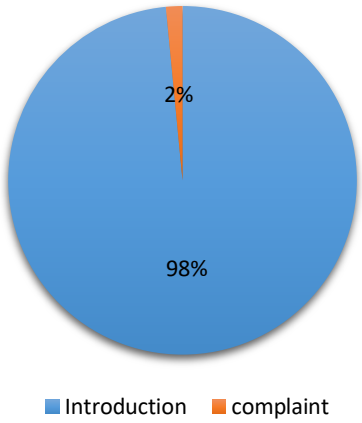

Figure 11. Total amount of views per accomodation category in travel vloggs about Georgia

Tables and figures for the survey replies

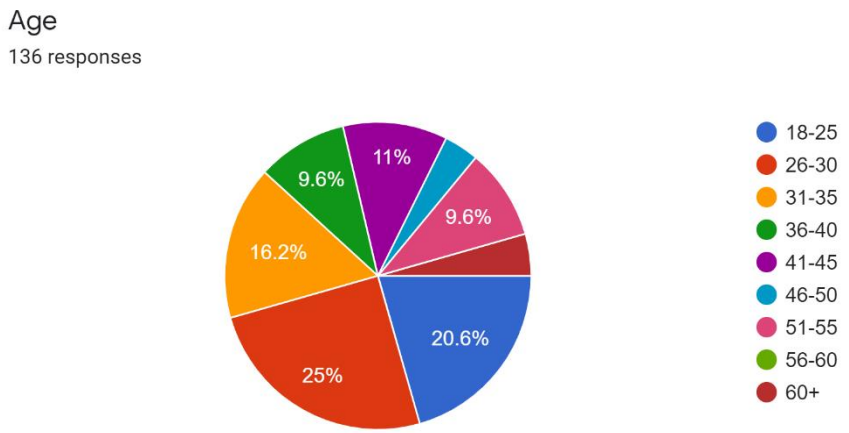

Figure 12. Age distribution among survey respondents

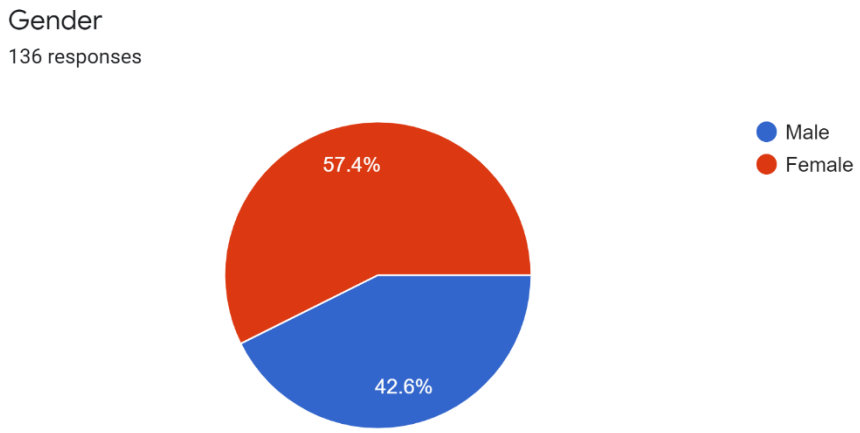

Figure 13. Gender distribution among survey respondents

Table 11. Origin distribution among survey respondents

Country		Country		Country		Country	
Australia	4	Germany	17	Kenya	1	Romania	1
Austria	1	Hong Kong	1	South Korea	1	Russia	11
Azerbaijan	2	Hungary	1	Lebanon	2	Serbia	2
Belarus	1	India	2	Lithuania	2	South Africa	4
Belgium	1	Iran	2	Moldova	1	Spain	2
Brazil	1	Ireland	2	Morocco	1	Sweden	4
Canada	3	Israel	4	Netherlands	3	Turkey	1
Czech Republic	3	Italy	1	New Zealand	1	United Arab Emirates	1
Egypt	1	Japan	1	Nigeria	1	United Kingdom	13
Finland	2	Jordan	1	Philippines	4	Ukraine	2
France	6	Kazakhstan	1	Poland	4	United states of America	13
				Portugal	1	Uzbekistan	1

