

**The Lens of the Other: Instagram as a Tool to Counter the Unsafe Images of
Countries and the Case of Lebanon.**

Raphaela Nehme

**Submitted to the University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts degree in Communication**

**Department of Communication
Faculty of Arts
University of Ottawa**



uOttawa

© Raphaela Nehme, Ottawa, Canada, 2020

Abstract

The emergence of new media tools and social media platforms over the last ten years has created new means of intercultural engagement. On Instagram, there is a growing trend of travel pages and travel bloggers whose aim is to introduce and share with other users the highlights of the destinations they travel to. This also applies to locals in these destinations who wish to portray their country positively and promote it as a tourist destination, particularly in certain countries of the Middle East where there is the added challenge of an ‘unsafe’ image to combat. This research focuses on Lebanon to find out to what extent Instagram can be considered a tool to combat the ‘unsafe’ image of the country, and if users who come across depictions of Lebanon on Instagram perceive the country as a potential tourist destination. Using a mixed methods approach, this thesis combines surveys and semi-structured interviews with Canadian participants to reach its findings. Its theoretical framework makes use of Edward Said’s conception of the ‘other’ (1978), Stuart Hall’s system of representations (1980), Jan Neverdeen Pieterse’s hybridization paradigm (1996), and Eli Pariser’s (2011) echo chamber to analyze its findings. Broadly, findings show that while Instagram can effectively be considered a tool to counter the ‘unsafe’ image of Lebanon, and while the country may be branded as a potential tourist destination to users who come across such depictions of it, algorithm restrictions limit the potential for such depictions to fulfill their potential since they don’t always reach users who perceive Lebanon to be an ‘unsafe’ place.

Keywords: Representation, perceptions, semi-structured interviews, surveys, new media tools, discourse, Instagram, orientalism.

Acknowledgment

I would first like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Philippe Ross, for his unwavering support over the last two years to see this thesis through. From the moment the idea for this thesis came to fruition, to the last period marked on this paper, you have always allowed my ideas and creativity to take the front seat while guiding me through all the hiccups, sharp twists and turns that are a natural happenstance of the academic world. I believe this makes the best quality in a supervisor. Thank you for always having your door open to this very often confused, very often tired graduate student. This thesis would not have happened without you.

I also wish to thank my evaluators, Professor Kyle Conway, and Professor Florian Grandena, for their valuable insights and comments. Objectivity is sometimes hard to attain when you are deeply immersed in a writing project, but your insights allowed me to do so at key points in this thesis.

I would also like to thank my close friends, whether in Lebanon or Canada, for their support. You often heard and let me complain about the difficulty to achieve this project without judgment. Thank you for supporting me when I was at my lowest. You know who you are.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their continued love and support throughout all these years. 6 years ago, you let your only child travel across the world for a chance at a better life in Canada. Well, this is it. I consider this project to be the fruition of all these years of hard work you put into my health and education, and I will always cherish it as such. Dad, thanks for making use of your excel skills to help me achieve this thesis. It is the one skill I will probably never master. Mom, thank you for gracing me with your beautiful opera voice over the years and thank you for getting excited over music with me. It has been an essential part of lifting and keeping my spirits up throughout this journey.

Dedication

To Lebanon.

إلى لبنان

Never here, nor there.

ليست هنا، ولا هناك

A soul split between two places

روح منقسمة بين مكانين

we call home.

ندعوهم الوطن

To always yearn for a country to come back to.

أن يتوق دائماً لبلد يعود إليه

To that school by the beach,

إلى تلك المدرسة قرب الشاطئ

and a childhood, sun kissed throughout the years

وطفولة قبلتها الشمس

على مر السنين

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	6
2.1 Representation of Arabs and Islam by traditional media outlets and strategies to counter the ‘unsafe’ images of countries in the Middle East.....	6
2.2 Individual representation and social media use	15
2.3 Social media interconnectedness as a means to bridge the gap between ‘imagined communities’.....	19
2.4 Other social media users’ access to social media representations	21
2.5 Research question	24
2.6 Theoretical framework.....	24
2.6.1 Orientalism and the Other.....	25
2.6.2 System of representations – Semiotic and discursive representation	26
2.6.3 Globalization, Hybridization, and the Echo Chamber	28
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	30
3.1 Research design	30
3.2 Population	30
3.2.1 Sampling and Recruitment.....	31
3.2.2 Recruitment Process.....	32
3.3 Data collection tools	34
3.3.1 Surveys.....	34
3.3.2 SurveyMonkey questionnaire design process.....	35
3.3.3 Data analysis of SurveyMonkey	37
3.3.4 Interviews.....	38
3.3.5 Interview guide	39
3.3.6 Retrieval document and coding frame	42
3.4 Limitations	43
Chapter 4: Results and analysis.....	45
4.1 Representations of Lebanon and Lebanese people	45
4.1.1 Knowledge of the Other.....	45
4.1.2 Modernization in Lebanon.....	47
4.1.3 Women in Lebanon.....	51
4.1.4 Conflict and religion in Lebanon	53
4.1.5 Tourism and Safety in Lebanon.....	57

4.1.6 Summary	63
4.2 Where do representations of Lebanon come from?	63
4.2.1 Social Interactions and word of mouth	64
4.2.2 Traditional media outlets and news	67
4.2.3 Social media and Instagram use	70
4.3 Discussion	84
4.3.1 Representations of Lebanon, Lebanese people, and the Other	85
4.3.2 Lebanon and system of representations	89
4.3.3 Instagram algorithm, hybridization paradigm, and social media interconnectedness ..	94
Chapter 5: Conclusion	96
5.1 Results and implications	97
5.2 Limitations and future studies	99
References	101
Appendix A: Ethics Committee Approval Letter	108
Appendix B: Survey Consent Form	110
Appendix C: Interview Consent Form	113
Appendix D: SurveyMonkey Questionnaire	115
Appendix E: Interview Guide	127
Appendix F: #LiveLoveLebanon Posts	129
Appendix G: Coding Frame	131
Appendix H: Interviewees	134

List of Figures

FIGURE No.	Page
FIGURE (1): CLUSTERED COLUMN CHART (<i>Lebanon is a country that has yet to modernize</i>)	48
FIGURE (2): CLUSTERED COLUMN CHART (<i>Conflict in Lebanon is due to various religious affiliations</i>)	54
FIGURE (3): LINE CHART (<i>Which of the following options have most impacted your views and opinion on Lebanon (rank the following options in order of preference, 1 being the option that has influenced your opinion and image on Lebanon the most?)</i>)	64
FIGURE (4): PIE CHART (<i>In your opinion, how is Lebanon typically depicted in traditional media outlets (i.e. TV, movies, radio, newspapers?)</i>)	67
FIGURE (5): PIE CHART (<i>In your opinion, how is Lebanon typically depicted on Instagram?</i>)	77

Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, the emergence of new social media tools has rendered the world an interconnected community. Only a decade ago, it was nearly impossible for people to know how individuals live their lives in different parts of the world except for travel and what traditional media outlets, movies, travel blogs, books or worldly friends told them. Now, the emergence of social media platforms and applications such as Facebook, Periscope, Snapchat, Instagram, and others has made it possible for people to connect by sharing filtered moments of their lives through stories, pictures, and videos accompanied with captions and emojis. These tools make it possible for individuals to represent themselves on social media and to shape an image or ‘version’ of themselves they want others to see (Goffman, 1956; Davis, 2011). These representations may vary based on individuals’ cultural baggage and backgrounds. Thus, they are rooted in a culture’s ‘conceptual system,’ which dictates how users will choose to represent themselves and the environment surrounding them (Hall, 1997). Furthermore, individuals may choose to represent themselves differently online than they would in real life, which gives rise to the multiplicity of online identities in a digital age (Davis, 2011).

Since its launch in 2010, Instagram has become one of the most popular platforms for brand marketing and self-promotion and reached 600 million active monthly users as of December 2016 (“Why Instagram,” 2017). EMarketer, a market research company, had predicted “4.5 million people ages 12 to 17 will use Facebook in 2017, a decline of 3.4% from the previous year,” as they migrated to Facebook’s Instagram (“Facebook may have grown-up problem,” 2017). The launch of Instagram’s Snapchat inspired disappearing ‘stories’ and live videos in 2016 gave the option to share content that disappears 24 hours after posting it and

made it possible for users to engage more directly with each other since they can share moments of their lives as they are happening.

Furthermore, travel pages through which ‘influencers’ share beautiful pictures of their favorite destinations to vacation in have also taken up the platform by storm and the most famous ones have between 100,000 and 600,000 followers, sometimes even more (“25 Awesome Instagram Travel,” n.d.). This also applies to locals in these destinations who wish to portray their country positively and promote it as a tourist destination.

This trend may also be part of a larger movement to alter the images of places in the Middle East that have been considered as ‘unsafe’ due to ongoing crises, and that have been depicted as dangerous by Western media (Avraham, 2008). The concept of place branding is one of various marketing strategies that is used for such purposes (Avraham, 2008). It has been on the rise over the last few years and is used by countries who wish to market themselves as a tourist destination on social media. In fact, governments have launched initiatives using social media platforms and hashtags to encourage tourism and to frame the ‘destination image’ of a country, which is “influenced by tourists’ prior knowledge, experiences, commercial and noncommercial information sources, and, in today’s media environment, content generated by tourists themselves” (Stepchenkova & Li, 2014, p. 4).

For instance, #Live.Love.Syria is a crowd-sourced initiative that aims to showcase a positive image of Syria. #MyDubai was also launched in 2014 to depict the lives of Dubai’s residents and visitors (The National, 2014). Particularly, this thesis is interested in #LiveLoveLebanon, a campaign ostensibly led by regular Lebanese citizens who use social media interactions to show what life in Lebanon is actually like and “to show what most foreigners are not aware of” (“Live Love Lebanon,” 2014). When users choose to share posts

depicting Lebanon, they may simply brand them with the LiveLoveLebanon hashtag through a caption or ‘mention’ where they become part of an extensive catalogue of pictures, stories, and/or videos that aims to portray a genuine and positive image of the country and to reveal “its hidden beauties on an international scale” (“Live Love Lebanon,” 2014). Since its launch in 2014, the campaign has gained over 94,214 followers on Facebook and 116,000 followers on Instagram with over 853,754 hashtag mentions. The goal of this campaign is seemingly to challenge traditional media depictions of Lebanon as a war-torn country. For example, the TV show *Homeland* has portrayed it as a hub of terrorist activity and has depicted its most famous party street, Hamra street, as one that harbors terrorists, even resulting in a threat by the Lebanese tourism minister to sue the show in 2012 (“Homeland angers minister,” 2012). This show is one of many examples that embody the concept of ‘Orientalism’ and the ‘othering’ of Middle Eastern people through depictions that portray them as ‘exotic,’ ‘backwards,’ and ‘barbaric’ (Said, 1978). #LiveLoveLebanon is not the only campaign in the region with the aim of portraying a positive image of its people and country. Thus, there is an emerging trend of movements in the region with the goal of depicting these countries through their locals and tourists who visit such countries.

But how effective are such initiatives on Instagram in countering the images of ‘unsafe’ countries in the Middle East, particularly that of Lebanon?

Effectively, given the increase use of Instagram to market and brand places as appealing tourist destinations, the potential to also rebrand ‘unsafe’ places might be realizable.

Furthermore, self-representation also plays a role in furthering these depictions since locals or tourists who travel to countries post about their activities and travels there. Here, the tension between how traditional media outlets represent places such as Lebanon versus how regular

users of Instagram might do so comes into play. The reach of the former is deeply entrenched in audiences, whereas that of Instagram is relatively new and unpredictable. Furthermore, when it comes to social media and the web, algorithms and ‘echo chambers’ (Pariser, 2011) play a role in filtering the content that users are exposed to. This is an important consideration since users cannot assign meaning and value to representations if they are not exposed to them in the first place. This is particularly important when talking about countries that have been represented as dangerous and ‘unsafe’ by traditional media outlets, and who wish to counter such depictions through social media marketing and branding.

Based on the considerations above, Edward Said’s concept of the ‘other’ (1978), Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model (1980), Jan Nederveen Pieterse’s hybridization paradigm (1996), and Eli Pariser’s (2011) echo chamber form the theoretical framework of the study. The ‘other’ allows to thematically frame the study in terms of how users perceive depictions of Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon in the media and on Instagram. Hall’s encoding/decoding model is used to interpret these perceptions since it acknowledges audience members’ active role when exposed to such representations. Pieterse’s hybridization paradigm and stance on worldwide interconnectedness allows us to acknowledge the potential of social media representation to increase cultural awareness and intermingling between Lebanese people and outsiders who are exposed to depictions of Lebanon on Instagram. Finally, Pariser’s ‘echo chamber’ is useful to make sense of the ways in which the Instagram algorithm affects the exposure of users to different content.

The literature review addresses the potential of social media tools to foster new kinds of representations that might contradict traditional media depictions of countries such as Lebanon. It tackles the representation of Arabs and Islam by traditional media outlets and strategies to

combat the ‘unsafe’ image that outsiders associate with the Middle East, individuals’ representation of themselves online, other social media users’ receptions of representations they come across online as well as the extent to which algorithms affect their exposure to content, and the potential that social media platforms provide in bridging the gap between certain communities. Following the literature review, I identify my research objectives and questions and expand upon the theoretical framework that guides these objectives.

This thesis uses Lebanon as its case study and employs a mixed methods approach using surveys and semi-structured interviews to answer the main research question. An online survey was administered to a sample of university-aged Canadians and enabled the collection of statistics that offer insights into respondents’ knowledge and beliefs about Lebanon as well as their general social media and Instagram use. The semi-structured interviews allowed to discuss and elaborate on these beliefs since surveys were limited to close-ended questions. Interviewees were shown #LiveLoveLebanon posts on Instagram and were given the chance to discuss them at length. The main research question and secondary question are answered by thematically coding interviewees’ responses to find out the extent to which Instagram is considered a tool to counter the ‘unsafe’ image of Lebanon; and if users who come across depictions of Lebanon on the platform consider it a potential tourist destination.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Representation of Arabs and Islam by traditional media outlets and strategies to counter the ‘unsafe’ images of countries in the Middle East

The emergence of new social media tools and platforms in recent years has fostered a growing trend of government-led initiatives and individuals that take part in them to represent themselves and their homeland. This trend has gained momentum in certain countries in the Middle East as exemplified by the #LiveLoveLebanon, #MyDubai, and #Live.Love.Syria campaigns. These initiatives aim to depict these countries in a positive light to tourists and foreigners. A vast body of literature attempts to demystify the stereotypical views of the various “multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic groups” who coexist, but are oftentimes portrayed in the media as “one persona which is endowed by all sorts of devilish deeds” (Ridouani, 2011, p. 15).

Indeed, Said (1978) first coined the term Orientalism to conceptualize the “Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (p. 2). Given the rich history of European colonies in the Orient, Said makes a distinction between the tangible role that the latter played in shaping European culture, history, civilization, ideology, and the less realistic monopolization and indoctrination of Oriental understanding and imagination by Americans since their political and economic involvement in the area only started after World War II and is still in its infancy. He also situates the role of Orientalism in academic literature where it has been used by writers and researchers as a basis to separate between the Orient and the Occident. Lastly, he explains how the term Orientalism has been used as a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3). For Said, the West and the Orient are constantly depicting themselves to one another through identity building. To an extent, they feed off each other and are “man-made” (p. 5). However, he states that this does not discount or exclude the

reality of the Orient and the people who live there. Thus, despite the construct of the idea of the Orient in the West's mind, it remains a real "geographical and cultural" entity with an extensive history (p. 5).

From here is born what Said refers to as the 'other,' which indicates how the Orient is seen and depicted from the West's perspective. Said notes the "extraordinary turbulence in the relations of East and West" (p. 26) in the 50s, which made it easier to depict the Orient as dangerous and 'unsafe' – a threat to Western safety and prosperity. He attributes this unrest to several reasons, among which a "history of popular anti-Arabs and anti-Islamic prejudice in the West" (p.26), as well as the lack of cultural resources that would make it possible to view and discuss the Orient from the other's perspective. Moreover, according to Said, the digital era also played a role in reinforcing the stereotypes "by which the Orient is viewed" (p. 26), which practically reinforced a culture of racism and dehumanization of Arabs and Islam in the West. In that sense, individuals such as Said, "an Arab Palestinian in the West" (p. 26), cease to be "whole humans," but rather become oppressed under a system of propaganda that continuously pushes the image of Orientalism and the Oriental in people's minds (p. 27).

Other authors have also studied representations of Arabs and Islam by traditional media outlets. For example, Karim Karim has studied these misrepresentations from a Canadian perspective. He argues that the depictions in the U.S. media have influenced the content of their Canadian counterpart (as cited in Herman, 2001). The author argues that they are simply meant to adhere and push forward the policies of the West and are not part of a larger conspiracy against Islam (as cited in Herman, 2001). Evelyn Alsultany (2013) has studied the representation of Arabs and Muslims in the media following 9/11. Unlike Karim, the author looks at the increase of "positive" depictions of Arabs in U.S. Television (Alsultany, 2013, p. 161). Alsultany

argues that while some depictions are sympathetic to the plight of Arabs and Muslims, they separate “good” Muslims from “bad” Muslims (p. 163). The author notes that while positive depictions increased after 9/11, the rates of crimes and discrimination against Arabs in the U.S. rose exponentially (p. 161). Alsultany argues that these representations are meant to signal a ‘postrace’ era, but instead rationalize the need to push forward racist policies. This happens through “simplified complex representations,” which counter a negative depiction with a positive one and are meant to “challenge or complicate earlier stereotypes, yet contribute to a multicultural or postrace illusion” (Alsultany, 2013, p. 162). Effectively, Alsultany defines these earlier stereotypes as the “stock ethnic villains of the past” (p. 162). She gives the example of Arab’s representation as terrorists and how depictions after 9/11 attempted to change the narrative and portray them as “victims of violence and harassment” (p. 163). Alsultany explains that such depictions were meant to get audiences to sympathize with the plight of Arabs, but instead justified the necessity for discrimination against them for security reasons (p. 164). On his end, Said (1978) also defines these earlier stereotypes as the Middle East’s identification with “Great Power politics, oil economics, and the simple-minded dichotomy of freedom-loving, democratic Israel and evil, totalitarian, and terroristic Arabs” (p. 27). These stereotypes, according to Said, keep the Orient “subordinated intellectually to the West” (p. 152).

Furthermore, these stereotypes sometimes include an image that paints Arab women as oppressed and passive. Indeed, a list of studies have focused on the ways in which Arab women were represented in traditional media outlets following 9/11 and found an increase in that type of depictions (Eltantawy, 2007; Dahlan, 2011; Al-Hejin, 2015; Mishra, 2007). Eltantawy (2007) finds a “continued focus of many Western reporters on Muslim women’s hijab and their outside appearance, which are more often than not taken as a sign of women’s backwardness and

oppression.” The author refers to Falah (2005) to provide an explanation for Western media’s interest in portraying Arab women as such. Falah (2005) argues that the media uses the general population’s interest in what *separates* them from Muslim majority countries and places them in a “higher position” rather than what unites them (as cited in Eltantawy, 2007, p. 372). As such, Eltantawy (2007) agrees with previous studies that find the use of the “veil” as “the clearest way to identify this cultural gap for many Western reporters” (p. 372). Al-Hejin (2015) takes this proposition one step further and argues that the media assigns meaning to the hijab to *represent* the oppression of Arab women, despite the fact that many of them willingly choose to wear it (p. 40). Both Al-Hejin (2015) and Mishra (2007) refer to the idea of “Western Liberation,” (p.1), which implies that Arab women are ‘passive’ and need saving from their male counterparts. The only way for them to do so is to “integrate into Western societies,” (Al-Hejin, 2015, p. 40), which is also “defined narrowly as the exercise of individual choice in the purchase and use of consumer goods such as nail polish, lipsticks and high-heeled shoes” (Mishra, 2007, p. 1).

To counteract the images associated with Arab women and men, Afnan Qutub (2013) proposes that outsiders learn about “the ‘other’ from the other’s perspective” to manage intercultural miscommunication (p. 152). She argues that “viewing the ‘other’ through the lens of similarity and commonality rather than through the lens of differences could provide a more accurate understanding of the ‘other’ in place of media fabrications” (Qutub, 2013, p. 153). Thus, Ridouani, Karim, Alsultany, Qutub, Eltantawy, Mishra, and El-Hajin, pertain to Edward Said’s concept of ‘Orientalism’ and the ‘other,’ which argues that Middle Eastern people are looked down upon and are depicted as “barbaric,” “backwards,” and are unwilling to modernize and conform to Western hegemonic ideologies (Said, 1978, p. 150).