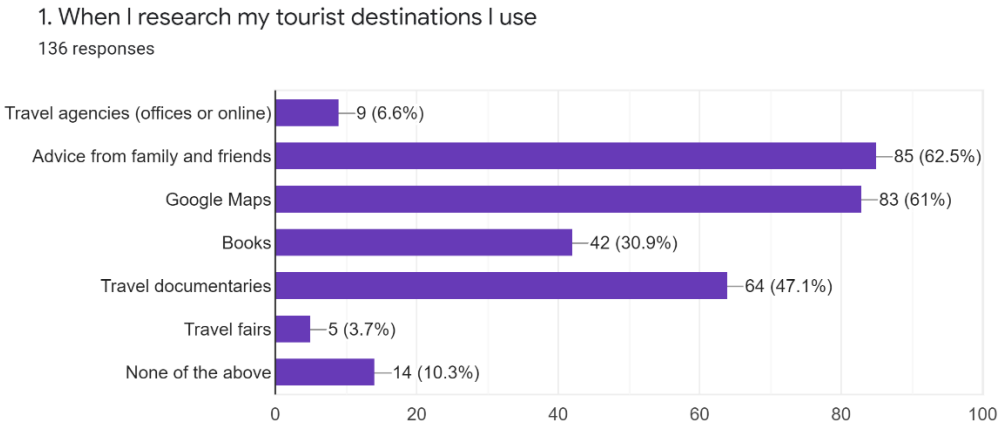

Figure 14. What methods survey respondents use to research their tourist destination

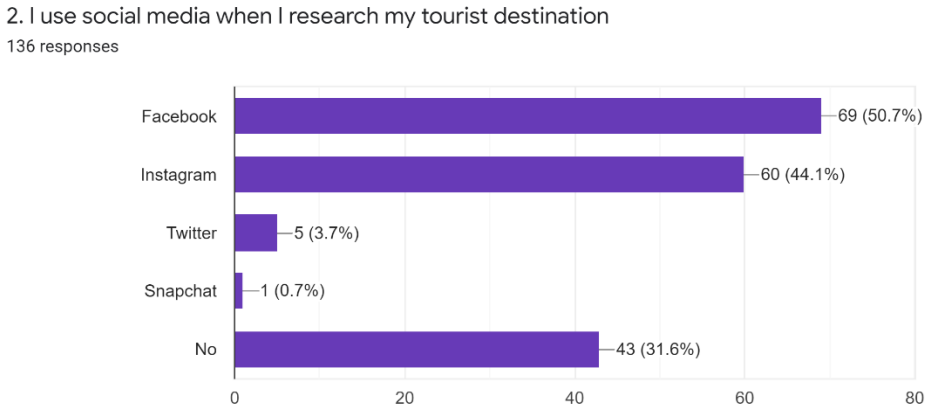

Figure 15. What social media survey respondents use to research their tourist destination

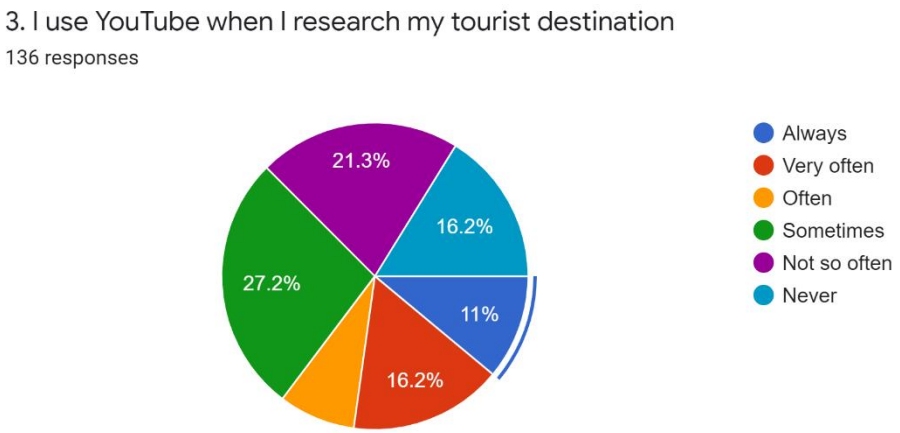

Figure 16. How often survey respondents use YouTube as a research method

Table 12. How often survey respondents use YouTube as a research method divided by gender

Female		Male	
Always	12 % (9)	Always	10 % (6)
Very often	12 % (9)	Very often	23 % (13)
Often	5 % (4)	Often	12 % (7)
Sometimes	29 % (23)	Sometimes	24 % (14)
Not so often	23 % (18)	Not so often	19 % (11)
Never	19 % (15)	Never	12 % (7)

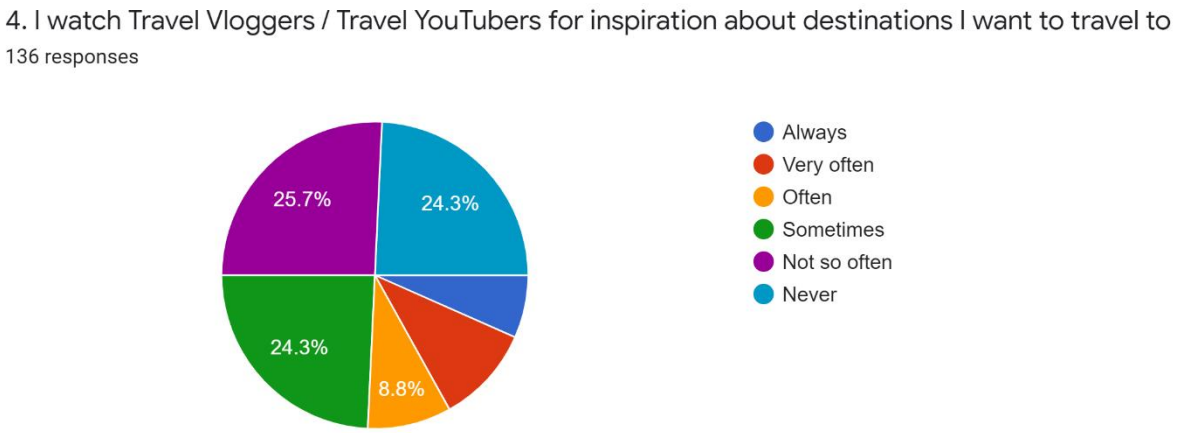

Figure 17. How often survey respondents use travel vloggers for inspiration about destinations they want to go to

Table 13 How often survey respondents use travel vloggers for inspiration about destinations they want to go to divided by age and gender

18-35		36+		Female		Male	
Always	7 %(6)	Always	6 % (3)	Always	5 % (4)	Always	8 % (5)
Very often	11 % (9)	Very often	6 % (3)	Very often	8 % (6)	Very often	14 % (8)
Often	11% (9)	Often	6 % (3)	Often	10 % (8)	Often	7 % (4)
Sometimes	22% (19)	Sometimes	27 % (14)	Sometimes	23 % (18)	Sometimes	26 % (15)
Not so often	25 % (21)	Not so often	27 % (14)	Not so often	27 % (21)	Not so often	24 % (14)
Never	24 % (20)	Never	27 % (14)	Never	27 % (21)	Never	21 % (12)

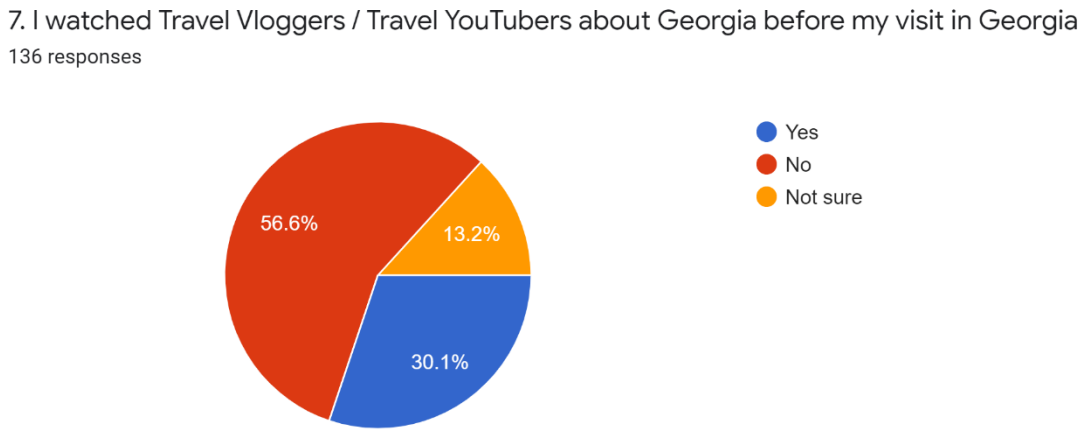

Figure 18. How many of the survey respondents had watched travel vloggs about Georgia before their visit to Georgia