For certain communities such as diasporas and minorities, the advent of social media and

new media technologies has proven useful since it allows them to represent themselves and show an alternative perspective to the national imagined communities that traditional media outlets present (Georgiou, 2013, p. 81). New media give opportunities for these communities to present themselves online through “particularistic cultural projects and, alternative to the mainstream, spaces for identity, expression and participation” (p. 83). However, members of diasporas who have to conform to the norms of the nation-states they live in can often find themselves trapped in national ideologies (p. 85). This can lead to polarizing depictions and tensions on social media (p. 86). However, the media provides a “common framework for identities that are not fully dependent on Cartesian geography and the boundedness of the nation-state” (p. 92). It allows diasporas to feel connected with their homelands and can illustrate that “mediated co-presence is more powerful than physical co-presence” (p. 93). Thus, social media tools have not only proven useful by allowing users to represent themselves online, but they have also narrowed the distance between diasporas and their homelands by making them feel emotionally closer to home despite the geographical distance. Similarly, one can ask if there is a potential for social media tools to allow foreigners to feel closer to countries they have never been to by contributing to their perceptions of these places through depictions that they might be exposed to on certain platforms.

Although some, such as Kunzick (1997), have argued that once individuals have internalized certain images and stereotypes of a place, it is difficult – though not impossible – for leaders and citizens to produce a new perception that outsiders might have of it, it is worth considering how social media might be changing things in this respect. Indeed, social media provides countries with the possibility to represent themselves by showcasing their “history, policies, values, culture, science, and other achievements” (Gilboa, 2006, p. 720).

Many studies have focused on the possibility to alter the images of places that have been considered ‘unsafe’ due to ongoing crises such as natural disasters, war-related conflicts, and others. Avraham and Ketter (2008) recognize the challenges in altering these images and posit that although they are based on various variables such as the country’s “location, leadership, type of regime, economic situation, government stability and more” (p. 197), it comes down to the stereotypes that feed into these images and are difficult to change due to stereotypes’ unshakable nature (Elizur, 1987, as cited in Avraham and Ketter, 2008). As such, the authors argue that the ‘re-presentation’ (Short et al. 2000, as cited in Avraham and Ketter, 2008) of a place is needed “to create and market a new image, geared to compete for the retaining and attracting of various resources” (p. 197). This can be achieved through various means of place marketing such as the “multi-step model for altering place image” (p. 198) by using source strategies, message strategies, and audience strategies (SAM) (Avraham and Ketter, 2008). The concept of ‘place branding’ has also been on the rise and is defined as a “distinct identity that include functional, emotional, and sensual layers” (Avraham and Ketter, 2008, p. 197). Moreover, Avraham (2013) distinguishes between strategies that can benefit “organizations that have undergone and immediate crisis” (p. 1353), and the need for strategies that can allow destinations in the Middle East to counter their ‘unsafe’ images, which have been shaped by long lasting crises and negative depictions in the media. These strategies include finding alternatives to depictions of the Middle East by traditional media and targeting audiences directly through the use of the “Internet to promote tourism to these destinations and their image” (Avraham, 2013, p. 1357).

Furthermore, to better understand how tourism promotions affect tourists’ perceptions of destinations and incentive to go to them, studies have attempted to distinguish between the “country image” and the “destination image” of a country (Mossberg and Kleppe, 2005).

Mossberg and Kleppe (2005) define the concept of country image as “simply all associations linked with the country” (p. 497). These associations are further broken down by other authors who differentiate between the perceptions that individuals may have towards “the products of a country” and the country itself (Martin and Eroglu, 1993, p. 194). Martin and Eroglu (1993) claim that various factors affect the development of a country image such as “travelling to the country,” “advertising and word of mouth,” and “inferences (correct or incorrect) based on past experience” (p. 194). In contrast, Crompton (1979) defines the image of a destination in terms of its touristic value as “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impression that a person has of a destination” (p. 18). Mossberg and Kleppe (2005) find that past definitions of country image and destination image are interchangeable and that a strong association between these concepts should be recognized since they both refer “to the sourcing country (destination) of a specific stage in the value chain for a specific product (attraction)” (p. 499). However, other studies have found that for countries that have struggled with a negative country image, ‘country image’ and ‘destination image’ should be separated since potential tourists may hold fearful attitudes and beliefs towards a country but still find its touristic products appealing and worth experiencing (Campo & Alvarez, 2014; Campo & Alvarez 2010; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008).

For countries in the Middle East that have struggled with a negative image, the use of social media has enabled individuals to produce their own content and brand it with the use of hashtags to counter ‘unsafe’ images and promote a particular image of themselves or their country. Recent literature has highlighted the importance of these User Generated Contents (UGC) or Consumer Generated Media (CGM), which are defined as any content produced by online users made publicly available on a “website or on a page on a social networking site” (Moens, Li & Chua, 2014, p. 8). The purpose of UGC is to allow users to connect with other

users and to be given the platform to freely express themselves online (Moens, Li & Chua, 2014). Sometimes, this can result in “fame and prestige within their circle of friends, or even on a global scale” (Moens, Li & Chua, 2014, p. 8). As such, UGC is required and considered to be separate from “professionally generated content” because a “well established class of professional content providers currently have their presence on the Internet” (Moens, Li & Chua, 2014, p.8). The concept of UGC has also led to recent studies on the rising role and power of users in the context of place branding and marketing through social media campaigns (Avraham, 2012). Avraham (2012) posits that both the traditional linear and non-linear interactive models of communication separate the place being branded from the target audience. The former views audiences as passive receivers and consumers of media messages (Lasswell 1948; Caspi 1993, as cited in Avraham, 2012) and the latter recognizes that audiences possess an active role in “encoding these messages and providing feedback” but still distinguishes their role from that of content creators (Morreale *et al*, 2007, as cited in Avraham, 2012, p. 288). However, Avraham takes it one step further and posits that in the age of Web 2.0 and the ensuing “social and technological changes” (p. 286), the target audience is also able to create the message, spread the campaign messages, and as such becomes a “message creator” and “distributor” (p. 288-289). As audiences become an integrated and essential part in the communication process, Avraham (2012) argues that this disputes the traditional communication model, particularly in a social media age that “directly affects the paradigm of place marketing, as the growing role of web users makes the traditional marketing and communication processes outdated, and forms new integrative relations that are based on the dynamic nature of the social media” (p. 293).

Instagram is a popular platform in this respect, particularly in Lebanon. There are countless “studiously crafted personality profiles” of individuals (Campbell *et al.*, 2006, p. 425)

on Instagram that use hashtags such as that of #LiveLoveLebanon to generate attention to their pages, craft an image of themselves, and perhaps promote tourism in Lebanon through these depictions. Thus, they take on the role of message creators and distributors by posting their own representations of places in Lebanon and spreading the campaign's messages by branding their posts with the #LiveLoveLebanon hashtag. They may even brand their posts with other well-intentioned hashtags related to Lebanon with the aim of generating traffic to their profiles and depicting Lebanon positively to their 'followers' and other users who come across their posts through the 'tag' option. However, the role of content creators and message spreaders is not solely relegated to locals in the destination country as tourists and/or visiting immigrants from said country also tend to post their representations of it. When this happens, they also spread the campaign message within "their own social networks" (Avraham, 2012, p. 292) by introducing these locations to their friends and family. "According to the Hedonic Tourism Motivational Model (Goossens, 2000), such marketing efforts lead to cognitive involvement, hedonistic responses and increased motivation for visiting the destination" (Avraham, 2012, p. 293). In the case of Lebanon, these representations range from photos that portray touristic sites in Lebanon such as the oldest Phoenician town of Byblos, nature pictures that stress the proximity of the mountains to the Mediterranean Sea, nightlife pictures in the core of downtown Beirut, and pictures or selfies of Lebanese individuals in these various locations. These depictions contrast those perpetuated by certain traditional media outlets because they challenge the perception that all areas in Lebanon are war-torn or are a hub for terrorist activity, and that all Lebanese individuals are "backwards" and "barbaric" (Said, 1978, p. 150).

In order to explore whether/how the content generated by individuals on social media may contribute to (changing) perceptions others may have of these individuals' broader

community/culture, two aspects will be addressed in turn: 1) representation and self-presentation; and 2) exposure to (new) representations (i.e. tourist destinations) on the Internet.

2.2 Individual representation and social media use

Hall (1997) refers to “system of representations” to explain the different ways through which meaning is produced (p. 4). These systems “work like languages,” because “they all use some element to stand for or represent what we want to say, to express or communicate a thought, concept, idea or feeling” (Hall, 1997, p. 4). Hall specifies that representation is of “secondary importance” to the “conceptual systems” that vary within different cultures and that are used to construct and share meaning (p. 26). He uses the constructivist approach to differentiate between “representation,” which refers to the act of “depicting” something, and “re-presentation,” which signifies that that depiction “stands in” for that something and subjectively gives it meaning (Hall, 1997, pp. 25-26). This model can be applied to highlight the idea that the pictures and videos that individuals post online and even the ‘selfies’ they share are a construct and do not necessarily reflect reality. However, these representations are sometimes the only means through which others can form ideas and opinions about who/what these representations are standing in for, and thus carry meaning despite their construct. For individuals who have never been to Lebanon, the depictions presented online by #LiveLoveLebanon, other Lebanese users, and/or tourists to the country who may or may not use the hashtag to brand their posts, might be one of the few means through which they can form ideas about the country. However, because the campaign aims to only show ‘positive’ images of Lebanon, the depictions might not accurately reflect what all areas look like or be representative of the living conditions of all its citizens and residents.

Furthermore, representations on Instagram are shared by individual users who choose to

show other users images, videos, and captions that depict their daily lives. Sometimes, they share these depictions in an attempt to market themselves, their crafts, their pages, and their businesses, and other times, they simply share them as an attempt to connect with other users or friends on the platform. Either way, other users who come across such depictions witness the formers' perspective of themselves and the environment surrounding them. Thus, self-representations constitute the basis of Instagram depictions.

Goffman (1956) tackles the concept of self-representation and argues that a performer will change their self in an attempt to influence the way people perceive them. Depending on the circumstances in which individuals find themselves in, they have to rely on the "appearances" that "others" give off to form an "impression" of them since facts are not always readily available in such situations (Goffman, 1956, p. 161). In return, the performer will give off an image of themselves that fits with the situation at hand, or to achieve a personal outcome (Goffman, 1956). The performer can also manipulate how the observer treats them since the "impressions the observer uses" are only a representation and "substitute for reality," and can also allow for "misrepresentations" to take place (Goffman, 1956, p. 162).

More recently, when it comes to online environments, some scholars have stressed the multiplicity of online identities that arise with the emergence of online media technologies and the tensions "between the risks and opportunities associated with self-multiplicity" (Davis, 2011, p. 635). More broadly, scholars have researched the ability of social media platforms to affect individuals' self-perception and attitudes when they are predisposed to such changes since they create a participatory culture revolving around the "self" (Perloff, 2014, p. 366). Others have researched the ability of platforms such as Instagram to affect self-esteem and self-satisfaction using the social comparison theory (Dion, 2016). Some scholars have also researched and

confirmed that behavior characteristics such as narcissism are a predictor of “Instagram users’ self-promoting behavior” (Moon et al., 2016, p. 22). Finally, some scholars have researched the influence of culture on behavior in the context of certain Arab countries such as Kuwait and have found a correlation between the latter and differences in the ways through which men and women present themselves on Instagram (Al-Kandari et al., 2016).

Thus, many authors acknowledge the pertinence and characteristics of Instagram and use the platform to research ideas of self-perception and self-presentation. Representations on Instagram as a strategy for nation and place branding have not been researched extensively, but some studies have endeavored to address this gap in knowledge recently (Uzunoglu, 2017; Shuqair & Cragg, 2017; Smith, 2018; Molinillo, Cabanillas, Sanchez & Buhalis, 2018). Uzunoglu (2017) examines the case study of the city of Izmir on Instagram and finds that such campaigns gain more success “when achieving the commitment of stakeholders to branding process” (p. 111). However, the author finds that this requires that professionals “acknowledge that users’ advocacy, in particular those who have influential role in digital platforms, is the key to achieving credibility, sincerity, and a wider reach for brand communication” (p. 111). As such, collaborative effort across all sectors of a city and/or country is required to achieve the level of exposure desire for city branding on the platform (Uzunoglu, 2017). However, other authors such as Smith (2018) view the capability for any user on Instagram to appropriate and assign meaning to a place through representation negatively. The author focuses more so on “world travelers” and argues that “consistent visual motifs on Instagram echo a colonial iconography that sees tourist destinations as available for possession and consumption” (p. 173). Smith (2018) assigns three attribute of Instagram motifs to argue his case: “(1) the tropical exotic, (2) the promontory gaze and (3) fantasised assimilation” (p. 173). He argues that the

appropriation of such places and motifs by tourists on Instagram to reinforce “colonial era perceptions of the ‘other’” (Smith, 2018, p. 188) because it showcases how easily they can “don and discard local-ness” (p.189).

However, regardless the intent and the means by which such places are shown on Instagram, authors such as Molnillo et al. (2018) and Shuqair & Cragg (2017) find that such representations online can increase the intent to visit such destinations. Particularly, Molino et al. (2018) study the effects of destination image on the intent of “millennials” (p. 117) to travel to places that are marketed as tourism destination on social media platforms such as Instagram. The authors find that when it comes to online platform such as Instagram and Facebook, “tourist involvement in the process of obtaining and analyzing information positively affects a destination's cognitive and affective image” (Molino et al., 2018, p. 124), where “cognitive” refers to a tourist’s knowledge about a destination and “affective” refers to their attachment to it (p. 118). According to the authors, involvement can be encouraged and increased through creation of content that is useful, informative, and visually appealing by Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) (Molino et al., 2018, p. 124). Similarly, Shuqair and Cragg (2017) find that Instagram can positively affect the destination image of a country by increasing visual motifs, which can provide potential tourists with “clues” as to the quality of said destination (p. 8).

Thus, the literature on place branding through the promotion of said place as a tourist destination on Instagram is growing. This study is interested in addressing this gap further by asking if/how Instagram can be used for place branding in the context of countering the ‘unsafe’ images of countries such as Lebanon, as well as the potential to depict these countries as tourist destinations to users.

2.3 Social media interconnectedness as a means to bridge the gap between ‘imagined communities’

With the rise of Web 2.0, Pieterse (1996) defends the emergence of “worldwide interconnectedness,” which renders the world a “smaller community,” and thus brings larger awareness to “cultural change” and a “growing sensitivity to cultural difference” (p. 1389). Pieterse (2009) states that this perspective on cultural difference is one of three that constitute paradigms since “each of these positions involves particular theoretical precepts” (p. 44). The second perception is that of “homogenization” or “McDonaldization,” which states that globalization is erasing cultural differences since the trend of consumerism “leads toward increasing cultural standardization and uniformization” (Pieterse, 2009, p. 44). Pieterse (2009) states that McDonaldization is a slight variation of Americanization and Modernization since it leads to the spread of capitalism and “wide homogenization of societies” (p. 51) on a global scale as a result of the impact “multinational corporations” (p. 51). According to Pieterse, opponents to this school of thought defy the notion of homogenization with that of “*global localization*” (p. 52) by arguing that chains such as McDonalds would not be successful in different parts of the world if they followed the same business model as of the United States. In order to succeed, such businesses would need “to adapt themselves to local cultures and markets” (p. 52). As such, Pieterse argues that instead of leading to uniformization, McDonaldization should be considered a “form of intercultural hybridization” (p. 52) since it takes the successful blueprint of the original ‘chain’ and adapts it to the local social, cultural, and economic conditions (p. 53).

The last paradigm views cultural differences as sources for “rivalry and conflict” (p.44). Pieterse criticizes scholars such as Samuel P. Huntington and others who favor a one-sided definition of culture that articulates “human diversity” and “the set of characteristics which distinguish one group from another” since it would deny any notion of “multiculturalism” as

being “cultural” and is rooted in notions of racism and nationalism (Pieterse, 1996, p. 1390). Instead, he favors the anthropological definition of culture that is “open ended” and acknowledges both cultural diversities and commonalities (p. 1390). Pieterse defends the paradigm of “hybridization,” which can be defined as the “mixing among cultural elements and spheres within societies” (p. 1392). He argues that through its championing of “border-crossing,” it provides a solution to the notion of “cultural differentialism” by acknowledging experiences “that have been banished, marginalized, tabooed in cultural differentialism” (p. 1392). Pieterse’s positive stance towards social media interconnectedness and hybridization can be seen as an argument for the use of social media tools to counteract cultural differentialism. This can be exemplified with how social media led campaigns such as #LiveLoveLebanon use these tools for promotion and to counteract the perceived misrepresentation of Arabs and Islam and Islam by traditional media outlets. Thus, it can also be argued that social media interconnectedness could potentially bridge the imagined divide between certain groups of people and certain communities (Anderson, 1983).

Anderson (1983) proposes a tangible definition of “nationalism” as an “imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (p. 5). It is imagined “because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of the communion” (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). Anderson argues that the emergence of imagined communities coincided with the decline of the “cultural artefacts” that preceded them, the “religious community” and the “dynastic realm” (p. 12). He argues that it was more importantly a result of the development of the idea of “homogenous, empty time” which was embodied in the emergence and production of newspapers and novels that allowed for individuals to become

more interconnected with one another and aware of each other's presence within these imagined communities (Anderson, 1983, p. 24).

In a current social media age, it can be argued that there is a potential for social media tools and content to extend the role that newspapers and novels played in heightening the awareness that individuals in different places have of each other despite the likelihood that most of them will never know one another. However, there are other scholars who would argue that this potential may be difficult to achieve due to the algorithms that underpin social media and which expose audiences to content that mostly adheres to and reinforces their existing knowledge, tastes, and beliefs. Thus, can social media representations of a place such as Lebanon reach their target audience and succeed in countering the 'unsafe' image of the country?

2.4 Other social media users' access to social media representations

When it comes to the access audiences have to representations online, recent literature has focused on the idea of 'filter bubbles' and the 'echo chamber' that ensues due to algorithms that filter content tailored to web users' interests (Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2017). As a result, users are seen as consumers who are unaware that their worldview is being constrained by algorithms who feed them what they (algorithms) think they (consumers) want. In this context, Pieterse's optimistic stance towards social media interconnectedness and its potential to bridge the gap between certain communities could be considered unrealizable since these algorithms may prevent users from being exposed to content that would challenge their perceptions and from connecting with other users who share different interests, ideas, and opinions.

On Instagram particularly, the algorithm works in an interesting way. While the literature on Instagram has not particularly focused on the algorithm aspects of the platform, many articles on the web claim to give users an 'in' into how to tackle the latter to expand their influence and

reach on other users. Particularly, the Instagram algorithm has been known to change regularly (“How the Instagram Algorithm Works for Your Feed Posts in 2020,” 2020). Most prominently, what users see on their “Instagram feed is a combination of all” their “Instagram behaviors” (“How the Instagram Algorithm Works for Your Feed Posts in 2020,” 2020). As such, the algorithm takes into account not only who users follow, but also “who” and “what” they like (“How the Instagram Algorithm Works for Your Feed Posts in 2020,” 2020). It also prioritizes content that receives “comments, likes, reshares, and for video posts, views” (“How the Instagram Algorithm Works for Your Feed Posts in 2020,” 2020). Finally, the algorithm aims to find out which users belong to another user’s social circle based on their interactions through likes, comments, and tags, and shows both users’ content more often to each other. As such, when it comes to content that users are exposed to, it seems that Instagram’s algorithm potentially adheres to the notion of the echo chamber, since it seems to show users *more* of what they like, instead of what they *need*.

However, although legitimate questions continue to be raised about algorithms and their effects, recent studies have challenged the idea of filter bubbles (Madsen, 2012; Rogers, 2013). Madsen (2012) argues that the search engine results page (SERP) does not represent the web sphere as a whole, but rather “functions as a starting point from which the user can follow the medium and repurpose its logic to see the world in a specific way” (p. 9). Beyond that are “web-visions,” “which is taken to be a result of a set of selection mechanisms that is distributed beyond the algorithm” (Madsen, 2012, p. 9). Madsen suggests that the importance and effects of filter bubbles and algorithms in today’s media landscape has been overstated, and that scholars must also take in consideration the “non-algorithmic selection mechanisms at play” such as selection, browsing, and the semantics of the query (p. 7).

The idea of a “passive” consumer has also been challenged in previous studies on uses and gratifications theory (UGT), which posits that individuals are “active” consumers of media and are “goal directed” (Katz et al., 1974, p. 510). This concept disputes the opposing school of thought which studies the effects of media on individuals, instead of deriving data “supplied by individual audience members themselves” (p. 511). More recently, the UGT has been applied in research studying the influence of social media platforms on individuals’ “perceptions of the brands they follow” as well as their use of these platforms and the gratifications they gain from them (Phua et al., 2016, p. 413). Other studies have focused on the use of different social media platforms to fulfill different needs and the goal-directed behavior of consumers in actively seeking and interpreting certain media outlets (Rubin, 1986; Phua et al., 2016). The theoretical framework derived from this concept allows researchers to use “active” audience members as starting point in their research instead of assuming that it is the media that monopolizes and pushes down its ideologies and hegemonic ideas onto them (Katz et al., 1974).

Other studies have focused on the concepts of audience fragmentation and selective exposure, which posit that the specialization of new media technologies and that of online news outlets have given audiences the opportunity to increasingly access content that pertains to their interests (Tewksbury, 2005; Sunstein 2001). Tewksbury (2005) fears that in the long term, fragmentation will result in audiences “who know something about specific parts of the social world but perhaps little else” (p. 334). However, Trilling et al. (2015) have argued that this phenomenon won’t prevent audiences’ exposition to content outside of their comfort zone (p. 141). They found that audiences will often not access specialized outlets even if they produce content that matches their interests (p. 150). The authors suggest “this shows that people actually appreciate a diversity of topics in news outlets and are not as keen on reading primarily about

their pet subjects as the fragmentation thesis assumes” (p. 150).

In this instance, Pieterse’s hope for social media interconnectedness may be realizable if filter bubbles do not constitute the bulk of the web sphere and if users can actively seek out content of interest while still being exposed to different contents produced online. This potential could also be realized if online campaigns such as #LiveLoveLebanon use social media tools – i.e. Instagram – to reach their target audiences and users who would not be exposed to such content otherwise. Consequently, while social media may constitute an obstacle to achieving interconnectedness, it paradoxically may enable to counter the ‘unsafe’ images of places such as Lebanon when used specifically for the purposes of challenging perceived stereotypes and misrepresentations.

2.5 Research question

Based on the considerations above, my study aims to answer the following main research question:

- *To what extent can Instagram be considered a tool to combat the ‘unsafe’ image of Lebanon?*

To explore the major RQ further, a secondary question is posed:

- *Do users who come across depictions of Lebanon on Instagram perceive the country as a potential tourist destination?*

2.6 Theoretical framework

Based on the research questions stated above, and since users’ perceptions when they are exposed to media depictions of Lebanon and Lebanese individuals on Instagram through the lens of the ‘other’ are a focal point of the study, Edward Said’s ‘other’ allows to thematically frame the way these users perceive these depictions. Furthermore, Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding

model is useful in that it allows to analyze social media representations through audience members' perspectives and acknowledges the role that individuals' cultural backgrounds and own experiences play in shaping how they translate these representations. His approach also acknowledges the transformation of a raw event into a 'communicative event' when the producer encodes it and it takes on 'message form' or 'form of appearance' (Hall, 1980, p. 164). Hall's take on semiotic and discursive representation is also important to include since it takes things one step further from how these representations are *interpreted* and *read*, to how they can have an emotional and political impact on audiences since they can influence the way they think, feel, and act about a certain topic (Hall, 1997). Finally, this study's significance is highlighted by the potential for representations by the 'other' to potential to contrast traditional media depictions of the 'other.' Thus, they could foster stronger intercultural communication between Lebanese individuals or even Lebanese diasporic communities and users who might have previously internalized such stereotypes. This is why the hybridization paradigm is used to look at the 'intercultural mingling' between Lebanese individuals and other users while acknowledging their marginalization as a result of cultural differentialism (Pieterse, 1996). However, if depictions of the 'other' don't reach their target audience, then this intercultural mingling might not be achievable. As such, Pariser's (2011) 'echo chamber' is useful to analyze if users who come across depictions of Lebanon on Instagram are exposed to them as a result of their interest in it, or if the algorithm proposes such content regardless of their interest and/or disinterest in it.

2.6.1 Orientalism and the Other

As stated in the foregoing, Said's 'other' explains how the Orient is seen and depicted from the West's perspective, given the system of propaganda that continuously pushes the image of "Orientalism" and the "Oriental" in people's minds (p. 27). As such, until now, history has

made it impossible for the ‘other’ to dictate the discourse by which they are seen in the West. Based on these considerations, Said’s ‘Orientalism’ offers a conceptual framework to answer the major research question: *To what extent can Instagram be considered a tool to combat the ‘unsafe’ image of Lebanon?*

Practically, his theory is used to define the way in which respondents of this study perceive Lebanon, and whether these perspectives correspond to the notion of othering – and whether Instagram depictions defy and counter this notion by providing an alternative perspective that is able to overcome the perpetual stereotypical and oppressive depictions of the ‘Oriental’ by traditional Western media outlets. However, this binary distinction between West and East is not meant to be literal, but is rather used for the purposes to conceptualize the case study. One of the objectives of this thesis is to find out the extent to which Instagram depictions achieve Pieterse’s hope for worldwide interconnectedness by allowing users in different parts of the world to reach each other. As such, they could possibly bridge the long-standing history of disconnect between West and East and in turn, reframe, or at least undermine the image of the ‘Oriental’ and ‘Orientalism.’

2.6.2 System of representations – Semiotic and discursive representation

Hall (1997) emphasizes different definitions of the term culture but focuses on the anthropological version which stipulates that culture is “whatever is distinctive about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation or social group” (p. 2). As stated earlier in this chapter, he closely associates how meaning is continuously produced and exchanged through cultural practices (Hall, 1997, p.3), and how different cultures have distinctive worldviews and as such different ways of representing things, ideas, and concepts. These representations range from visual images, to stories and words used to describe things, to “the emotions we associate with

them, the way we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them” (p. 3). They constitute the ‘system of representations’ through which individuals of a specific culture regulate how they represent, think and feel about the environment surrounding them. Similarly to Said, Hall (1997) also emphasizes the speed at which new media technologies have made it possible to transmit and exchange these representations on a global scale (p. 3).

This is where the signs and symbols used to represent a culture become important in the context of encoding/decoding since they allow individuals in a different place to understand, interpret, and ‘read’ (p. 5) the formers’ way of viewing and coping with the material world. Hall refers to this as the semiotic approach, which is more geared towards understanding how language works as the “vehicle” through which “meaning in culture” (p. 6) is transmitted to others. However, he distinguishes between the semiotic approach and the discursive approach, which “is more concerned with the effects and consequences of representation – its politics.” (p. 6). Whereas the former is more interested in the “science of signs” (p. 6), as in the details of how meaning is produced, the latter examines “how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced and studied” (p. 7).

The concept of power is useful in this study since it explains why and how the idea of the other came to be in the first place. The image of the ‘Oriental,’ as Said puts it, has been framed by the West for political reasons, and this agenda has been consistently pushed forward with the aid of traditional media outlets, which for years was the main source through which audiences got their news. As a consequence, the identity of the other has been constructed and represented by outside forces with more influence and power. Now that new media technologies are

potentially allowing the other to regain some of that power, it is interesting to see the extent to which that shift of power will impact the dominant discourses surrounding it, specifically in regards of representation of Lebanon on Instagram. If Lebanese users and tourists to the country are depicting it as a tourist destination, or are at least framing it under a positive lens, then it is possible that users on the reception end of these depictions might start to see it as such. If so, then the ‘unsafe’ image of the country can be countered, or at the very least, undermined. As such, both of Hall’s arguments on encoding/decoding, as well as semiotic and discursive representation are essential components of this study’s theoretical framework since the former allows to analyze how audiences would read and interpret representations of the other by the other, and the latter takes into consideration the political implications and consequences of such representations on its audiences. Practically, the semiotic approach is useful to analyze the *quality* that respondents assign to depictions of Lebanon on Instagram through their descriptions of them, whereas the discursive approach is useful to analyze the *importance* that they assign to such depictions, and therefore its direct/indirect impact on them.

2.6.3 Globalization, Hybridization, and the Echo Chamber

The third component that constitutes this theoretical framework is Pieterse (1996) and his Hybridization paradigm, as well as Pariser’s (2011) echo chamber. As explained in the literature review, the two other paradigms that Pieterse tackles are that of polarization and homogenization. Pieterse is unequivocally against the former since it does not leave any room for the coexistence of cultural differences and the coming together of people who live in different parts of the world and have different ways of perceiving and engaging with the environment surrounding them. As for the Mcdonaldization paradigm, Pieterse (1996) argues that it dismisses the very notion of cultural differences since it places consumerism as the reason

for the increasing uniformization and homogenization of societies (p.51). Finally, the hybridization paradigm is the only one that acknowledges the intermingling of different cultures, which can possibly lead to better coexistence and provide a solution to cultural differentialism. Pieterse also champions the idea of social media interconnectedness since it is the leading engine that can provide increased hybridization and acknowledgment of different, unpopular, or ‘taboo’ experiences that minorities must endure. Similarly, this research’s worldview engages with the idea that depictions of different places in the world by the people living in them through new media tools and platforms such as Instagram can reach users with different cultural backgrounds and potentially allow them to engage with the particular realities of the ‘other.’ As such, the hybridization paradigm provides this research with its final theoretical component since it opens the floor to interpret the ways in which social media depictions of different cultures potentially reach different users and impact the ways in which they perceive and experience these depictions. Here, Pariser’s (2011) echo chamber enhances that notion since it allows to determine the extent to which ‘filter bubbles’ impact respondents’ access to depictions of Lebanon on Instagram. As a result, it is useful to determine how much of respondents’ access to such representations is a result of their interest in or ties to Lebanon, and how much of it is a result of the algorithm’s manipulation of such depictions’ appearance on users’ feeds.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research design

To address the major research question and find out the extent to which Instagram can be considered a tool to combat the ‘unsafe’ image of Lebanon; and the secondary question which asks if users who come across depictions of Lebanon on Instagram perceive the country as a potential tourist destination, I employed a mixed methods approach making use of a survey and semi-structured interviews. I administered a survey to a sample of Canadian participants to gain general insight into their use of social media and Instagram, their views of Lebanon, and the ways through which they have formed these views. Then, I interviewed a sample of survey respondents to explore their perceptions of representations further. During the interviews, I showed interviewees #LiveLoveLebanon posts to elicit a more insightful conversation about their beliefs of the country and to explore representations of Lebanon on Instagram further.

3.2 Population

As shown in the literature review, authors such as Karim Karim, Evelyn Alsultany, Eltantawy, Said, and others study the representations of the ‘other’ from the West’s perspective. For this reason, coupled with the restrictions of completing a thesis in Ottawa, Canada, I chose to focus on Canadian respondents. Furthermore, according to Statistics Canada, since 2001, almost 144000 people living in Canada had Lebanese origins and it was the “6th largest non-European ethnic group in the country” (“The Lebanese Community,” n.d.). The population is heavily concentrated in Ontario and Quebec, with 30% living in Montreal, and 14% residing in Toronto and Ottawa respectively. According to Statistics Canada, 23% of them faced discrimination or unfair treatment at some point in their lifetime based on their ethnicity, religion, race, and accent” (“The Lebanese Community,” n.d.). With the prevalence of the Lebanese population in

Canada, and the discrimination that they face in the country, the study could be considered a step towards forging a better understanding of the Lebanese community. The study's secondary question: *do users who come across depictions of Lebanon on Instagram perceive the country as a potential tourist destination*, also allows to further examine if Canadian users who come across depictions of Lebanon on Instagram consider traveling to the country, and the reasons for which they would consider doing so. Furthermore, being a Canadian of Lebanese origin myself, and having lived in both countries, my insight and knowledge of both cultures gave me a perspective for deriving useful qualitative data and for being a competent mediator between the Canadian interviewees and the posts I showed them during the interviews¹.

3.2.1 Sampling and Recruitment

Since Canada is a multicultural and inclusive country that heavily relies on its immigrant populations to grow and thrive, broadening the criteria and definition of the word Canadian was justifiable. As such, I identified Canadian participants as Canadian citizens and/or immigrants who have lived most of their lives in the country and whose media exposure would consist mainly of traditional Canadian and U.S. outlets. As a first step towards deriving quantitative data, a survey was conducted with a sample of eligible Canadian participants. I limited the population size in Canada to that of Ottawa, due to practical reasons and the fact that 14% the Canadians with Lebanese origins live in the city. A convenience sampling frame was relied upon to complete the data collection. As such, I limited my research to university-aged students and

¹ My Lebanese-Canadian identity was not revealed to survey respondents and interviewees before they completed the survey or participated in the interviews. In a few instances when interviewees inquired about my identity, I confirmed my Lebanese roots. Often, interviewees became more comfortable discussing Lebanon since my knowledge helped them spell out their thoughts about Lebanon.

chose the University of Ottawa as the institution through which I recruited the participants. According to the Pew Research Center, the usage of social media by people aged 18-29 has increased exponentially in 8 years by almost 1000% (Brenner et al., 2013), and 98% of adults aged 18 to 24 use social media in the US (Macale, 2011). Thus, the choice to limit the age of participants to that of university-aged students was justifiable since this cohort was representative of the population who mostly uses social media platforms such as Instagram.

The University of Ottawa's Integrated System for Participation in Research (ISPR), which aims to put researchers in contact with individuals who might be interested in taking part in their research (University of Ottawa, 2017), was used as the recruitment tool. I deemed that it would be easier and quicker to recruit students of the desired age criterion through ISPR since as of 2014, most students taking part in the system (92%), were "between the ages of 19-22" (University of Ottawa, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2014). Initially, I planned to realistically collect over 30-50 surveys using ISPR over the span of one semester. I then planned to assess the eligibility of the respondents and choose 15-20 participants to interview. Interviewees had to be regular users of Instagram and be familiar with its features to generate an insightful discussion and provide reliable qualitative data. They were also required to have some general knowledge about Lebanon to talk about it with some level of confidence and ease.

3.2.2 Recruitment Process

Following the approval of the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board on February 14th 2019 (see appendix A), the process to recruit survey participants began (see appendix B). The aim was to collect 30 completed surveys. This number was deemed realistic since the requirements to participate in the research on the ISPR stated: "You are Canadian and/or have lived in Canada for at least 10 years. You use Instagram or understand how the platform works."

This meant that a number of ISPR participants would not participate because they did not meet the requirements².

Furthermore, given this requirement, Lebanese immigrants and/or Lebanese Canadians were also deemed eligible participants. This wasn't considered an issue since these individuals' insights were deemed valuable and comparable to insights provided by those of other Canadians. Insights of Lebanese Canadians could also explain how their cultural backgrounds and exposure to traditional media outlets informed their views about their country.

From February 24 to March 31, 2019, about 175 respondents had submitted their responses, which exceeded by far the initial expectations of 30 respondents. After cleaning the data and deleting uncompleted surveys, there were 169 completed responses left. A spike of responses was noticed towards the end of term, likely because students were rushing to find a study to participate in to receive score credit for their course requirements³.

While the data collection procedure for survey responses was taking place, the ISPR system was simultaneously used to activate the interview portion of the study. Since ISPR does not offer the option for students to sign up for the survey and the interviews at the same time, the interview was treated as a separate study. Only participants who had completed the survey were allowed to sign up for the individual meetings. Furthermore, the last question of the survey asked participants if they were interested in taking part of the interviews to elaborate on their answers.

² Prior to that, there was an added requirement that participants had to have some, but not necessarily expert knowledge on Lebanon. However, following a period of two weeks where very few students were signing up to participate in the study, a decision was made to remove this requirement since it seemed very restrictive and exclusive. Also, the point was to gain insights into participants' views on Lebanon and how they formed them. Thus, it did not matter if they knew very little about Lebanon or were subject-matter experts.

³ At this point, there was some concern that their responses weren't as reliable as could be due to the average completion time of 7 minutes. However, the risk of unreliability with surveys is always present since respondents have the freedom to represent themselves and their beliefs however they choose and can as such alter their responses to fit in with the social desirability bias. Still, it remains one of the most effective methods to find out people's insights, beliefs, and expertise on a subject matter.

Thus, participants could either manually sign themselves up for interview spots (after having completed the survey) or could allow me to sign them up if they expressed an interest in being interviewed.

By the end of the winter term, 15 survey respondents had signed up for the interview portion of the study. This correlated with the desired number of recruitments and no additional measures were taken⁴. The interviews were conducted face to face and took place over the span of two weeks. Per the instructions of the ethics board committee, each interviewee gave their consent through a consent form at the beginning of each interview (see appendix C). Each interview was audio recorded on my phone and was manually transcribed. After completing the transcriptions, I proceeded to thematically code the interviews.

3.3 Data collection tools

3.3.1 Surveys

The online survey tool SurveyMonkey was chosen due to its easily accessible platform and customizable layout. It also offers pre-built questions which were occasionally used for general inquiries such as demographics and time spent on social media platforms. The use of a survey as a first step towards gaining general insight and data about Canadian participants' views or knowledge of Lebanon, as well as their use of Instagram and opinions on tourist destinations found on the platform was essential to identify participants who were "the experts on the topic" and to derive a "knowledge base" (Schrauf, 2016, p. 138). Also, according to Schrauf (2016) "when administered to groups of people who are methodically selected as representative of their

⁴ Initially, the plan was to look over survey responses and choose interviewees who fit the criteria of being adept Instagram users and seemed to have some, but not necessarily expert knowledge on Lebanon. However, since most of the respondents who did not personally sign themselves up for interviews spots stated in the survey that they weren't interested in being interviewed, the possibility to personally choose interviewees was removed.

larger under-lying populations, the survey provides a unique snapshot of cultural sharing that can be gained in no other way” (p. 124). They can also provide participants with a “coherent domain of talk” through their structured forms (Schrauf, 2016, p. 138). I was interested in discerning a pattern of participants’ Instagram use, their opinions on tourist destinations found on the platform, and their views on Lebanon. As a result, close ended questions were considered suitable. The quantitative data that I derived from the surveys was also beneficial for structuring and tailoring the interviews based on the responses that selected interviewees gave.

3.3.2 SurveyMonkey questionnaire design process

The process of designing a reliable survey questionnaire and piloting it with test respondents was completed over the span of two months during January and February 2019. 10 test respondents took the survey and provided feedback for altering and/or adding response options for a number of questions. The final questionnaire can be found in appendix D.

Drawn from the literature review and theoretical framework, social media and Instagram use was identified as the first theme. Respondents were asked which social media platforms they use most often and had the option to rank applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Reddit. They were also asked which tool they most frequently use on the platform, and were given the option to choose between posts, stories, live videos, IGTV or the search bar. For this section, Pieterse’s (1996) hybridization paradigm and Anderson’s (1983) imagined communities prompted questions such as: the extent to which respondents agree that Instagram allows them to discover new communities, places, and people they would not know about otherwise; and if Instagram can introduce them to new communities more effectively than traditional media outlets can. This section also inquired about respondents’ impressions on Instagram tourist destinations. Participants were also asked if they believe that Instagram

algorithms have filtered or restricted the type of content that they are exposed to or if they think that they are still able to control the content they view on the platform (Pariser, 2011; Madsen; 2012; Phua et al., 2016).

The second theme addressed Lebanon to assess how much respondents know about the country. This theme was mostly addressed through Likert scale questions with a five-point scale. Traditionally, the five-point scale offers respondents the choice to be indecisive/neutral in their response through a variation of the following response options: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neutral/no opinion, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree. This scale was offered in the original structure of the survey. However, in the pilot phase of the survey, most test respondents chose the neutral option. I took this to mean that respondents were either too timid to voice their opinion, or had genuinely no strong opinion regarding aspects related to Lebanon. Thus, the results did not allow for an insightful and pertinent analysis of the core research question. After discussing the matter with my supervisor and a survey design specialist, a decision was made to alter the scale to incite respondents to express an unambiguous opinion. In the revised scale, respondents were offered the following response options: completely agree, strongly agree, moderately agree, agree a little, don't agree at all. The aim was to encourage respondents to carefully consider whether they wished to disagree or agree with statements. Thus, they could only express disagreement with a statement if they felt strongly about that opinion ('don't agree at all'), but still had the option to choose among varying options of very little to very high levels of positive agreements. This allowed me to analyze with higher precision the nuances of their responses⁵.