Table 14. How many of the survey respondents had watched travel vloggs about Georgia before their visit to Georgia divided by age

18-30		31-45		46+	
Yes	32% (20)	Yes	41% (20)	Yes	13% (3)
No	52% (32)	No	53% (26)	No	79% (19)
Not sure	16% (10)	Not sure	6% (3)	Not sure	8% (2)

Table 15. How many of the survey respondents had watched travel vloggs about Georgia before their visit to Georgia divided by gender

Female		Male	
Yes	29 % (23)	Yes	31 % (18)
No	58 % (45)	No	55 % (32)
Not sure	13 % (10)	Not sure	14 % (8)

Table 16. How many of the survey respondents had watched travel vloggs about Georgia before their visit to Georgia divided by origin

Western Europe		Eastern Europe & former USSR		Distant western countries	
Yes	21 % (11)	Yes	35 % (11)	Yes	24 % (5)
No	64 % (34)	No	56 % (18)	No	71 % (15)
Not sure	15 % (8)	Not sure	9 % (3)	Not sure	5 % (1)

Table 17. How many of the survey respondents had watched travel vloggs about Georgia before their visit to Georgia divided by origin continuing

Middle east & Africa		East & south east Asia	
Yes	45 % (8)	Yes	45 % (4)
No	33 % (6)	No	33 % (3)
Not sure	22 % (4)	Not sure	22 % (2)

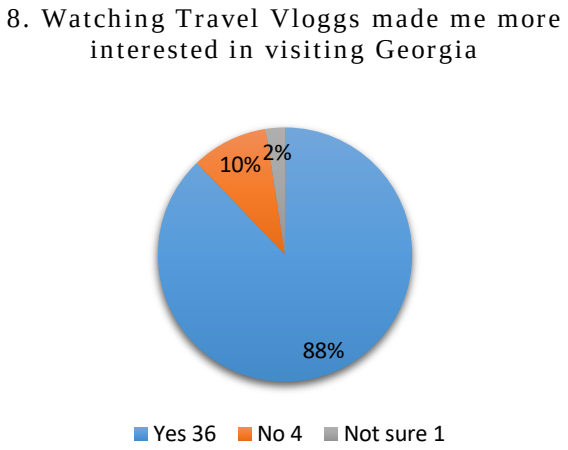

Figure 19. How many of the survey respondents were made more interested in visiting Georgia by watching travel vloggs about Georgia

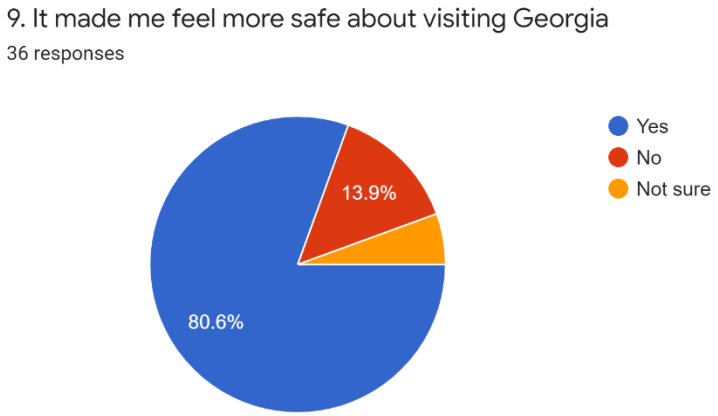

Figure 20. How many of the survey respondents felt more safe about visiting Georgia after watching travel vloggs about Georgia