⁵ While an explicit neutral option was not included, respondents still had the option to choose between varying degrees of agreeability and if none reflected their opinion, they could choose to not agree at all. The choices to moderately agree or agree a little were taken to mean that respondents were ambivalent in their choices, in that,

In the section about Lebanon, the themes I addressed were related to the “country image” and “destination image” of Lebanon. For the former, five negative statements in the form of Likert scale questions addressed issues such as modernization, safety, freedom, and conflicts in Lebanon. For the latter, five positive statements in the form of Likert scale questions addressed touristic possibilities in Lebanon such as nightlife, scenic landscapes, authentic cuisine, the ‘open-mindedness’ of Lebanese society, and the desire to visit Lebanon. The themes in this section were inspired by Edward Said’s ‘other’ and pointed to a Lebanese society that is ‘backwards,’ ‘exotic,’ and unwilling to modernize (1978). Participants’ insights on religion and conflict in Lebanon were also addressed in this section (Alsultany, 2013; Karim, 2000).

The last section addressed Lebanon’s depiction in the media, and aimed to find out if, how, and to what extent these depictions have influenced participants’ views and beliefs about Lebanon. Some test respondents stated that they were unable to truthfully answer some questions in this section because they did not offer enough response options that accurately represented their beliefs. For example, one question asked respondents how they thought Lebanon was typically depicted on Instagram and offered *positively*, *neutrally*, and *negatively* as response options. However, test respondents who hadn’t previously seen depictions of Lebanon on Instagram could not accurately answer the questions. Thus, the response option: *don’t know, I’ve never seen Lebanon depicted on Instagram* was added for these types of questions

3.3.3 Data analysis of SurveyMonkey

One of SurveyMonkey’s practical features is that it automatically generates data trends in

they didn’t strongly lean towards a positive or negative extremity of a statement. These two levels of agreeability allowed me to take into account the neutral possibility of their answers.

the form of graphic representations with clear variables stating how many respondents chose a specific answer option. Thus, once the survey was closed, these graphs were manually transformed into raw percentage tables in Microsoft Word that gave a clear overview of data trends. In the survey, I opted for one open-ended question that asked respondents what came to mind when they thought of Lebanon. This question was thematically coded using excel and after developing categories, responses were coded using a binary measure with a value of 1 or 0.

3.3.4 Interviews

Once the survey was closed, interviews were conducted with a sample of the survey respondents to delve deeper into their responses and further explore their perceptions of Lebanon, and representations of Lebanon. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore participants' beliefs about Lebanon without being constrained by a rigid interview guide; and allowed them to freely view and discuss the #LiveLoveLebanon posts. Open-ended questions helped elicit "data grounded in the participant's experiences" as well as data grounded in the theoretical framework of the research (Galletta, 2016, p. 46). Also, individual meetings made it easier to ask for clarifications, follow-up questions, and to encourage interviewees to elaborate on their answers when they were shy or unsure on how to proceed (Galletta. 2016, p. 25). These answers could not have been given through the survey since participants were restricted to pre-fixed responses. Even in the case of the open-ended question, most respondents gave one-word responses that did not reflect the nuances of their opinions. This proved to be the case when interviewees elaborated much more effectively on their thoughts about Lebanon during the interviews than they did in the survey. Thus, the survey was essential for covering the quantitative portion of the study and for offering a basis through which the interview guide was

developed. However, it would have remained incomplete without the use of semi-structured interviews to delve deeper into interviewees' survey responses.

3.3.5 Interview guide

The interview guide (see appendix E) was largely inspired by the online questionnaire since it aimed to encourage interviewees to elaborate on their survey responses. Its structure mostly aligned with that of the survey with slight changes and an added #LiveLoveLebanon section. The interviews began with open-ended questions and transitioned to more specific ones as the interviews developed (Galletta, 2016, p. 54). This allowed to advance the narrative organically by learning about participants' backgrounds and drawing upon their experiences before asking specific questions related to the research subject (Galletta, 2016, p. 54). Each interview guide was slightly modified to adapt to interviewees' survey responses. Survey responses were only used to jog interviewees' memory if they did not know how to answer a question.

The main themes tackled were participants' general social media use with a focus on Instagram and travel destinations found on the application, Lebanon-specific questions which included inquiries into how participants had gained their knowledge and views on Lebanon, and their thoughts on the #LiveLoveLebanon posts. The questions did not directly point to the themes to avoid leading the interviewees' answers. For example, they were asked questions such as: "What comes to mind when you think of the people who live in Lebanon?" and "What do you think of religion in Lebanon?".

For the #LiveLoveLebanon section, I used a probability sampling frame followed by a purposive sampling frame to choose the posts that I showed the interviewees. I planned to first generate all the posts that would come up by clicking on #LiveLoveLebanon and give

interviewees the chance to go through them and discuss the posts that caught their attention. Thus, any posts included in this hashtag could be chosen by interviewees. I deemed this would generate a more organic and natural conversation between interviewees and interviewer about the posts and would attenuate the sense of artificiality that comes with such experimental components. I also considered it would constitute a useful comparative tool for later data analysis of the kind of posts that were most popular among interviewees.

In case this method did not elicit useful responses due to interviewees being hesitant or unable to personally select posts for discussion, I planned to use a purposive sampling frame and choose posts that I would show interviewees based on themes. By definition, the purposive sampling technique requires a researcher to use judgment and strategy when choosing their population of study (Etikan, Abubakar Musa, and Alkassim, 2015, p. 2). Participants are also chosen based on the qualities they possess (p.2). Thus, the researcher strategically chooses what information they need to collect and the type of people -- or in the case of this study -- the type of Instagram posts that can facilitate data collection pertaining to the phenomenon studied. As such, choosing the type of posts that interviewees would view and discuss had to be pertinent to the object studied to add homogeneity and a point of correlation for further analysis among the different given responses.

While scrolling through the hashtag #LiveLoveLebanon, a clear pattern of themes emerged. These included posts that depicted nature and scenic landscapes, popular religious monuments, touristic activities, authentic cuisine, nightlife, and pictures of Lebanese individuals in these various locations. These themes correlate with the definitions of ‘destination image’ found in the literature review, which tie a destination to its touristic attractions and products. Also, Instagram recently introduced the option to save and categorize posts under a ‘saved’

section, which allowed me to safely keep the posts I chose for each interview. Thus, after handing my phone over to the interviewees, I could easily switch between the posts that the hashtag #LiveLoveLebanon would generate and the posts I had saved myself.

Based on the themes I had already identified, I chose at least 3 posts under each section to show the interviewees (see appendix F). The posts I selected were based on popularity and had to have at least 50-100 likes and some comments to determine that they were able to elicit responses from interviewees⁶. During the interviews, I generated the #LiveLoveLebanon hashtag and allowed interviewees to choose those that caught their attention to discuss. They were asked how their impressions of the posts correlate and/or differ with what they believe and/or know of Lebanon. Once they signalled they did not have anything else to add, I showed them the posts I had saved on the platform and asked what they thought of them. After discussing the posts at

⁶ For example, for the nature section, the first post depicted a Lebanese woman walking with her dog along a hike path during the winter snow season. The second one showed a waterfall in the Afqa village of Lebanon framed to depict and inspire grandiosity. Similarly, the third post also included a colorful waterfall and a Lebanese man posing next to it. The last post in this section depicted a Lebanese woman posing in the Chouwen area next to gigantic green mountainsides with a river flowing in between them. The common denominator in these photos was the colors edited to look more vibrant and striking.

The second section was that of religion, and the posts depicted various religious symbols and monuments. The first post showed the rooftop of an old stone church with a cross sitting on top of it and framed to inspire reign and grandiosity over the surrounding valley. Similarly, the second post positioned a Lebanese man in the middle of the frame, surrounded by green mountainsides and a gigantic cross seemingly looking over and protecting the area. The third one depicted a grandiose, vividly lit up mosque in downtown Beirut during nighttime. Finally, the last post was a drone shot of the famous shrine of “Our Lady of Lebanon” honoring Mary, mother of Jesus. The shot captured the monument seemingly looking over and protecting the surrounding Jounieh bay area and mountainside.

The third section was titled tourism and depicted various famous touristic attractions in Lebanon. The first portrayed two children posing next to the famous Roman temple ruins of Baalbek. The second posed a stark contrast to the first as it depicted modernly lit up structures and buildings in downtown Beirut at night, and the third portrayed the old market of Tripoli displaying traditional Lebanese clothing and items. The last one showed Lebanese men posing inside the Jeita grotto known for its impressive stalagmite and stalactite structures.

The fourth section depicted Lebanese cuisine. The first post showed a cook while preparing the famous cheesy dessert dish “knefeh.” The second post included a short video depicting a Lebanese breakfast on a sunny day with the Mediterranean Sea serving as a background. The third post captured a traditional Lebanese lunch that included a variety of food such as hummus, kebab, taouk, fries, and tabbouleh. The fourth post also depicted Lebanese pies surrounded by colorful mountains and valleys. Finally, the last post depicted various Lebanese snacks in a bowl, with the ancient town of “Dayr Al Qamar” serving as the backdrop.

The last section showed Lebanese people in various locations. The first post depicted a Lebanese woman posing against an old stone wall next to the Mediterranean Sea. The second one showed a Lebanese couple posing on top of a mountain hill with the village of Baalbek serving as the backdrop to their embrace. The last post showed a Lebanese woman with a traditional head scarf posing next to the ruins of a Roman temple in Baalbek.

length, I proceeded to the last section in the interview guide which asked interviewees to rehash which posts caught their attention the most and why, what they thought of the use of Instagram to showcase Lebanon and other potential travel destinations on the platform, if the posts they saw correlate with what they have been told of or how they view Lebanon, if they thought the posts reflect an accurate⁷ representation of Lebanon, and if they would trust Instagram to make an informed decision to travel to destinations such as Lebanon. The last question was meant to draw out a response that would pinpoint if Instagram could practically influence the ‘destination image’ of a country by attracting potential tourists to it. Following the interviews, interviewees’ answers were thematically analyzed.

3.3.6 Retrieval document and coding frame

All 15 interviews were audio recorded and manually transcribed to ensure accuracy and objectivity of the thematic analysis process. The basis of a thematic analysis is to examine “narrative materials from life stories by breaking the text into relatively small units of content and submitting them to descriptive treatment” (Vaismoradi, 2013, p. 400). This process was essential to ensure that each interview was given its fair share of analysis. While transcribing, paragraphs or quotes that were deemed important and interesting were highlighted using a yellow marker to be easily located for future in text citations. After the transcription process was

⁷ The notion of accuracy is highly subjective and difficult to objectify. This thesis doesn’t aim to define accuracy rigorously and leaves it up for respondents’ and interviewees’ interpretations. Indeed, I wanted to find out the extent to which their preconceived notions of Lebanon (based on word of mouth and the media – traditional or social) influenced their perceptions of a place to which they didn’t have close ties to. The latter sometimes lead to stereotypical versions of Lebanon that they’ve made up in their mind (i.e. people who imagine that Lebanon includes deserts when it does not), and sometimes, beautiful vacation spots is what they think of based on what they’ve seen from friends on Instagram. These versions of Lebanon might be accurate to them and it is their interpretations that make up the analysis of the thesis.

complete, texts were read once again to increase familiarity with the data and the preliminary process of generating initial codes began. This was done in a systematic fashion across all the interviews. All transcripts that pointed to identical ideas and themes were coded similarly and were highlighted using colors schemes that would allow to easily locate the data when generating the coding frame (see appendix G). Once this process was completed, a retrieval document was created and similar data extracts were collated under broad categories that were generated using the structure of the survey and interview guides. As such, all data extracts and codes were categorized and combined under potential themes within this document. The document was read again and the creation of a coding frame allowed to review, refine, and finalize the themes and subthemes. This arduous process ensured an objective and fair analysis across the entire data set.

3.4 Limitations

A convenience sampling frame is considered by some to be unreliable since it is not representative of the entire population. However, youths are representative of the population that mostly uses Instagram and since the scope of my research was limited to university-aged students, it was representative of this cohort. Thus, a convenience sampling frame was justified for the purposes of this study. Also, the requirements for participation in the survey stated that respondents had to be Canadian and/or have lived in Canada for at least 10 years, and that they used Instagram or understood how the platform works. However, there is no feature on ISPR that allows to fact check if respondents adhered to these requirements. Thus, I had to trust that respondents' answers were reliable. Nevertheless, reliability is always a concern when survey methods are used, but it still one of the most efficient methods to collect a quantitative basis that covers a sample of the populations' beliefs, impressions, or expertise on a subject matter.

Furthermore, in the interviews, my Lebanese/Canadian identity could be considered a limitation since some would consider that I was looking at the subject matter through a biased lens and that this could have possibly affected my ability to remain objective. However, the access and insight I possess in these cultures allowed me to derive pertinent data. Also, the study was rooted in an extensive conceptual framework, which was used to ensure that both the survey and interview guide were structured in an objective manner. Finally, while surveys and interviews are needed for this research, the use of these methods could be considered flawed on some level since there is always a possibility of unreliability with human sources.

Finally, data collection was completed in May 2019. At the time, the financial crisis which has overtaken Lebanon since September 2019 had not started. Since then, Lebanese people have taken to Instagram to express their frustrations and represent their revolution against the government. Thus, currently, users who are exposed to content on Instagram depicting Lebanon might have different views or beliefs of the country than participants of the study. Thus, the chosen cohort might not be representative of current views anymore. Participants' views since data collection was completed might have also changed. However, their views at the time remain timely and relevant given the study's goal to find out the extent to which Instagram can be considered a tool to counter the 'unsafe' image of countries such as Lebanon and if users who come across such depictions consider the country to be a potential tourist destination.

Chapter 4: Results and analysis

In this chapter, the results of the study are reported based on themes that were used to cohesively organize the various sections of the survey. A section on Lebanon is tackled first and includes subsections related to perceptions of Lebanon/Lebanese people including themes such as: social aspects, religion, women in Lebanon, geography, nature, tourism, conflict, and politics. The second subsection tackles the notion of representation and includes themes related to media and social relations. The third section addresses social media and Instagram and includes subsections tackling general social media use, the use of Instagram specifically, and the control over contents/influence that users possess. Throughout the chapter, interview excerpts are included to add depth and context to the survey statistics. The interviewees' identities remain anonymous and pseudonyms are used when they are referred to. Excerpts from my discussion with interviewees about #LiveLoveLebanon are also included and provide more insights on their perceptions of Lebanon, their exposure to content depicting it on Instagram, and the potential to frame it as a 'safe' tourist destination on the platform.

4.1 Representations of Lebanon and Lebanese people

4.1.1 Knowledge of the Other

In the survey, respondents were asked about their understanding, beliefs, and perceptions of Lebanon. First, when asked how they would fare in a conversation about the cultural and social aspects of Lebanon, most respondents claim to have little knowledge (40%) or no knowledge at all (36%) about Lebanon. A combined 24 % of respondents claim to have moderate, a lot, or expert knowledge of the country. Similarly, most respondents claim to have little knowledge (39%) or no knowledge at all (37%) about the Lebanese community in Canada.

The rest, a combined of 24%, claim to have moderate, a lot of knowledge, or expert knowledge of the Lebanese community in Canada.

To inquire about their specific knowledge of the country, respondents were asked what came to their minds when they thought of Lebanon and were given the choice to either write down key words or spell out their thoughts. Ideas which received the most mentions were those related to food (mentioned by 50% of respondents). Examples of these would be respondents who mentioned Lebanese cuisine such as: shawarma, hummus, tabbouleh, fattouch, and others. This was followed by ideas related to cultural traditions (mentioned by 21% of respondents) (e.g. dabke, belly dancing, traditional garments), Lebanon's geography (mentioned by 15% of respondents) (e.g. the location of the country on the map), respondents who claimed they had no knowledge of Lebanon (mentioned by 12% of respondents), and religion (mentioned by 11% of respondents) (e.g. Christian and Muslim religions). Noteworthy mentions were those regarding Arabic identity/ethnicity (mentioned by 9% of respondents) (e.g. "Arabic," tan skin, foreign), positive personality traits of Lebanese people (mentioned by 9% of respondents) (e.g. nice, friendly, fun, generous) the idea that Lebanese people are family oriented (mentioned by 9% of respondents), and respondents who associated Lebanon with their Lebanese friends in Ottawa (mentioned by 7% of respondents).

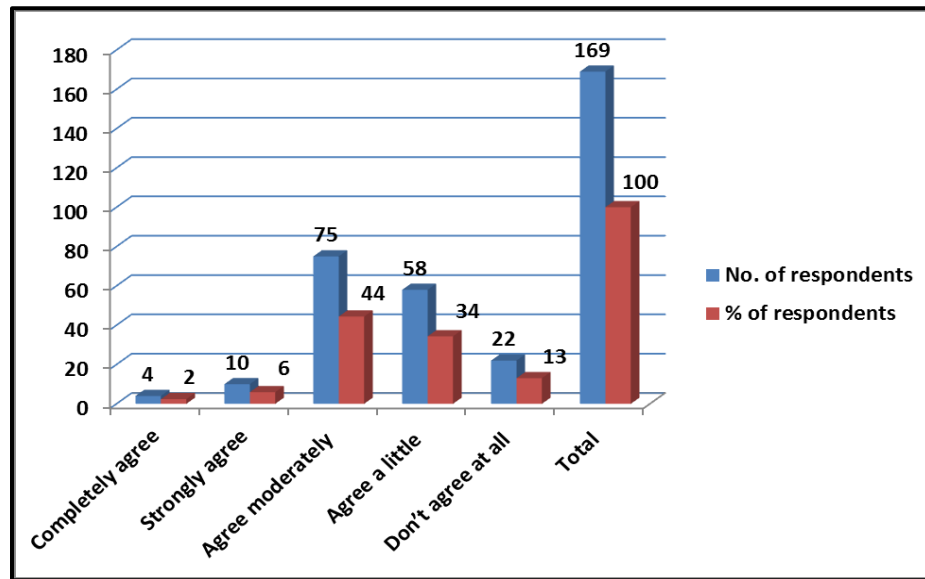
All interviewees also pointed to posts that depicted some of the above stated themes when discussing #LiveLoveLebanon on Instagram. However, some received more mentions than others (please note that these numbers refer to the posts automatically generated by the #LiveLoveLebanon hashtag, not the posts that I sampled). The posts included scenic mountain hills, greenery and vegetation, snow, and the Mediterranean sea, and were mentioned by 11 interviewees. 5 interviewees commented on the modern and urban architectural style of the

capital Beirut, which for some was surprising as they expected more rural representations. 4 interviewees pointed out religious depictions in Lebanon which included pictures of churches and mosques side by side. 5 interviewees pointed out depictions of Lebanese food that inspired them to try out an authentic Lebanese meal. Thus, interviewee responses confirm that users who post content depicting touristic products and attractions in Lebanon consider that such representations belong in the #LiveLoveLebanon catalogue on Instagram. Fearful, ‘unsafe,’ or dangerous seeming posts could not be found on the #LiveLoveLebanon page and were not mentioned by interviewees when scrolling through the catalogue. On occasion, they compared the posts to beliefs they hold about the country. In the following sections, their impressions, opinions, and knowledge of these will be broken down in detail.

4.1.2 Modernization in Lebanon

Drawing from the literature review on Said’s (1978) ‘Orientalism’ that emphasizes a view of the ‘other’ as being a dangerous and unmodern place, respondents were asked about their level of agreement with the statement: *Lebanon is a country that has yet to modernize*. Most respondents (79%) either moderately agreed (44%) or agreed a little (34%) with the statement. A small percentage of respondents strongly or completely agreed with the statement (8%), and 13% of respondents did not agree with the statement at all. Thus, although most respondents tended to be in agreement with the statement, their levels of agreements were modest.

Figure 1: Lebanon is a country that has yet to modernize



Interviewees elaborated upon modernity and/or modernization in Lebanon by linking it to ideology in Lebanon; the ‘open-mindedness’ of Lebanese families and/or people, Lebanese women in relation to their families and/or household; the religious, political and conflict situation pertaining to Lebanon. The cautious/ambivalent responses to the survey question can perhaps be explained by the fact that the notion of modernity is taken as relative: a few interviewees seem to define and compare the level of modernity in Lebanon to that of neighboring countries and/or Canada. Thus, Lebanon is more modern than the former in certain aspects. However, when compared to Canada, the country does not have as much to offer.

Sarah brought up modernization in relation to religion and conflict in Lebanon. She said that she feels her Muslim and Christian Lebanese friends “live really well together there compared to other countries,” because “when they come together it’s who they are as Lebanese people that matters and it’s not religion that separates them.” To solidify her point, she mentioned discussions she has had with Palestinian and Lebanese friends on conflict in both countries where religion as a conflict instigator is said to be more pertinent in Palestine than in

Lebanon. She further explained how “it’s not the same in Lebanon” because “it’s just more modern in the sense that that’s just not a problem that they have.”

Another interviewee, Layla, has been to Lebanon before. She defines modernity in terms of the touristic and cultural artefacts that a country can offer. She also mentioned the contrast she finds between Lebanon and other neighboring countries when it comes to these artefacts. She said:

“It’s beautiful. It’s a nice country, there is a lot of nature in it, a lot of culture in it. They have really good food. They’re very modern compared to other Arabic countries I’ve been to. And they have a great nightlife, I can go on. It’s not that bad of a country. We went to historical sites; we went to a big statue...on top of the mountain.”

The depiction of cultural artefacts and how they relate to the level of modernization in Lebanon was recurrently brought up during the #LiveLoveLebanon discussion. When coming across posts that depict Beirut as a modern city, Lara said she originally “pictured rolling hills and valleys and this is straight like city blocks and an urban center.” Similarly, Nour expressed how such pictures are very “city-like” and that she “does not imagine this” when she thinks of Lebanon. However, when coming across pictures of ruins and old markets in Lebanon, she admitted this validates her preconceived perceptions about Lebanon “even though it’s like ruins” and “more stereotypical Middle Eastern.” Gaelle also said that pictures of mosques and ruins are what she imagines despite the city-like pictures that made her realize it is not as rural as she thought. For Jenny, who had learned a little bit about Lebanon through her history classes, the contrast between city structures and more rural areas was welcome. She said: “I watched the ancient culture stuff like that, I love seeing the ruins and different buildings that were built. And the contrast of being a huge city and then you can go and also see the ruins.” Kristen was also impressed by the architectural placements of buildings, the promotion of historical ruins and

monuments, and that of nightlife which she said is not usually shown on traditional media outlets given the “violent” nature of the representations. Similarly, Jad said he did not expect the depiction of tall skyscrapers on Instagram which make Lebanon seem like a “modern” society. However, he said that depictions of old villages, ruins, and nature make it stay “close to its roots.” Matt also said that depictions of mountains and waterfalls matches his “friend’s description of Lebanon.” Thus, even though interviewees seem to generally think that Lebanon is more modern than other Middle Eastern countries, their responses when discussing #LiveLoveLebanon seem to indicate that they are still cautious of crediting it with high levels of modernity.

Furthermore, when comparing Canada to Lebanon, interviewees brought up the former’s seemingly more modern aspects. For example, Gaelle, spoke to the potential difference between Lebanese families and Canadian ones in terms of how modern or conservative they might be. She said:

“They’re mostly just assumptions but I feel like they’re most conservative but then that’s probably not always the case... I feel like Canada is pretty modern so over there is probably more conservative unless they are a modern family so it just depends.”

Thus, Gaelle’s definition of ‘modernity’ is associated with a more open ideology when related to Canada. However, when measured in relation to Lebanon, the term takes on a negative connotation as it is associated with conservatism among Lebanese families.

This was also the case when Nick said his parents immigrated to Canada to give him a better chance at a life in a more open society. He explained: “My parents wanted to move me to a place with a more open ideology. It was a lot more different here than it was over there and we saw there more chance of a peaceful living here and it was also for school education and all

that.” Thus, for Nick’s parents, Canada was more modern in terms of the quality of living and education that their son could receive in the country.

Thus, the level modernity in Lebanon takes on various forms and definitions for interviewees given that they are speaking from within Canada and their perception of modernity and Lebanon is somewhat skewed. When comparing Lebanon to other Middle Eastern countries, the former is deemed to have more modern attributes. But the interviewees’ discussion of #LiveLoveLebanon indicate they don’t believe that Lebanon is, in fact, modern since they are surprised by posts on the platform that depict it as such. This is further supported by their comparison of Lebanon and Canada and their belief that the latter is more modern, mostly in regards to the standard of living and open-mindedness of the country.

4.1.3 Women in Lebanon

As shown in the *Literature Review* chapter, traditional media outlets often depict Arabic women as oppressed. As such, I deemed it pertinent to question interviewees on their perception regarding women in Lebanon. A majority of respondents (52%) strongly (26%) or moderately (26%) agreed with the statement: *Women in Lebanon do not enjoy the same freedoms as Western women.*

Interview talk echoed survey responses that reflected an agreement with the above statement. The reasons for that were various, such as: restricted/conservative parents and/or families; cultural differences; religious differences; different personalities and/or mannerisms; no women’s rights.

On conservatism and restrictions, one interviewee in particular, Lara, said she believes Lebanese women would not have “sex before marriage.” She added that they would not “get off and get their own home” because they would live with their parents or their husband’s parents

for the rest of their lives. Other interviewees such as Jenny believe that these restrictions all come down to Lebanese women “not having as many rights” and “still fighting and trying to get over the conflicts that have been arising.” Similarly, while Matt is not sure about “what the case would be in Lebanon,” he spoke about the situation in Canada and how people there “are well treated, well respected, they have their rights.”

However, for other interviewees, differences between Lebanese women and Western women don’t have as much to do with ‘restrictions’ as they have simply to do with different norms pertaining to the country. Layla said:

“If you’re asking if they’re oppressed I don’t think they are. I think Lebanese women are living their lives regularly. I think there is a level of social norms that women over there, whether they’re Muslim or Christian, Jews or Druze, there is a level of social [awareness] that we don’t have here that they do have in Lebanon of the unacceptable.”

Similarly, Gabriela, a first-generation Lebanese Canadian who grew up in Canada, spoke about the religious differences which can sometimes impact, not necessarily negatively, the social norms pertaining to women in Lebanon. She said:

“Because there is a lot of different religions in Lebanon. I found that certain women will either have hijab and will have a high position and good pay, and other women would not be viewed as having hijab as a positive thing, or like going out and not staying at home and all the stereotypical stuff that we don’t usually see here like taking care of all the kids and the house and the cooking, I feel like there is a lot more of that there than there is here that some people view as the right thing and not necessarily the normal thing.”

Celine also spoke about the difference in norms and how “here [Canada] we’re kind of more vocal about whatever you want. There it’s more restricted about what you should say, what you should not say.” However, she added that she does not “really see that as something negative” given that her Lebanese friends who go there and “have the time of their lives.” “It would be mostly knowing when to have a voice and knowing when you should not vocalize your opinion as much,” she said.

Thus, while differences between women in Canada and Lebanon were highlighted by Gabriela, Layla, and Celine, all three avoided the negative connotation of oppression that is sometimes associated with social norms pertaining to Arabic women.

Nick, who is of Lebanese descent and immigrated from Dubai to Canada at a young age, spoke about the cultural differences which impact society as a whole, and not necessarily just women in Lebanon. He said:

“I think it’s a lot of personality and a lot of mindset differences. I think it’s more than just women, I think the culture itself is different. It comes down to a lot of things. I do see it. When I’m with my Arabic friends, we’re a lot different than if I’m with friends who are white, or from here, Western. And we see it in a different light because we’re raised in a more strict environment, we’re expected more of.”

Mary relates the idea of women’s freedom in Lebanon to how they are generally depicted in the news and explained that she would not let negative depictions impact her impressions of them. She said:

“I don’t think I’d let the views of the West shape my ideas of the women, cause I think it’s all about perspective. Cause if you want to learn from other people you can always learn, cause I have friends, their parents, and you can see that just because you’re Lebanese it does not mean they have to be like or act like this or dress like that.”

Thus, interviewees generally expressed the idea that women in Lebanon might face more restrictions than Canadian women. However, many of them clarified that the reasons for which these restrictions might apply are not all negative or related to the oppression of Arabic women, but rather have to do with different social norms that are not always seen as normal by people in Canada or the West.

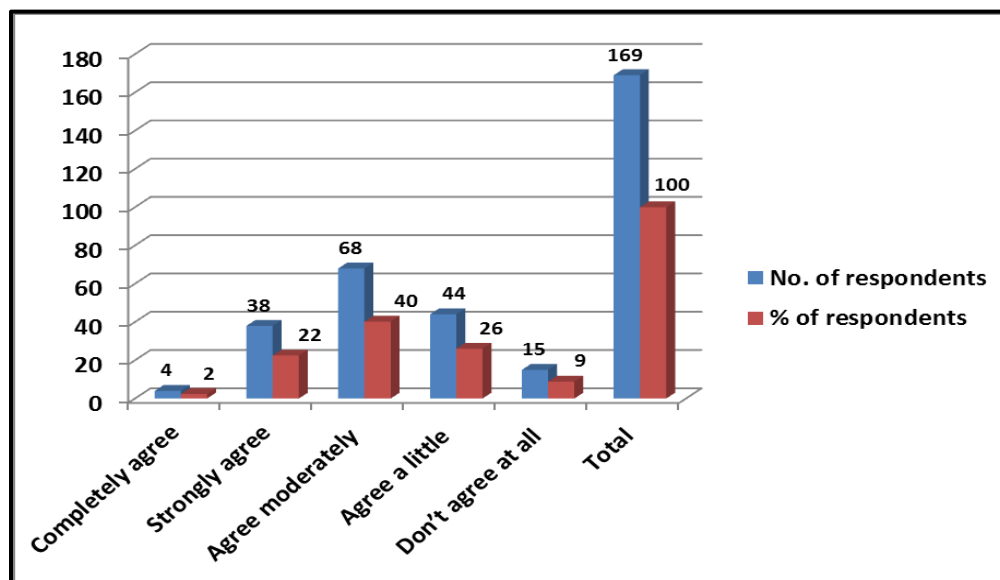
4.1.4 Conflict and religion in Lebanon

Survey respondents’ perceptions of conflict and religion in Lebanon were deemed important to assess given the focus of traditional media outlets on these themes when depicting

the region. These themes are intimately linked together since religion is viewed as an instigator of war and conflict in the Middle East. As a result, they are reported on simultaneously in the following paragraphs.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) moderately agreed (27%), agreed a little (37%), or surprisingly did not agree at all (25%) with the statement: *Lebanon is a war-torn country*. Responses were almost equally split when it came to the statement: *conflict in Lebanon is due to various religious affiliations*. 24% of respondents strongly or completely agreed with the statement, and 26% agreed a little with it. However, most respondents (40%) moderately agreed with the statement and only 9% did not agree with it at all.

Figure 2: Conflict in Lebanon is due to various religious affiliations.



On religion, interviewees are generally aware of the presence of the two main religions in Lebanon: Islam and Christianity. Some had more to say on the ratio of the Muslim to Christian population. Celine, for example, said that the “majority [of Lebanese people] are Muslim,” and that she got to know them either through mosques or the middle school she went to. However, some such as Mary, did not know about Christianity until recently. She explained:

“I used to think it was all Muslim. I’ve met Christians Lebanese but I did not know it was that much until I was doing a volunteer, and then the lady I was shadowing was from Lebanon so she taught me a lot of stuff and was telling me how a great amount of the population is Christian and how the president has to be Christian and the prime minister Muslim.”

Interviewees’ ambiguous knowledge and perceptions of religion in Lebanon also came to light when discussing religious depictions of Lebanon on Instagram through the #LiveLoveLebanon posts. Such depictions intrigued some of the interviewees. Celine said that as a Muslim person, she would be interested “in going to see other religions depicted in that country.” For Nick, who had lived in Egypt for some of his childhood, the religious depictions are refreshing. He explained: “I know Lebanese are a lot more open when it comes to the catholic side and I love that they express it a lot more, cause it’s a lot more hidden under wraps in Egypt.” Similarly, in relation to her previous comment on religious coexistence in Lebanon, Sarah pointed out how a picture of a mosque and church located side by side is refreshing because it shows that religious conflicts in Lebanon are not an issue since “it’s their [Lebanese people] culture that brings them together.” Gabriela also found that depictions of churches and mosques located next to each other and their architectural style are appealing to see. She explained: “You see that very often because it’s everywhere especially in Beirut, they’re always next to each other and they’re so pretty, they always look so nice from the outside.” Similarly, Jenny explained that the depictions of various religions is refreshing because “usually you’ll see one over any other one that dominates.” However, for someone like Nour whose Lebanese friends are all Muslim, the depiction of various religions surprised her. She said: “I feel like because from the few people I know from Lebanon I associate it with Islam, it’s like weird to see catholic/Christian things potentially like crosses.” Thus, for interviewees who associate Lebanon with Islam, the presence of Christian depictions on Instagram came as a surprise. Those who

claim that both religions make up a big part of the population's religious beliefs were less surprised.

Interviewees also had varying perceptions about the impact of religious differences on conflict in Lebanon. Jad said he is aware of the various religions in the country but does not know the extent to which they have had an impact on the political situation of the country. However, he said he feels “like there could be room for conflict” given the “different religions that are going about and people trying to put their views forth and trying to make their views priorities over other ones.” Similarly, Layla said she knows of the history of religious conflicts in Lebanon in the 90s, but is not sure about the extent of their impact on the country. However, she said she believes the situation is “fine right now.”

On conflict, 40% of interviewees think Lebanon either does not have or has less conflict in comparison to neighboring countries. Many of these interviewees think conflict in neighboring countries is more pertinent because they know/have heard more about these countries' state of unrest either through word of mouth, traditional media depictions, or personal experience.

On word of mouth, as shown in the section on modernization, Lara thinks conflict in Lebanon is significantly less pertinent than that in Palestine following discussions with her Palestinian and Lebanese friends. Similarly, Julie said that her sister has gone to Lebanon before and told her that Christian and Muslim areas are separated. She explained that her sister “wasn't allowed to be in the Muslim area after midnight, she had to go to the other,” and concluded that “we still have that conflict between Muslims and Christians.”

Interviewees also mentioned the impact of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon, given its prevalence in the last decade. For example, as highlighted in the *Tourism and Safety* section, Lara thinks “Lebanon is a perfectly safe place to go to” but wonders whether the Syrian conflict

has had a negative/dangerous impact on the country. Similarly, Jenny is aware of the increase of Syrian refugees to Lebanon in the last few years and stated that “they don’t really know what to do with it because the government is not prepared for taking in all those refugees.”

Furthermore, as much as interviewees talked about conflict in neighboring countries, they also highlighted the lack of conflict in Lebanon. For example, Mary said she is aware of the political turmoil in Palestine and Syria “but not in Lebanon.” Similarly, Kristen said she thinks “some countries there [Middle East] have more conflicts than other countries.” She added: “You hear a lot about the neighboring countries on the news but not a lot about Lebanon.”

Particularly, Nick mentioned the lack of representation of conflict in Lebanon in the news. As a result, he perceives Lebanon as peaceful. He explained:

“Whenever I listen to the Middle East in conflict over there I usually think, their big stories are in Israel or Egypt now or before because of all the political conflicts, but I have not heard much about Lebanon so it seems to me to be peaceful maybe that’s also because I don’t see a lot on my news feed or it’s not as big or covered up by other things.”

Thus, interviewees are aware of the political turmoil and conflicts in countries surrounding Lebanon, but generally don’t think the country itself is dealing with as many conflicts. They seem to have this opinion either because of the lack of representation of conflicts in Lebanon on the news, or due to their experiences and/or conversations with their Lebanese friends and acquaintances.

4.1.5 Tourism and Safety in Lebanon

As discussed in the literature review, the issue of safety in countries that are affected by either natural or man-made disasters affect the ‘tourism destination’ image of such countries. This image potentially impacts the flow of tourists into these countries (Avraham and Ketter,

2008). As a result, the notion of safety in Lebanon and its relation and/or impact on tourism in the country was deemed important to address in the survey.

Five positive statements in the form of Likert-scale questions addressed touristic possibilities in Lebanon such as nightlife, scenic landscapes, authentic cuisine, the ‘open-mindedness’ of Lebanese society, and the desire to visit Lebanon. First, most respondents (70%) completely, strongly, or moderately agreed with the statement: *Lebanon is a country worth visiting*. 21% of respondents agreed a little with the statement, and only 8.9% of respondents did not agree at all. However, less than a quarter of respondents (23%) completely or strongly agreed with the statement: *Lebanon is an appealing tourist destination*, whereas most respondents (62%) agreed moderately or a little with it. A small but substantial percentage of respondents (16%) did not agree at all with the statement. Similarly, a small percentage of respondents (23%), completely or strongly agreed with the statement: *Lebanon has a great nightlife*, whereas most respondents (60%), moderately agreed or agreed a little with the statement. A small but substantial percentage of respondents (17%) did not agree at all with the statement.

However, when it comes to Lebanon’s natural beauty, most respondents (85%) completely, strongly, or moderately agreed with the statement: *Lebanon has beautiful, natural, scenic locations*. 12% of respondents agreed a little with the statement, and only 4% of respondents did not agree with it at all. Also, most respondents (70%) completely or strongly agreed with the statement: *Lebanon has tasty cuisine*, whereas 30% moderately agreed or agreed a little with it. Only 4% of respondents did not agree at all with it.

When asked about their perceptions of safety in Lebanon, most respondents (68%) moderately agreed (31%) or agreed a little (37%) with the statement: *Lebanon is an unsafe country*. 9% of respondents either completely (1%) or strongly (8%) agreed with the statement,

and 23% did not agree with at all.

To gain insight into their perceptions of safety and tourism in Lebanon, interviewees were asked what they would do in Lebanon if they ever went there and if there were things they would choose to avoid. First, interviewees' responses reflect survey responses that highly agreed with the statement: *Lebanon has natural scenic locations to offer*. Also, their responses strongly correlated when they talked about the touristic activities they would go on such as: visiting the capital Beirut; experiencing the nightlife; visiting ruins, museums, and experiencing the 'old' Lebanese architecture style; bathing in the Mediterranean ocean, and enjoying the authentic cuisine.

However, while all interviewees expressed excitement at the prospect of tourism in Lebanon, safety concerns were brought up by most (10 out of 15) interviewees. Safety concerns included: not going out at night alone, being cautious and respectful about potentially having to wear conservative attire, being weary of the political situation, and being careful not to venture into older areas and/or 'bad' areas of the country.

Although Sarah and Matt both said they would not go out alone at night in Lebanon, and Gaelle said she would avoid bad areas in the country, all three made it explicitly clear that they would be equally cautious regardless of the country they were visiting. For example, Sarah thought that "Lebanon is a pretty safe place." She added: "I would not go out by myself just because I don't know the place but I don't think I would be scared because of safety or anything like that."

Thus, these interviewees wanted to clarify that their safety concerns about Lebanon have little or nothing to do with any preconceived perceptions they might have about the country. In an example, Gaelle explicitly stated this idea. She explained that "all countries have bad areas"

and she would look into those. She further added: “Like I don’t have any biases towards it or prejudices so I would not just like avoid things on purpose so I would try everything, so do like the sightseeing, I would not be afraid of going out at night, enjoy the good food.” Thus, interviewees are aware that Lebanon and/or neighboring countries are generally perceived as being ‘dangerous’ locations and wanted me to separate their responses from these prejudices.

However, one interviewee in particular admitted to those prejudices and attributes some of her safety concerns to them. While Lara is interested in the Mediterranean ocean and ruins located in Lebanon, she said she “would avoid anywhere near the borders just because of my preconceived notions.” She explained: “I’ve been hearing that it’s a perfectly safe place to go and peaceful. I think the one thing that would make me nervous going is knowing there is a little bit of unrest, I think it’s Syria which borders it, which is not Lebanon but it’s close by.”

Similarly, while Celine is interested in “clothing and food and architecture and learning a little bit of [Lebanese] history,” she said would avoid “probably anything to do with politics.”

Thus, whether interviewees think they have or don’t have any preconceived notions about Lebanon, they still voiced certain safety concerns related to visiting the country.

Furthermore, two interviewees mentioned that because Lebanon is located in the Middle East, they would be careful to respect the potential conservative climate regarding attire, or just generally respect the culture that might be different from that in Canada. As stated previously under *Modernization*, interviewees sometimes used the example of neighboring countries to show how Lebanon might be different or similar when it comes to the general climate of the country. For example, Sarah had travelled to Morocco before and said she was careful about not wearing anything revealing while she was visiting the country and that she “might think the same

way going to Lebanon,” because “you could be exposed to someone who is pretty conservative and you don’t want to offend them.”