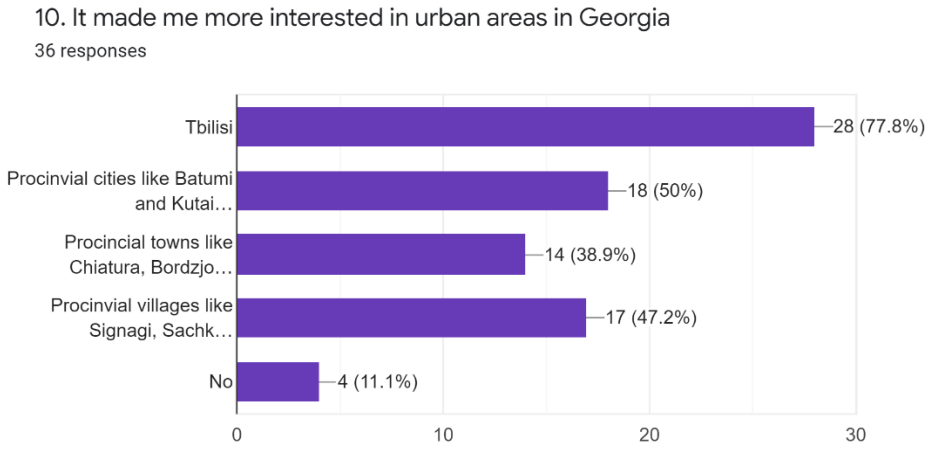

Figure 21. How many of the survey respondents became more interested in different urban areas in Georgia after watching travel vloggs about Georgia

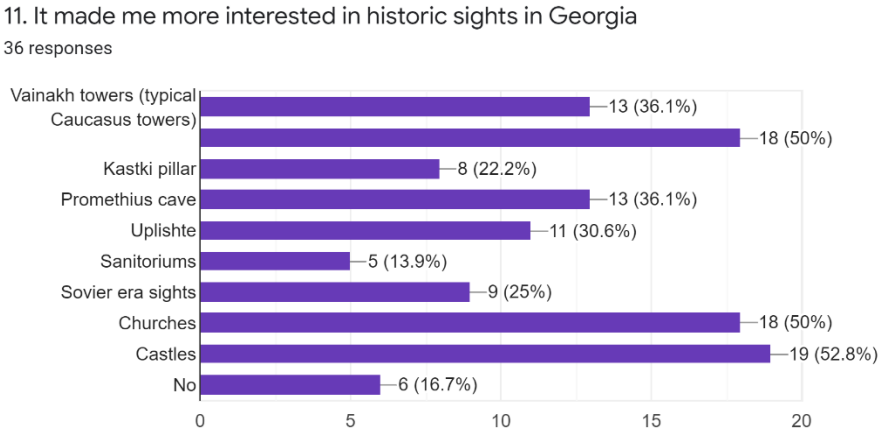

Figure 22. How many of the survey respondents became more interested in different historic sights in Georgia after watching travel vloggs about Georgia

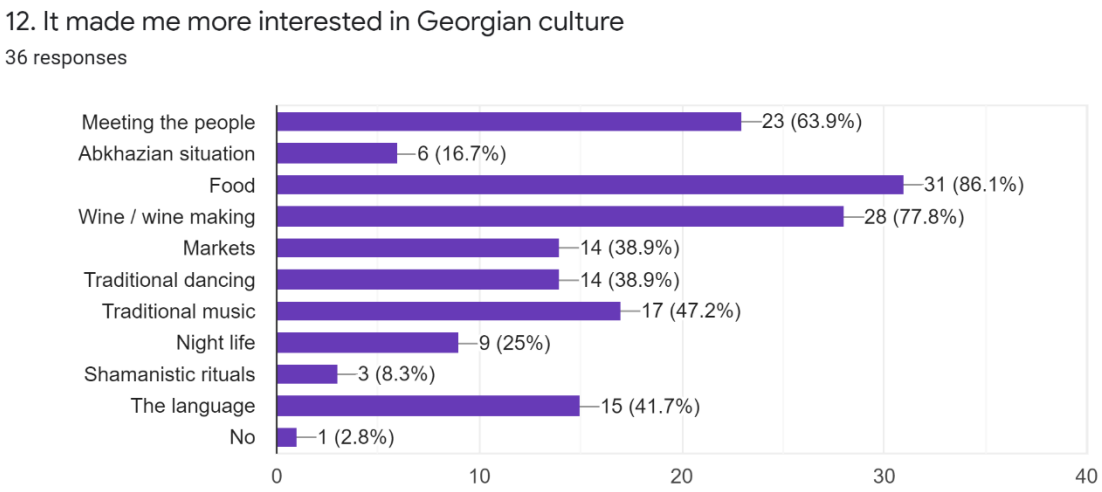

Figure 23. How many of the survey respondents became more interested in different cultural categories in Georgia after watching travel vloggs about Georgia

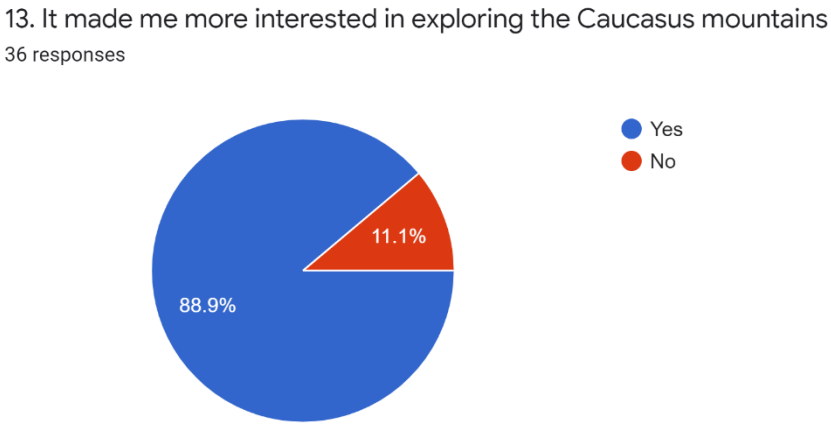

Figure 24. How many of the survey respondents became more interested in exploring the Caucasus Mountains in Georgia after watching travel vloggs about Georgia

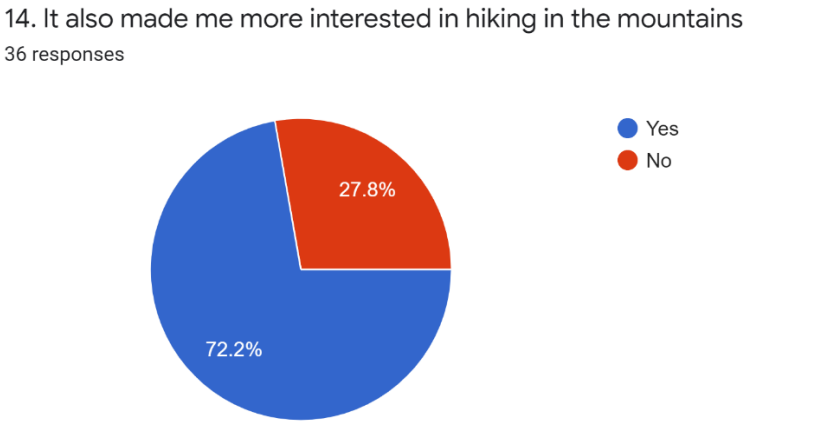

Figure 25. How many of the survey respondents became more interested in hiking in the mountains in Georgia after watching travel vloggs about Georgia

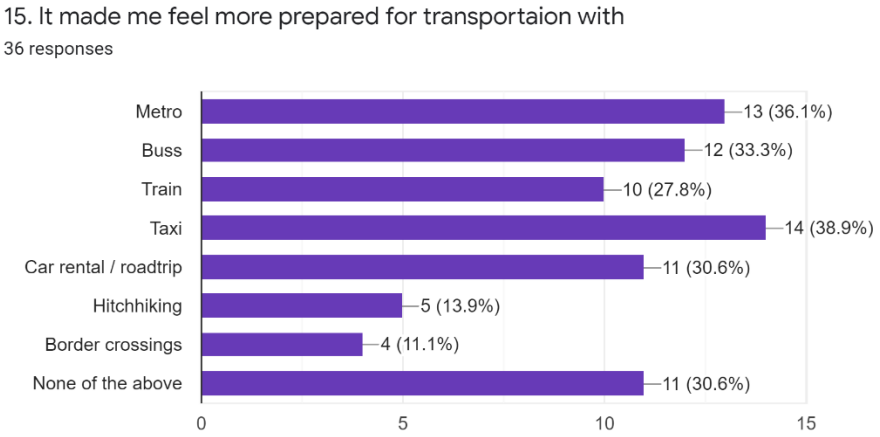

Figure 26. How many of the survey respondents felt more prepared about using different transportation modes in Georgia after watching travel vloggs about Georgia