Similarly, Mary stated she would respect the different culture and would be aware that she’s “not in Canada.” She added: “If they tell me not to do this, they tell me that’s how I have to behave then that’s what I’m going to do cause that’s not my country you have to respect other people’s beliefs.”

Safety concerns also came to light when interviewees discussed the reliability of #LiveLoveLebanon posts, and if they would trust these depictions to travel to the country. They are concerned that the matter of safety in Lebanon may be misrepresented or overlooked. Effectively, many pointed to the lack of well-rounded representations. For example, Sarah fears that such representations are only good for depicting beautiful landscapes but don’t really show the mentality in Lebanon. She explained: “I don’t think you could really depict that in a picture. It’s an experience that you would have to have.” Lara also thinks that the representations are not completely accurate and that they only show “the most beautiful parts,” and that surely “there is areas that are not as safe or are not as pretty, or maybe poverty-stricken.” However, she added that the positive depictions make her think about wanting to go there despite that she is “still a little bit nervous” because she is “holding on to things” she’s “seen on TV and other traditional news outlets rather than social media.”

However, for someone like Gabriela who has been to Lebanon numerous times given her Lebanese origins, safety is not an issue. She said that Instagram posts sometimes exaggerate reality but still believes they’re accurate given that “there is so much to see and so much to do [in Lebanon] and everything is always very pleasing to the eye to see, so Instagram benefits that in a way because it shows the good stuff, the good food, and the good places to visit.”

Only five interviewees don't have any safety concerns about being in Lebanon. Particularly, Rawan has been to Lebanon before and found that she would not avoid anything given the myriad of "tourist places to go to" such as the nicer beaches and weather that can be found in Lebanon compared to Canada. Jad also claimed he would not avoid anything because when he visits new places he wants to try "the different experiences you could not find in Canada." As a child, Nick had lived in Cairo, Egypt, and stated he might avoid the older areas in Lebanon if they were similar to those of this hometown. However, he was unsure and said he would "try not to avoid much."

However, whether safety in Lebanon is an issue for them or not, all but two interviewees stated that they would use Instagram to discover new tourism destinations on the platform, but they would conduct their own research afterwards when deciding if they really want to travel there in order to assess the safety and reliability of such destinations, regardless of whether they are located in the Middle East or not. For example, Mary said:

"If I were to visit I would first google where that is, and then see google news about it, how safe it is to travel there. Cause if you live there then that's where you live it's not a big issue for you to post the pictures but like if I were to be a tourist going there then I would have to google how safe it is to travel there."

She reaffirmed that she would take safety into consideration if she were to "travel anywhere in the world" and not just Lebanon.

Layla stated that she would research the destination and ask questions such as "is it worth it to go there? Is it like they show it in the media? Or is it like a dirty old place?" She added: "So it is a bit of a risk if you want to go, you just have to like..., me I would research it or just take a risk go and see what it is."

Thus, the recurring theme of comparing Lebanon to neighboring countries and/or Lebanon was present amongst interviewees when tackling the idea of safety in the country. It is

deemed safe when compared to Syria, but perhaps not so much when compared to Canada. Also, while many expressed concerns about visiting Lebanon, the desire to discover new touristic spots is present and sometimes stronger than the fear of wondering if they would be safe there.

However, assessing the safety of such places through research is important for interviewees regardless of the method through which they come to know about the destination.

4.1.6 Summary

The last sections have shown the perceptions and general knowledge that respondents have about Lebanon. Sometimes, they tend to be more ambivalent/cautious when talking about certain aspects of Lebanon such as its level of modernity which is considered either lower or higher when compared to that of other countries – either Middle Eastern or Canada. The same can be said about their knowledge of conflict and religion in the country, although they are more assertive in their belief that conflict in Lebanon is not as pertinent as that in other neighboring countries given that they have not heard about it as much on traditional media outlets. Furthermore, respondents and interviewees display their awareness of exciting touristic possibilities in Lebanon but still bring to light their fear of safety issues – although they claim these are present regardless of the country they would consider visiting.

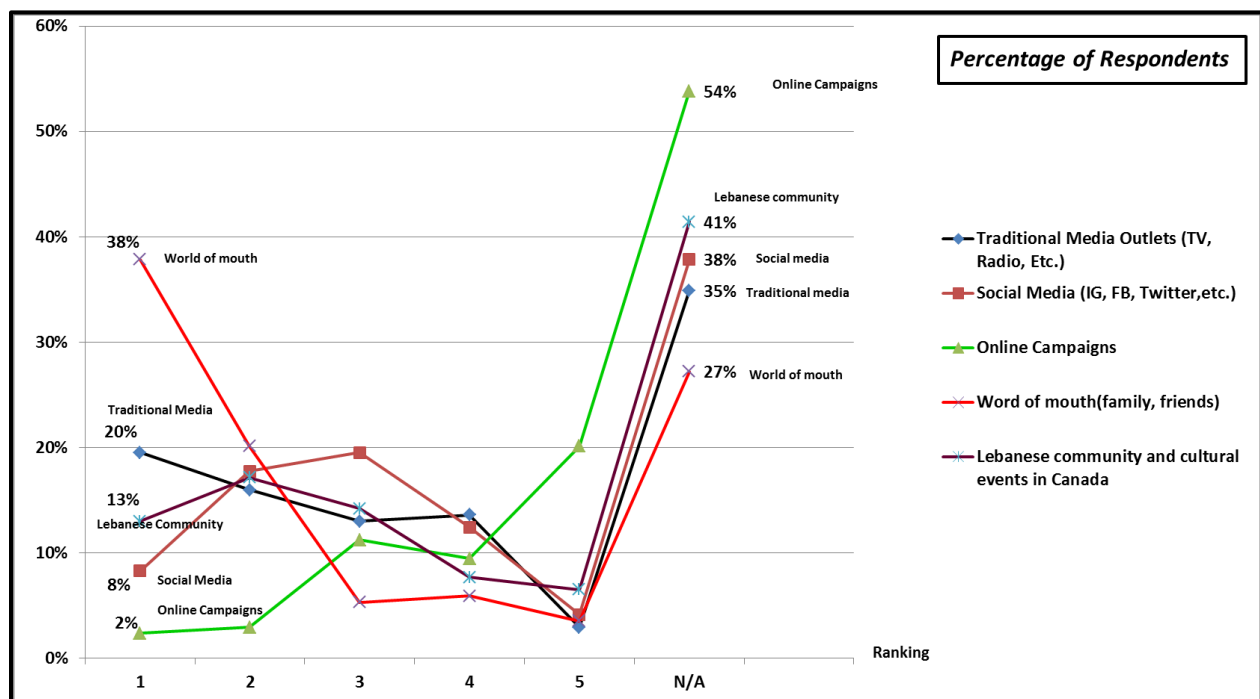
As shown in the foregoing, respondents have strong views when it comes to Lebanon, and they seem to be a result of exposure to various media depictions and/or interpersonal communication. For this reason, the following section will focus on studying depictions and media that have most informed these perceptions and beliefs.

4.2 Where do representations of Lebanon come from?

When asked to rank the means through which they have formed their opinions and beliefs about Lebanon, most respondents (38%) claimed that word of mouth has had the biggest impact

on their views, followed by those who chose traditional media outlets (20%), those who chose the option “Lebanese community and cultural events in Canada” (13%), those who chose the option “social media (IG, FB, Twitter, etc.)” (8%), and finally, respondents who chose the “online campaigns” option (2%). Thus, it seems that half of respondents (50%) claim to have formed their views of Lebanon through some form of direct social experience and/or interaction, and 50% claim to have formed it through exposure to various media.

Figure 3: Which of the following options have most impacted your views and opinion on Lebanon (rank the following options in order of preference, 1 being the option that has influenced your opinion and image on Lebanon the most)?



4.2.1 Social Interactions and word of mouth

When talking about their knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of Lebanon, many interviewees shared anecdotes of getting to know more about the country through their Lebanese friends. Sarah said she started to know more about Lebanon in high school. Having immigrated from Morocco to Canada as a child, she became friends with a Lebanese immigrant at her school. She said: “It’s really interesting to me because when I came here I did not want to be

anything other than Canadian and I feel like a lot of immigrants kids have to deal with that but I did not sense the same about Lebanese kids – like they’re really proud about being Lebanese.”

Other interviewees highlighted certain personality traits of Lebanese people based on what they have experienced with their Lebanese friends. Gaelle has been to her friends’ family gatherings and said that “family oriented” is a common trait among Lebanese people. She also used the word “loud” but “not in an obnoxious way” to describe the energy emitted during these gatherings. At one of her previous jobs, Mary learned about Lebanon and Lebanese people through a Lebanese acquaintance she shadowed, and talked about the sense of fashion and style that they possess. She described them as “extra,” “chic,” and “well-dressed.” Matt shared that he does not possess “many thoughts on the country itself,” but that his Lebanese friends are “very happy and very passionate people,” and that “they seem to have a lot of energy.” Jad shared an anecdote about the workers at his local shawarma restaurant who have told him stories about Lebanon, their culture, and their food. Jenny also spoke about her friend whose father and family are Lebanese, but explained that “she has not adapted to their culture because she does not live with them right now.”

Lara’s boyfriend is Lebanese and comes from a family of farmers. She shared her knowledge of agriculture in Lebanon that she gained through him. She said:

“[...] It’s all about crops and which ones are good this year which ones are not so good and their general food source and making a lot of things by hand like you don’t go and buy the eggs from the supermarket the chickens lay them on the farm and then they eat.” She further shared her impressions of Lebanese people and said: “I think [they are] probably warm and protective. Probably protective of culture and religion. I might have this wrong but I think conservative, like they would be conservative people. I think friendly.”

Two interviewees of Lebanese descent had a different take on what Lebanon represents for them. Gabriela’s parents are both Lebanese but she was born and raised in Canada. She said

she grew up with a “Canadian mentality” and that she hated Lebanon when she visited it for the first time because of the “cultural shock.” She explained: “When I came back I realized that I actually did like it, so I went again two summers ago, and then I started really liking it, I started listening to Lebanese music, liking the food, liking more of the cultural traditions than I would’ve liked before.” She said she now feels more connected to her Lebanese roots.

Nick is also of Lebanese descent but has never been to Lebanon. The son of a Lebanese man and an Egyptian woman, he grew up in Egypt and immigrated from Dubai to Canada when he was 8 years old. He said his knowledge of Lebanon is limited to anecdotes from his family members and other Lebanese friends who occasionally visit the country. He explained:

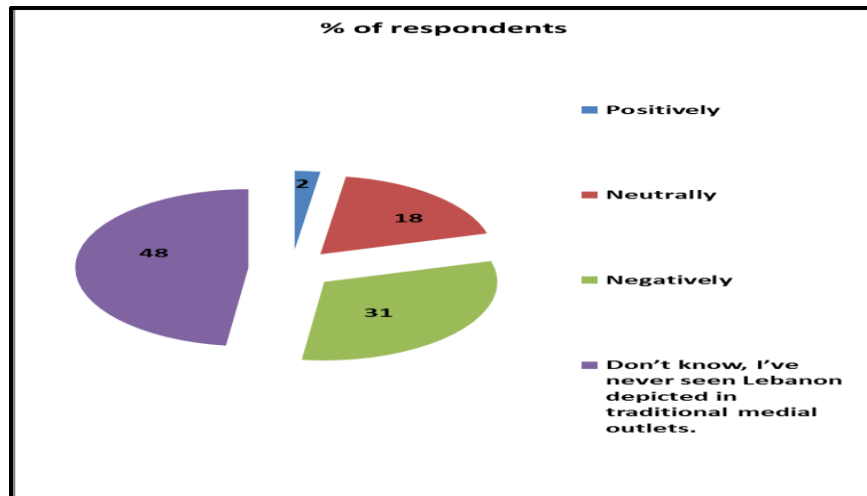
“A lot of people tell me it’s a very peaceful and it is nice to go. But I have a lot of Lebanese friends that have left and would love to go back and every time they do go back they tell me stories about how nice it was and they show me some pictures and it does look like a beautiful place to visit and it is on the top of my list to go visit.”

Thus, interviewees’ rich anecdotes on developing their perceptions and knowledge of Lebanon through their social relations with friends correlate with survey responses indicating word of mouth as the most impactful way through these perceptions have been formed. However, as is shown in the following paragraphs, representations of Lebanon in traditional media outlets and social media platforms also inform respondents and interviewees’ opinions on Lebanon. Sometimes, word of mouth is applied in the case of social media since friends of interviewees travel to Lebanon and post pictures of their trips on Instagram, which make their way to the former’s feeds. Thus, in this instance, the distinction between word of mouth and social media – where the former informs people’s perceptions of Lebanon through *real* interactions with other individuals, whereas the latter does so through *online* representations by such individuals – is blurred given that they become one and the same or are combined when informing users’ perceptions of the country.

4.2.2 Traditional media outlets and news

When asked how they think Lebanon is typically depicted in traditional media outlets, most respondents (48%) chose the option: *don't know, I've never seen Lebanon depicted in traditional media outlets*. This number might reflect respondents' lack of traditional media content consumption. More plausibly, as stated in the *Methodology* chapter, it might also reflect a point in time when Lebanon was going through a period of stability (the data collection was completed in Spring 2019, prior to the financial crisis that the country is currently going through.) As such, it is plausible that prior to these events, Lebanon was not often depicted in traditional media outlets. Furthermore, 31% respondents think Lebanon is depicted negatively in traditional media outlets, 18% think it is depicted neutrally, and only 2% think it is depicted positively.

Figure 4: In your opinion, how is Lebanon typically depicted in traditional media outlets (i.e. TV, movies, radio, newspapers)?



Of the 52% of respondents who have seen Lebanon depicted in traditional media outlets, most (85%) think the depictions are somewhat, or a little accurate. Only 9% of respondents think the depictions are not accurate at all. Most of those respondents (63%) also think that traditional media outlets have *somewhat*, or *a little* changed their image and opinion on Lebanon. A

significant number (19%) think traditional media outlets have changed their image and opinion on Lebanon *a lot*.

Many interviewees could not remember specific instances of seeing Lebanon depicted in traditional media outlets. However, they imagine a negative representation given that they have seen other Arab countries depicted on the news. For example, Gaelle said she has “probably” seen representations of Lebanon on the news but “nothing recently.” She said the depiction was “negative like it was war-related, so not a good depiction.”

Similarly, Matt said that “you don’t really hear about Lebanon the country itself on news outlets.” However, having seen other countries in the region depicted in the news, he explained: “I feel the news in the traditional platform is often depicting people and places in a negative way, cause I feel like that’s what keeps these news stations alive, is selling fear. Unfortunately news are often associated with negativity.” Mary also elaborated on the idea that “there is a whole mindset when you think about the Middle East, it’s just violence.” Jad also gave examples of countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq that have been explicitly represented negatively on the news and said that “it’s pretty tragic because we don’t know the real story.”

Some interviewees even likened the climate and geographical attributes of Lebanon to other Middle Eastern countries. When scrolling through the #LiveLoveLebanon posts, the presence of snow in Lebanon surprised Gaelle since she expects the weather in Lebanon to be similar as in other Middle Eastern countries with generally warm weather. Nour, who is originally from Trinidad, has the impression that there is a desert in Lebanon. When she came across a picture that depicts trees and streams in Lebanon she said that it’s “greener” than what she associates in her mind with the Middle East because she just thinks of “sand.” She added: “It’s more refreshing than I expect, I feel so bad when I say it.” When coming across a picture

that depicts snow, she described that “this could easily be Canada and you would not know.”

When asked why the idea of sand and desert in Lebanon is persistent in her mind, she explained:

“From what we see in the news about the Middle East that they’re in a desert, and we just kind of think of hot and dry.” Lara also made a similar point about the weather in Lebanon. As stated above, she derives her knowledge of Lebanon from her Lebanese boyfriend. She said she knows that it snows once a year in Lebanon but thinks that “it was very little and all at once.” She added: “[...] Seeing that there is snow there makes me feel like there is a lot more to it that I don’t know cause in my head I kind of pictured tropical and warm.”

Thus, while interviewees could not remember specific instances of seeing Lebanon depicted in the news, their perceptions of Lebanon seem to be informed by other Arab countries’ depictions in traditional media outlets and are thus considered one and the same. However, do the negative depictions of other Arabic countries in the news impact the potential for Lebanon to be seen as a destination country by people in countries such as Canada?

According to Gabriela, sometimes they do. As a first generation Canadian originally from Lebanon, she said how some of her friends still get surprised when she tells them she is visiting Lebanon because “they don’t necessarily know what it’s like” and think “it’s supposed to be a complete war zone.”

Having experienced being in Lebanon firsthand during the trash crisis of 2015, she explained how in her opinion it was exaggerated in the news. She said: “I did not see any trash on the streets. I did, but it also depends where it is, it’s not in all of Lebanon [...] I was a bit confused as to how it was portrayed in the news compared to real life.” Layla, who also comes from a Middle Eastern background, explained how there is an over exaggeration of Middle Eastern conflicts in the news “just to get the views and shares.”

One of the Canadian interviewees, Jenny, said that she thinks the depiction of Lebanon on the news is “neutral or positive” but that it used to be more negative a few years ago because they “were being depicted as helpless” given the country’s involvement “in the conflict and the wars.” However, similarly to Layla and Gabriela, she made a point of questioning the news’ reliability and said: “I try and keep a neutral standpoint, when I’m looking or seeing the news because you never really know if it will be reliable, so I try to not let it affect me.”

The preceding sections have shown that respondents and interviewees’ knowledge of Lebanon is either anecdotal (word of mouth), or based on depictions of other Middle Eastern countries by traditional media outlets that show the region as war-torn and thus promote the ‘unsafe’ image of these places. Since this knowledge is limited – unless respondents have direct ties to Lebanon – and interviewees question the reliability of traditional media outlets to accurately represent conflicts in the Middle East and Lebanon, Instagram’s ability to show a different side of the story comes into play. Does it, in fact, help counter the ‘unsafe’ image of the Middle Eastern region and are users exposed to such depictions on the platform? If so, do they trust the alternative images promoted by such representations?

The following section establishes the prominence of Instagram in a new social media age before exploring its potential to showing a different or new side of Lebanon to users on the platform.

4.2.3 Social media and Instagram use

Participants were asked to rank the social media applications that they use most in a typical day by order of preference. The applications proposed as answer choices were Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, Twitter, and Snapchat, given the popularity of these platforms in recent years. The number of respondents that chose Instagram as the number one choice was overwhelmingly

higher (55%) than all other platforms combined (45%). The second most popular choice was Snapchat (25%), followed by Facebook (8%), then Twitter (6%), and lastly Reddit (5%). The number of respondents who did not use Instagram was the lowest (4%) compared to the number of respondents who did not use any of the other platforms. Thus, Instagram's popularity among survey respondents is consistent with its identification in the literature review as one of the most popular social media platforms.

When asked about the daily amount of time spent looking at and/or sharing content on Instagram, 47% of survey respondents indicated between 0-1 hours and 41% indicated between 2-3 hours spent on the platform daily. A small, but significant percentage of respondents (12%) claimed that they spend 4 or more hours every day on Instagram.

Interviewee answers are consistent with survey responses indicating a stronger affinity towards the use of Instagram over other social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and Snapchat. While the use of Instagram is sometimes described as unhealthy by interviewees, the amount of time spent on it indicates that they are consistently exposed to content on the platform.

When it comes to daily habits of using the platform, interviewees explained that they mostly check Instagram in the mornings and evenings, and when in need of distraction or bored. For some, checking Instagram is a recurrent activity throughout the day. Layla explained: "I was literally just checking Instagram as I came. I would not say that I abuse. I don't use it 24/7. I have all my notifications shut off just so I would not be distracted. But I do use it in my free time."

Some interviewees admitted that they waste a lot of time on Instagram, which hinders their ability to focus on their studies. Some, such as Sarah, even take measures such as deleting the platform during exam season to focus on studying because she procrastinates “with it a lot.”

Layla warned about the costs of using the platform too often. She said:

“I’ve shut off my notifications because of how much time it used to take. Instagram is not like watching a TV show. It’s not just 30 minutes of content and you’re done. You keep on scrolling and scrolling and there is the explore page. Those are the costs: it takes time from my studies, it takes time from my social life and whatnot. If I’m staying up all night looking at people’s stories I’m probably not going to want to wake up in the morning and be productive or go out with my friends.”