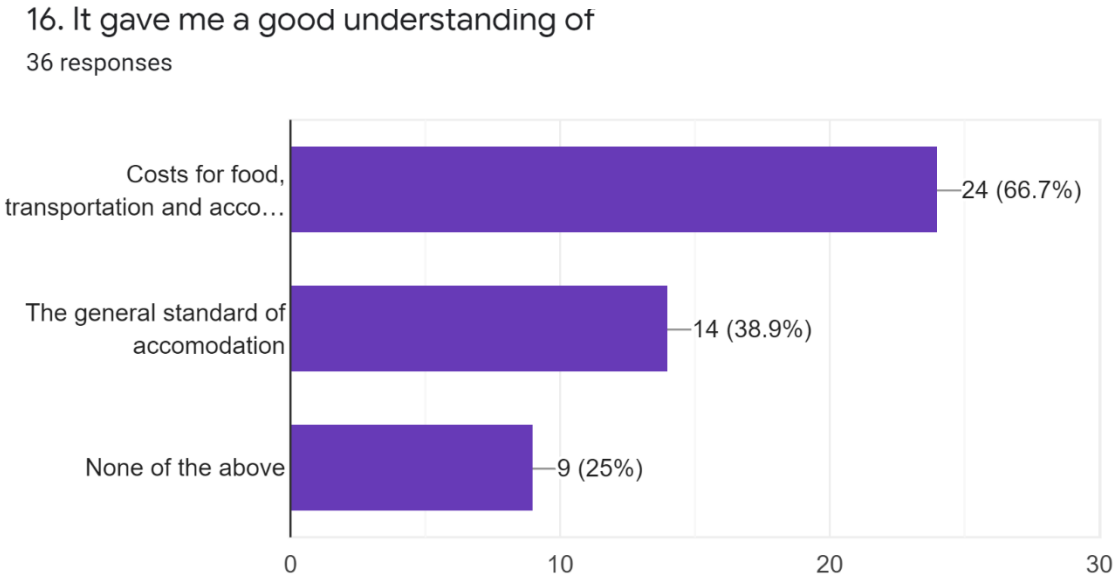

Figure 27. How many of the survey respondents felt they were given a better understanding of costs and standards in Georgia after watching travel vloggs about Georgia

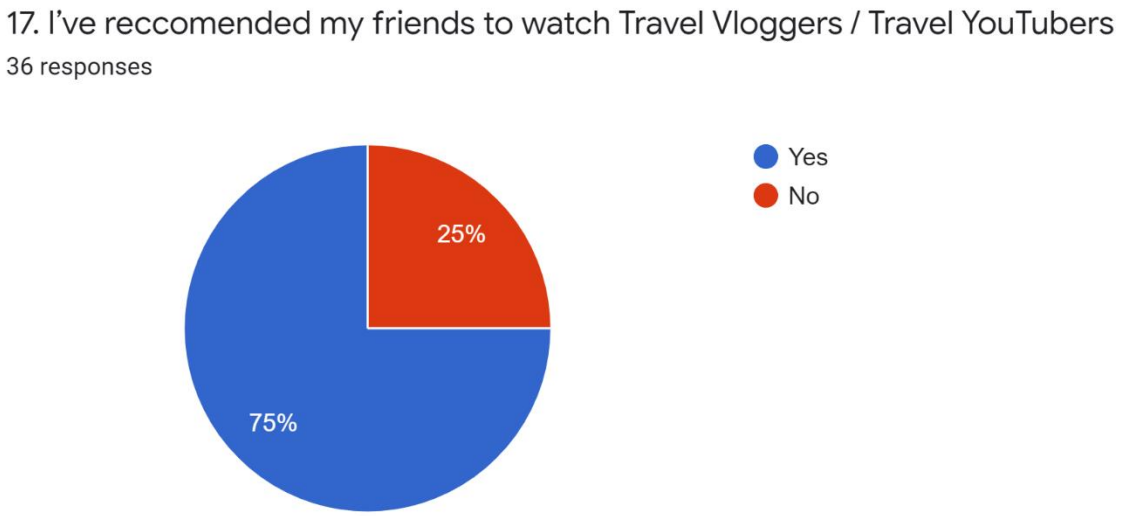

Figure 28. How many of the survey respondents have reccomended their friends to watch travel vloggers