Survey respondents were asked to choose from the provided list of answers, as many as apply to their purpose for using Instagram. The purpose which received the most mentions (73%) was the use of Instagram to receive updates on following’s content. This was followed by the desire to discover new content through the search tab (43%), wanting to post personal content (40%), exchanging DMs with other users (37%), and lastly, the *other* option (7%).

Survey respondents were then asked to choose from the provided list of answers, as many as apply to their use of Instagram features. The features which received the most mentions (82%) was the post feature, followed by the stories feature (49%), and time spent on the search bar (34%). Instagram’s newest features, the live videos and IGTV, were only 3% and 1% of mentions respectively.

Respondents were also asked about the Instagram profiles that constitute the bulk of their followings among: friends, family, acquaintances, social media influencers, celebrities (movie stars, singers, etc.). The majority of respondents (72%) said they mainly follow friends. 6% mainly follow acquaintances, while social media influencer and celebrities both garnered 5% of responses. Lastly, a mere 2% of respondents claimed their family constitute the bulk of their followings.

Thus, respondents' responses on their purpose for using Instagram, the features they use, and the bulk of their following show that they are mainly exposed to content on the platform through posts on their newsfeed shared by friends that they follow. However, to what extent does the Instagram algorithm affect users' exposure to depictions on the platform? The following sections highlight the pertinence of the algorithm and its impact on interviewees' exposure to content depicting Lebanon on Instagram.

4.2.3.1 Instagram algorithm and control over content

The search page and timelines are important features of Instagram since the algorithm that configures the content of these pages determines what users view when they scroll through them. Thus, it was necessary to ask respondents if they feel they can control the kind of content they see and are exposed to on the platform. Most respondents (66%) strongly or moderately agreed with the idea that they can control what they are exposed to, while 12% completely agreed, 18% agreed a little, and only 4% did not agree with the statement at all.

Many interviewees expressed that they can actively control the content that they see on Instagram based on their likes and dislikes. Sarah explained that the majority of posts she likes are motivation quotes and posts by celebrities, and that because she tends "to like the same things over and over again," she gets exposed to the same kind of content. Similarly, Jad explained that the more he looks up sports posts on Instagram, the more he receives sports updates on the platform's search page. Tina explained that she values her privacy on the platform and that she controls the content she views by never exposing herself to content on the explore page. Instead, she only follows content shared by her friends and family.

Other interviewees feel that they exercise control over the Instagram content they view, but only to an extent, and under certain circumstances. For example, Kim believes that the

process of scrolling on Instagram is mostly passive, but if she stumbles on content that piques her interest and scrolls further through it, it will come up as ‘suggested’ on her explore page. Nour also explained that she tries “to manipulate it [the algorithm] as much as possible so that Instagram recommends” content she’s interested in. She explained: “I don’t comment on a lot of things on Instagram but if my explore feed is all DIY videos and I’m not really into that I’ll look up a hashtag and a couple posts or photos in that hashtag to let Instagram know this is more what I’m looking for.”

Similarly, Matt believes he can manipulate what he sees on Instagram based on his likes and dislikes. However, Instagram’s algorithm still recommends content that he might not be interested in. He explained:

“[...]At the end of the day I follow what I follow, what I love, and what I’m passionate about. Definitely with my increased time and usage on Instagram I’ve been spending more time on the search bar and kind of see what is recommended to me but I’m definitely not following everything but I will give a glance on it every once in a while.”

Nick takes it one step further and uses certain tools to block Instagram from showing him content. He said:

“It depends on what tab I’m looking at but for my own use tab, I subscribe to places and those are the contents I’ll see and they’ll generally put the stuff that are most recently posted. They have their own algorithm, they’ll show you like in order of time posted but if I don’t want to see certain things, I can block it and I can ask Instagram to stop showing me stuff like that.”

On the other hand, other interviewees believe that the role they play in controlling the content they are exposed to on Instagram can only be passive. For example, Jenny said that it’s never really what she “wants to see” and that she has to scroll through content she does not care about to get to what really interests her. Similarly, Gabriela feels that on her personal newsfeed, the algorithm has a bigger impact on what she sees. She said: “Well if I’m scrolling through my

feed which is the people that I follow, I feel like it's always the same people that I see or people with the most views.”

Layla also voiced a similar concern. She said:

“It is mostly the algorithm and what it throws at you and the people that you should follow. I do choose the people that I want to follow. I think that much I have control over. But my explore page is not really what I want to see. It's often just the Instagram algorithm and what it thinks you should be looking at rather than what you want to look at.”

Thus, interviewee responses indicate that while Instagram users receive content recommendation on the platform's explore page, the more they explicitly search for content they are interested in, the more it shows up as a recommended. However, content on their personal newsfeed is dictated by posts and stories shared by users they follow.

Furthermore, content that users are oftentimes exposed to on Instagram either through their followings, their explore page, or through celebrities/influencers are travel destinations and new communities. Respondents were asked about the extent to which they think Instagram allows them to discover new communities, places, and people that they would not know about otherwise. Using a 5-point Likert scale, 78% of respondents completely (20%), strongly (30%), or moderately (37%) agreed with the statement. A combined of 22% agreed a little or did not agree at all with the statement.

Respondents were also asked about the extent to which they agree that, compared to traditional media outlets (TV, radio, movies, newspapers), Instagram allows users to better discover new communities, places, and people. Most respondents (81%) agreed moderately, strongly, or completely with the statement. This was further highlighted by the fact that most survey respondents (87%) answered yes to whether they have considered traveling to a new

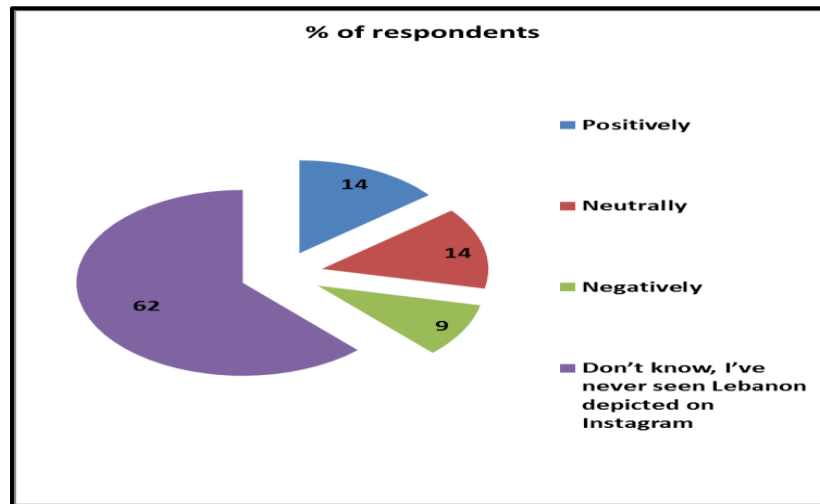
destination after discovering it on Instagram. A significant portion of the respondents (13%) also admitted to having already travelled to a new destination after discovering it on Instagram.

As shown in the following section, on Instagram, Lebanon is sometimes seen by interviewees as a potential travel destination. However, depictions that show Lebanon as a potentially interesting place to travel to don't always mean that users will be quick to believe their accuracy and reliability. If that is indeed the case, then despite such depictions' best efforts to counter the 'unsafe' image of Lebanon, their impact might not be as strong as desired by their creators if users remain skeptical of them.

4.2.3.2 Lebanon on Instagram

When asked how they think Lebanon is typically depicted on Instagram, most respondents (62%) chose the response option: *don't know, I've never seen Lebanon depicted on Instagram*. This might suggest that IG's use as a tool to combat negative images of Lebanon is very limited. However, the data suggests that when the hurdle of access is overcome and individuals come across such images, the story is different. Indeed, of the 38% of respondents who have seen Lebanon depicted on Instagram, more respondents (14%) think they were positive than those who think the same of traditional media depictions (2%). 14% of respondents think the depictions are neutral, and only 10% of respondents think the depictions are negative.

Figure 5: In your opinion, how is Lebanon typically depicted on Instagram?



Out of all the respondents who have seen Lebanon depicted on Instagram, most (72%) think the depictions are *somewhat*, or *a little* accurate. However, more respondents (27%) think that Instagram depictions of Lebanon are *completely* or *a lot* accurate than those who think the same of traditional media depictions (22%). Most of those respondents (67%) think Instagram has changed their image and opinion of Lebanon *somewhat* or *a little*, and “14%” think it has changed it *a lot*. Furthermore, the number of survey respondents who claimed to have seen depictions of Lebanon through the #LiveLoveLebanon campaign was less than half (38%). As for the interviewees, only one confirmed having seen depictions of Lebanon through the #LiveLoveLebanon campaign prior to the individual meetings. However, given the ease with which one may caption a post with the #LiveLoveLebanon hashtag, more interviewees that confirmed to have seen depictions of Lebanon on the platform might have forgotten whether these posts were indeed part of the #LiveLoveLebanon catalogue on the platform.

Interviewees shared many anecdotes of seeing posts on Instagram depicting Lebanon which make them question the way this part of world is portrayed by the news. Most of the time,

these posts depict their Lebanese friends' travel to Lebanon. Rarely, they appear on their newsfeed as recommended by Instagram.

Sometimes, interviewees even claimed they have seen Lebanon depicted on Instagram but not on traditional media outlets. For example, Gaelle said she follows her sister's Lebanese friend on Instagram and that "the only time" she sees Lebanon "is when she's there in the summer and she's posting pictures or stories on it." She explained that at first, she did not realize the country depicted was Lebanon, but that she "always thought it was really nice." Similarly, Kim said that the travel posts her Lebanese friend shares on Instagram are how she first got to know more about "the Lebanese culture." She said that most of the pictures she's seen depict nature. Landscape posts seem to be a recurrent theme on Instagram; Mary also said that when her Lebanese friend visits Lebanon, she shares posts depicting mountains. "I did not know they had a lot of mountains. It's really pretty to be honest," she said.

Mary is also one of the interviewees who purposely seeks out Lebanese "influencers" on Instagram. She explained: "[...] Especially cause I watch a lot of makeup tutorials, a lot of the girls are Lebanese as well. On Instagram there is a lot." Julie, also said that she's seen "more pictures of Lebanon and Beirut" because she follows a Lebanese actress who stars in her favorite French reality show.

Some interviewees also mentioned how interacting with posts depicting Lebanon increase the likelihood that Instagram will recommend them more often. Lara explained the process: "I think people go in the summer and I have a few Lebanese friends. So sometimes in social media if I interact with people who like photos of Lebanon or things about Lebanon, they'll show up on my feed." However, Layla has also seen depictions of Lebanon on Instagram through her Lebanese friends' posts, but she said that they still don't show up as recommended. She said: "I

would not say it's featured in those travels blogs. Like usually if it's a Middle Eastern country, it's usually Morocco, Casablanca, or UAE Dubai. That's usually the trend of what people post about the Middle East."

Thus, interviewees' responses generally indicate that users can be exposed to content depicting Lebanon on Instagram if they have a Lebanese friend and/or following who posts about the country, or through interactions with content related to Lebanon that increase the likelihood that such posts will appear on their feeds.

Interviewees also gave varying responses on how Lebanon is represented on Instagram and how that sometimes differs from how it is depicted in the news. Lara has seen posts from her Lebanese friends' trips to Lebanon and said that they depict the country "more positively." She explained: "I feel like there is a pervasive belief that the Middle East is a dangerous place all over, but seeing those pictures it was beautiful and there are tourists going all the time so I was like I wonder if it's safer than the media is making it seem to be, like CNN or CBC."

Celine also elaborated on that idea. She said:

"I think if Lebanon were depicted in more general media it may have a more negative light, it may be seeming like not as developed as Western society but if it were depicted in social media from someone personal, I think they may have a better experience and they may depict it in a more positive light."

Other interviewees brought up the personal side of Instagram depictions because Lebanese users can provide a glimpse into the touristic activities that the country has to offer and can show what life is 'actually' like there. For example, Mary said that on Instagram, users get to share posts about "food or just the culture." She added:

"[...] When you get to see actual people from there and you realize oh they're actually nice, they're not as violent as they make it seem so I guess it's different." Similarly, Matt pointed out that "people want to be portrayed in a good way so there'd be positive correlations with anything related to Instagram."

Thus, the trend of self-promotion or desire to portray oneself positively on Instagram inevitably translates to portraying one's surroundings, environment, and country in the same manner in order to increase one's likeability through the platform, whether intended or not. This can also include countries that users travel to. As a result, other users who come across this content witness these places depicted positively since they are promoted as interesting places to travel to. Indeed, Lebanon is sometimes seen as a potential travel destination by interviewees on Instagram. However, they are aware of the trend to positively frame Instagram depictions and to cast a rosy view on them, and as such are skeptical of their reliability.

Indeed, at first glance, the framing and colors of pictures seen on #LiveLoveLebanon posts, as well as content which showcases exciting locations and activities, elicits the desire for interviewees to go to such places and enjoy the views. For example, Lara expressed how pictures depicting the Mediterranean sea make her want "to swim in the ocean," or how pictures of rolling hills in Lebanese make her want to "hike there." Also, having been vocal about her prejudices towards the country that stem from traditional media outlets' depictions of Lebanon, she admitted that Instagram representations changed opinions she once held. She explained: "Yea, this [Instagram] definitely changes my opinion on what I thought what Lebanon was when I was a kid watching TV and the news. It makes me feel like it would be a place I want to go to rather than one I would avoid."

Similarly, depictions of sunsets in Lebanon intrigued Mary who expressed that when she thinks "of just contemplating the sunset it feels great." The depictions of fruits against a sunset background also intrigued Jenny. She explained: "It's really bright and catches your attention and the sunset in the background. It's like a beautiful scenic area and makes you want to travel there and witness it for yourself cause it looks almost surreal."

Interviewees also pointed out posts that depict Lebanese cuisine. Jad expressed the desire to try out authentic Lebanese cuisine, “especially with the landscape background.” He also said that tourism pictures make him “want to go there and see what it’s all about.”

Other interviewees expressed similar intentions and compared the depiction of Lebanon to that of other countries on the platform that are shown as tourism destinations. For example, Sarah said that depictions of Beirut and nature remind her of European cities and the countryside in France. Celine found that depictions of Lebanon to that of Morocco on the platform are similar. However, the difference in color pigmentation of posts caught her attention. She explained: “There seems to be less color. Cause Morocco is very colorful so I think just the way it’s represented there is less color involved but more or less along the same lines of architecture, food, waters.” She added that these kinds of representations make her “want to go there and explore it more.”

For interviewees such as Nick, the positive representations on Instagram are not surprising. He found depictions of Lebanon on Instagram similar to depictions of Bali. He said that it’s going to be a lot “people posing in front of something nice, people showing the places they visited” and that he does not think “anyone is going to post about times of crisis or any problems unless it was really current.” Mary also said that “there is different parts so that’s what people want to show to the world, show the good side and not always the bad side about the country.”

Tina expressed more appreciation than Nick and Mary about the positive representations given the negativity that usually surrounds Middle Eastern countries in the media. However, she is not hopeful that users would go out of their way to look up a hashtag such as #LiveLoveLebanon on their own. She explained:

“They already have a bad perception in their mind because that’s what the media told them or even if they see it on social media, they’ll just remember ‘oh I saw a post, or an article once that was saying bad things are in Lebanon.’ So they won’t even go forward with that.”

Other interviewees also noted the usefulness of Instagram to combat negative depictions of the Middle East in traditional media outlets by allowing users to have the choice to post about the positives in a country such as Lebanon. Matt, elaborated:

“I think it’s a very a good place to do so because that’s where millennials and people in general are on. It’s a very popular platform so I guess if you want to advertise or market a location, a product, or service you would definitely want to be spreading the word where people are spending the most time on.”

Similarly, Jad noted that “it [Instagram] gives people a good platform to express it and to allow others to see something that they would not think of at first, or really see otherwise on other platforms.” He further explained how this directly impacted him when viewing the #LiveLoveLebanon posts:

“When I think of the Middle East I think more of deserts. Especially those buildings like the skyscrapers I saw, I would not imagine it to be that modern and developed, which is something I never would’ve thought of before. But seeing that on Instagram, it gives me a whole new perspective on what it is and what it’s actually like.”

However, while some interviewees highlighted the usefulness of Instagram to advertise certain locations and countries and promote them as tourism destinations, they said that this opportunity is not being used to its full potential. Jenny explained:

“I feel like it could very much impact the way people view the different countries and maybe influence if people want to go there if they’re looking for their next travel destination it could be a good advertisement. Right now I feel like they’re not doing the best job at doing that but it’s very much on people’s preferences.”

Thus, while interviewees recognize the ability to advertise locations and or countries as tourist destinations on Instagram, they feel this feature is underused and/or cannot reach its full potential and audience given the restrictive algorithm features on the platform.

4.2.3.3 Summary

As shown in the foregoing, respondents and interviewees access representations of Lebanon as a result of exposure to various media depictions and/or interpersonal communication. Most prominently, these include exposure to traditional media content, word of mouth, and Instagram. When it comes to traditional media content, interviewee responses show that beliefs held about Lebanon are most likely based on depictions of other countries they have seen in the news. As such, even though interviewees claim not to have seen Lebanon depicted often or at all in the news, they still form views and beliefs about the country *indirectly* through news given its location in the Middle East. Furthermore, word of mouth plays a role in the knowledge that interviewees have about Lebanon, which is most often a result of having Lebanese friends and/or acquaintances that tell them about the country. Sometimes, word of mouth is applied to Instagram when these friends and/or acquaintances post about their travels to Lebanon. Indeed, when it comes to Instagram, results show that users are most likely to see representations of Lebanon on the platform if they have a Lebanese friend and/or following who posts about the country, or through interactions with content related to Lebanon that increase the likelihood that such posts will appear on their feeds. Furthermore, given the trend of self-promotion on the platform that encourages users to shed a rosy and positive light on content that they post, users who come across depictions of Lebanon on the platform are most likely to see its appealing features highlighted on the platform. However, to an extent, they are aware that such framing is not always accurate, and such as such are skeptical of its validity to provide a realistic view of Lebanon. Finally, restrictive algorithm features on Instagram dictate that users will not come across depictions of Lebanon on the platform unless they have Lebanese friends who post about

the country and/or they purposely encourage the algorithm to provide them depictions of Lebanon by increasing their interactions with such content.

4.3 Discussion

This research has aimed to find out the extent to which Instagram can be considered a tool to combat the ‘unsafe’ image of Lebanon; and if users who come across depictions of the country on the platform see it as a potential tourism destination.

As shown in the literature review, in certain countries of the Middle East there is the challenge of combatting the image of an ‘unsafe’ place/country, particularly in Lebanon. These images are usually exacerbated by conflicts in the region and/or natural disasters. In the Middle East, there is the added layer of traditional media outlets that have escalated these depictions and shown countries in this region as dangerous, ‘unsafe,’ and backwards (Said, 1978). These images become deeply rooted in viewers’ minds and are difficult to combat. This has prompted a trend of campaigns such as #LiveLoveLebanon with the goal of depicting these countries through their residents’ eyes on social media platforms such as Instagram.

Here, Hall’s encoding/decoding model (1980) and his semiotic and discursive system of representations (1997) come into play since the former allows to analyze how audiences read and interpret representations of the ‘other’ by the ‘other’ if they are exposed to them, and the latter takes into consideration the political implications and consequences of such representations on its audiences. Finally, Pieterse’s (1996) hybridization paradigm enables one to interpret the ways in which social media depictions of different cultures potentially reach different users and impact the ways in which they perceive and experience these depictions. Pariser’s (2011) echo chamber is useful to make sense of respondents’ access to such representations in order to determine how much of it is a result of their interest or ties to Lebanon, and how much of it is a result of the

algorithm's manipulation of such depictions' appearance on users' feeds.

The following sections answer the major research question and the sub question by interpreting results presented in chapter 4 in relation to the theories stated above.

4.3.1 Representations of Lebanon, Lebanese people, and the Other

When expressing their knowledge and perceptions/beliefs related to Lebanon, respondents' answers generally indicate ambivalence and/or cautiousness to express concrete concerns or fears related to the level of modernization in the country, conflict, and safety. For example, and since they are speaking from within Canada, respondents tend to compare aspects of modernity in Lebanon to that in Canada, and/ or neighboring countries in the Middle East. Their perception of modernity in Lebanon is relative to that of the country to which they are comparing it. When compared to neighboring countries, Lebanon is modern and has more to offer. However, when compared to Canada, it lacks in modernity. Respondents also express safety concerns about going to Lebanon, and compare them to concerns they have about visiting other neighboring countries in the Middle East. However, they express excitement at potential touristic activities in Lebanon. Similarly, they tend to say that women in Lebanon might face more restrictions than women in Canada. However, they tend to minimize the negative connotations usually associated with such restrictions by relegating them to the cultural mindset of the country as a whole rather than just the oppression of Lebanese women. Respondents also believe that conflict in Lebanon is nonexistent or minimal compared to conflict in neighboring countries. This is surprising given their general cautiousness and fear surrounding the political situation in the Middle East. However, they explain that this belief stems from not seeing Lebanon depicted on the news as much as other Arab countries.

However, why do respondents choose to express their knowledge of Lebanon by comparing it to neighboring countries in the first place? Is it because they make up for their lack of knowledge of Lebanon by drawing on their general beliefs about Middle Eastern countries? It seems to be the case as respondents tend to draw on the stereotypical image of the ‘Orient’ to inform their beliefs and perceptions of Lebanon. This is consistent with Said’s (1978) arguments about the system of propaganda in the West that continuously pushes the image of “Orientalism” and the “Oriental” in people’s minds and as such reinforces the stereotypes “by which the Orient is viewed” (p. 27).

To an extent, it can be assumed that Said’s stance is right for various reasons. Even though interviewees seem to be mostly ambivalent about topics such as modernity, safety, conflict and/or religion in Lebanon, they claim that news reports have a tendency to depict the Middle East as war-torn and as such fail to show the other side of the story. Furthermore, a significant 31% of survey respondents still think Lebanon is negatively depicted in traditional media outlets, and only 2% think it is depicted positively. The rest (48%) claim to not have seen Lebanon depicted on traditional media outlets.

Furthermore, when discussing the #LiveLoveLebanon posts, interviewees express their surprise at seeing depictions of modernity in Lebanon on Instagram. In these instances, their expectations of a more ‘rural’ or ‘desert-like’ Lebanon are brought to light. Thus, although they aim to seem neutral or unfearful about Lebanon, they still use terms that relegate its image as *less than* countries such as Canada. Interestingly, the lack of negative or stereotypical depictions of Lebanon on Instagram reveals the respondents’ expectations in this respect. Indeed, interviewees generally indicate that safety does not constitute a huge concern for them, yet they are not completely trustful of depictions that only represent the touristic aspects of the country or the

beautiful landscapes. They explain that they would conduct thorough research before they consider travelling to the country. This suggests that despite the interviewees' general neutral disposition, they are still *wary* of Lebanon, expecting to find information that will confirm their prejudices about it, and associating it with the general political situation in the region whether real or perceived (per traditional media depictions). To that extent, regardless of the method through which respondents form their beliefs of Lebanon, its image is merged with that of other Middle Eastern countries which impacts the knowledge they claim to have of it directly or indirectly.

Furthermore, according to Said, the digital era also played a role in reinforcing the stereotypes “by which the Orient is viewed” (p. 26), and as such reinforces a culture of racism and dehumanization of Arabs and Islam in the West. However, the current digital era is shaped by new media tools and platforms such as Instagram that are used by individuals in the countries Said claims have been marginalized or overshadowed by traditional media outlets' depictions of this part of the world. As this research has shown, Instagram plays a small – yet significant – part in how users of the current digital age are or can be exposed to representations of places such as Lebanon. More respondents (14%) believe that depictions of Lebanon on Instagram are positive than those who believe the same of traditional media outlets depictions (2%). Interviewees who are exposed to Lebanon on Instagram claim to have seen it through friends' travels to the country, and as such are exposed to its touristic features and landscapes.

Furthermore, respondents tend to strongly agree with the idea that Instagram allows them to discover new communities, places, or people, and that it does so better than traditional media outlets can. Interviewees contextualize this statement by explaining how Instagram can be used to share ‘personal’ stories and as such provide a glimpse into the side that news don't often

venture to when depicting places such as Lebanon. Also, interviewees highlight the trend of positive self-promotion and promotion of one's environment by users and/or pages on the platform, which whether intended or not, dictates that users who come across such depictions will often see it represented positively. Thus, Said's claim about the digital era perpetuating the stereotypes by which people from the 'Orient' are seen can be challenged given that the new era seems to facilitate the opposite. If users are constantly exposed to depictions that humanize and give back agency to Lebanese users or users from neighboring Arab countries, then the stereotypes by which they are seen and the system of propaganda that perpetuates them could possibly be undermined. However, according to respondents, while the potential is there, it is still short of reaching its target audience due to restrictive features such as Instagram's algorithm, which makes it difficult for such depictions to reach users who would not necessarily be looking for places such as Lebanon on the platform. Thus, Said's theory holds ground given that users who view Lebanon or Lebanese people through that lens of the 'other' would most likely not be exposed to the country on Instagram unless they search for it purposely, and/or their Lebanese acquaintances or friends happen to post depictions of the country on their feeds.

Furthermore, while interviewees praise personal and human representations on Instagram that challenge negative depictions, they claim they don't always provide the full picture of Lebanon and/or other places given their rosy spin on things, which is acknowledged as a feature of IG. This explains their wariness and choice to not fully trust these depictions and to turn to more traditional and 'factual' sources of representations when necessary, even though they might be negative. Also, those with Lebanese friends and/or acquaintances are further exposed to alternative anecdotes and information regarding the country. According to respondents and interviewees, this information is mostly positive and key to their knowledge and beliefs about

Lebanon. But their responses show that it is limited in nature and mostly associated with the person they are interacting with at the time, or the posts shared by that person on. Furthermore, interviewee responses show that when such interactions are seen as primary sources of knowledge regarding Lebanon, they can lead to generalizations and limited views of the country. However, regardless of the means, it is clear that representations in different media – whether social or traditional –, impact perceptions of new places and communities. As a result, respondents' exposure to Lebanon through either word of mouth, traditional media outlets, and/or Instagram influence their beliefs of the country regardless of the level of exposure, and none of these methods stands out as the single decisive influence on these perceptions.

4.3.2 Lebanon and system of representations

As stated in the literature review, Hall distinguishes between the semiotic approach and the discursive approach, which both make up the system representations that dictate how a group of people represents themselves, and thus form the image by which they are seen. According to Hall, these representations are transmitted on a global scale now that media technologies have exponentially increased the speed by which they are sent. The discursive approach in particular comes into play here because it is concerned with the political consequences and implications of such representations – the power they hold over their audiences and their interpretations of them.

On a semiotic level, there is clear difference between how respondents think places such as Lebanon are depicted on traditional media outlets versus social media platforms such as Instagram. They say that generally, traditional media outlets depict the Middle East as war-torn and 'unsafe.' However, interviewees responses show that Instagram is more likely than the former to depict places with 'unsafe' images as potential tourist destinations. Mary even goes as far as stating that:

“[...]If you’re just basing your views on what you see on the news it would always be negative and you would not want to travel there, but when you see real people going there and they come out and say it’s safe I think it gives you a better perspective that if you want to go it’s fine.”

The dichotomy between user-based representations and traditional media depictions, and how that affects the content and connotations associated with such representations, was consistently brought up by interviewees. They tend to associate Instagram representations with personal stories and ‘real’ people, whereas news less so. Lara’s description of these posts sums it up:

“[...]They’re usually very colorful. A lot of like, land, a lot of flowers so they’re really vibrant, lush places. They look really cozy, like they really create like a sense of community, like you see those shops and lots of people going through on the streets, it’s warm and colorful.”

Effectively, descriptions such as these are consistent with the majority of respondents (81%) who agreed with the statement: *Instagram allows me to discover new communities, places, and people that I would not know about otherwise*, as well as the majority (87%) who answered *yes* to whether they have *considered traveling to a new destination after discovering it on Instagram*.

The reason why these places are likely to have the appearance of tourist destinations and be considered as such is because, as Nick, puts it: “The shots they take show the beauty of the place and they show the different parts and things you can do there. Sometimes they show traditional meals, sometimes they show traditions that they do there, like maybe festivals.” Thus, such depictions correlate with the touristic products and attractions that people tend to associate with the ‘destination image’ of a country (Avraham and Ketter, 2008; Crompton, 1978).

Furthermore, as shown above, the trend inherent to social media depicting oneself and surrounding environment in a positive manner contributes to depictions such as the ones

described above. According to interviewees who have seen Lebanon depicted on the platform, more often than not, the country is represented as a tourist destination on the platform. Thus, on a semiotic level, it can be said that Instagram may contribute to counterbalance the ‘unsafe’ image usually associated with Lebanon and neighboring countries and promotes them as tourist destinations. Furthermore, given the consensus among interviewees on the codes and language used to produce Instagram posts and depictions, a claim can be made as to the possibility of a new cultural meaning and values system being created through Instagram, given the immense popularity and reach of the platform. In other words, if Instagram depictions are creating new norms, standards, and social conventions (Hall, 1997) by which people inform and show each other images about the world, and as such encourage new ideas of *seeing* and *being* in the world, then the platform itself becomes a “map of meaning” (p. 14) by which people, places, and others are judged and seen. Conversely, users start placing cultural value and meaning on depictions they are constantly exposed to based on the way they are shown and received by other users. For example, if a tourism destination trends on the platform, then users might start placing additional value whereas before they would have not.

However, by drawing on Hall’s discursive approach, one can reveal respondents’ struggles to decide whether they are more trustful of traditional media depictions or Instagram depictions. Do they trust discourse that tells them Lebanon and the rest of the Arab region are dangerous places that are best kept away from? Or do they trust Instagram discourse, which tells them that these places are safe and even possibly pleasant to travel to?

This dichotomy is present when respondents talked about depictions of Brazil, Venezuela, and Haiti on news, which elicit fear to go to these places. However, with the personal, positive light that Instagram depictions shed on these places, users are more willing to

accept that they might not be as ‘unsafe’ as shown on news. On Brazil, Lara said: “They showed Brazil and it was beautiful but you also hear on the news how dangerous it can be in South America so it kind of changes your perspective when it shows beautiful shots of this place.” Mary, who is originally from Haiti, shared her perspective about its depiction in the news versus on social media and/or in person: “My country Haiti. It’s always the bad stuff, it’s ugly or dirty, and then when you see it in actual person or when friends go there and you’re like ‘oh it’s so nice’ like there is actually other sides but they always show the bad side.” Layla further explained the struggle between relying on reputable sources such as news, and more modern ways of sharing information and representing places through Instagram. She said:

“If I’m going to see the Venezuelan crisis every other day someone is dying from malnutrition or whatever it is, and then on Instagram I see how nice Venezuela is, I’m more likely to believe what is said on the news, what those reporters are saying rather than what those bloggers are saying. Cause it’s more shocking and real.”

The same can be said about Lebanon. The previous section has shown that respondents tend to associate their knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs regarding Lebanon by drawing on that of other neighboring countries in the Middle East. Also, 31% of respondents believe that traditional media depictions of Lebanon are negative. While the knowledge they claim to have gained through some form of direct social experience and/or interaction is equally split with that formed through media exposure (50/50), the former remains mostly anecdotal, unless respondents have close ties to the country or neighboring countries. Furthermore, even when they claim not to have seen Lebanon depicted on traditional media outlets, they seem to assume that its depiction is negative based on that of the Middle East. Thus, if the respondents are exposed to images of Lebanon mainly through the news, their views are less likely to be positive. Effectively, Sarah articulates how people might base their perception of Lebanon on these representations:

“[...] Definitely on the news, I don’t think they have a really good depiction. Based on that people would be fearful of going to these places. There might be some people who think that all Arabs are the same so they might think a Lebanese person is they’re supposed to be a certain way and they are not actually like that and you would not know that unless you spent time with Lebanese people and see how they’re like.”

Thus, while Instagram is providing a new discourse to represent Lebanon and other countries in general, it seems that the discourse presented by traditional media outlets is more likely to have an impact and shape views. In that case, is the influence – i.e. the politics – of traditional media outlets on its audiences deeply rooted? It seems to be the case.

When Hall (1997) tackles the discursive approach, he explains the concept of *discursive formation*, which entails the production of “new discourses with the power and authority, the ‘truth,’ to regulate social practices in new ways” (p. 31). He further talks about Foucault’s rationale and explains that without discursive formation, objects would lose all “meaningful or intelligible construct” (Hall, 1997, p. 31). Thus, the discursive approach implies that representation is meaningless without power, since its impact on audiences is diminished or nonexistent when it is not regulated by an “institution” (Hall, 1997, p. 30). As this research has shown, the power that traditional media outlets have to project meaning onto places such as Lebanon is deeply entrenched in viewers. It has also shown that power and social construct can be regulated differently in a new social media age through platforms such as Instagram given the ‘power’ that users have gained in assigning their own meaning to their communities and/or places they travel to. However, that power seems to be undermined by the platform’s algorithm that restricts who the recipients of such depictions are.

As such, could an algorithm ‘fix’ allow Instagram depictions of places such as Lebanon to gain power, meaning, and value if more users are exposed to them? Pieterse’s hybridization paradigm can shed light on this idea.

4.3.3 Instagram algorithm, hybridization paradigm, and social media interconnectedness

As shown in the literature review, Pieterse (1996) champions the hybridization paradigm, which defends the emergence of “worldwide interconnectedness” and renders the world a “smaller community,” and thus brings larger awareness to “cultural change” and a “growing sensitivity to cultural difference” (p. 1389). In other words, it provides a solution to cultural differentialism (of which participants’ perceptions of Lebanon can be deemed an instance) and increases cultural awareness because it aims to remove the negative connotations associated with the former by making the ‘different’ accessible and, as a result, more understandable and relatable. This research has shown that this is effectively possible, but only to an extent. The popularity and reach of Instagram have increased accessibility to countries, cultures, and communities that were rarely thought of before. Also, respondents and interviewees responses have shown that there is a unique language and common perception associated with representations on Instagram given that the platform seems to encourage a positive storytelling format when users post content. While some users might be skeptical of the validity and reliability of these representations, they are regardless present all over the platform. Instagram’s unique storytelling format, and the trend of showcasing oneself and surrounding environment positively through the eyes of locals in their own countries or even tourists who travel to these countries have indeed rendered the world a ‘smaller community’.

As shown in the *Instagram algorithm and control over content* section, personalized feeds, profiles, and search tabs are tailored to show users content they are interested in. While suggestions and advertisements are present, users’ likes and dislikes trigger the algorithm to show them content they are interested in as their usage of the platform increases. This is where Pieterse’s hope for social media interconnectedness is halted. As respondents explain, their

exposure to places such as Lebanon is limited to posts from friends who happen to travel to the country. The depiction is positive and promotes the country as a tourist destination. But if users are not exposed to Lebanon on their personal feeds, don't purposely search for Lebanon on the platform, and/or don't interact with 'Lebanese' content that increases the chance of exposure to it, then they will most likely not come across depictions of Lebanon on the platform, nor any neighboring Middle Eastern country for that matter.

Thus, while one might acknowledge users as active agents (Katz et al., 1974) who are able to tailor content as they see fit, the fact remains that they are most likely stuck in an "echo chamber" (Pariser, 2011) made of components and depictions that they will agree with and find pleasant. As a result, Pieterse's hybridization paradigm is partly achievable when and/if users are exposed to countries such as Lebanon on Instagram. Of course, there are alternative social media platforms through which countries may brand themselves, but this thesis has focused on the usefulness of Instagram to do so. However, due to algorithm restrictions on Instagram that make it difficult for users with no interest in Lebanon, and/or direct or indirect ties to the country to come across depictions of it, campaigns such as #LiveLoveLebanon might find it difficult to reach their target audience through the platform and are possibly better off finding alternative ways and media to counter the 'unsafe' image of the country.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to answer the following main research question: *To what extent can Instagram be considered a tool to combat the ‘unsafe’ image of Lebanon?*; and the following secondary question: *Do users who come across depictions of Lebanon on Instagram perceive the country as a potential tourist destination?*

Longstanding conflicts in the Middle East and traditional media outlets’ constant negative and stereotypical representations of them have gendered an image of the ‘other’ (Said, 1978) through which they are mostly seen as backwards and barbaric. However, because of Instagram’s popularity since its release in 2011 and the ways through which it has made it possible for locals and tourists to post their own depictions of the countries they live in and/or travel to, this thesis set out to find out if Instagram users, with a particular focus on Canadian respondents, can be and/or are exposed to depictions of Lebanon on the platform, and what their impressions of them are.

To answer the research question, Instagram can effectively be used as tool to combat the ‘unsafe’ image of Lebanon, given the accessibility of the platform, its user-friendly interface, the inherent positive associations with content and depictions, and the ability to showcase the touristic aspects of the country. However, while the country may come across as a likely tourist destination to users who happen to see depictions of the country on the platform through their acquaintances and/or friends, or because of their personal interest in Lebanon, the ‘unsafe’ image of the country may be undermined – but not fully dismantled –, since campaigns such as #LiveLoveLebanon can’t fully reach the audiences whose perceptions would need to be changed in the first place, unless the hashtag is used by friends and/or followings of such users to caption posts they share of the country.

5.1 Results and implications

The main results of this thesis have operated on four levels: respondents' knowledge and perceptions of Lebanon, representations of Lebanon (i.e. word of mouth, social media, news, campaigns, etc.), the reach of Instagram depictions (i.e. their politics), and finally, if such depictions can indeed dismantle the 'unsafe' image of Lebanon or countries that are viewed as such.

While respondents' perceptions of Lebanon seemed ambivalent at first, their impressions of #LiveLoveLebanon posts and their comparison of Lebanon to neighboring countries and/or Canada show that they still perceive Lebanon as more 'backwards' than the latter and that they believe it possesses 'stereotypical' attributes similar to that of other Middle Eastern countries they have seen depicted in traditional media outlets. This, combined with the fact some interviewees base their knowledge of Lebanon on that of other Middle Eastern countries, shows that Said's (1978) theory of the 'other' applies to the extent that the stereotypes "by which the Orient is viewed" (p. 27) are reinforced in the case of Lebanon.

On representations, results show that while respondents believe word of mouth to be key when it comes to how they have learned and formed beliefs about Lebanon, this information is mostly anecdotal and traditional media outlets still have a bigger influence over beliefs held about this part of the world. However, although the number of respondents who claim to have seen depictions of Lebanon on Instagram is low (38%), it remains significant. Indeed, when the hurdle of access is overcome, users are likely to find depictions of Lebanon on Instagram more positive (14%) than depictions on traditional media outlets (2%). Furthermore, of the users who see depictions of Lebanon on Instagram, more believe that they are positive than those who believe the same of traditional media outlets representations. Interviewee descriptions of

Instagram depictions show that it is represented as an attractive tourist destination on the platform. This is part of the trend of positive self-promotion and promotion of one's surrounding environment by users and/or pages on the platform, which, whether intended or not, dictates that users who come across such depictions will often see it represented positively, but might not always find it reliable.

However, the power and reach of these representations plays the most crucial role in answering the major research question: to what extent can Instagram be considered as a tool to combat the 'unsafe' image of Lebanon?

Results show that Instagram's algorithm prevents campaigns such as #LiveLoveLebanon from always reaching their target audiences since users are restricted to content dictated by their followings on their feeds, and content on the explore page is tailored according to their likes and dislikes. Users can mostly be exposed to the campaign if they follow other users who post about Lebanon and brand it with the #LiveLoveLebanon hashtag. However, the hashtag does not dictate the impact or nature of the post since it is up to the content creator to decide whether or not they want to include it in the #LiveLoveLebanon catalogue. Furthermore, users are exposed to Lebanon on the platform if they purposely seek posts depicting the country, or if they interact with content related to Lebanon which, in return, increases the likelihood of it appearing on their explore page as recommended. Thus, while Instagram can be considered a tool to combat the 'unsafe' image of Lebanon, the algorithm issue remains to be addressed if campaign such as #LiveLoveLebanon wish to have a bigger impact on users' perceptions of countries that have been marginalized and depicted as dangerous by traditional media outlets. Indeed, while this thesis has focused on the algorithm aspect of Instagram, branding initiatives can include the use

of influencers— among others – to promote said content to their followers who may not be exposed to it otherwise.

5.2 Limitations and future studies

Using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, this research set out to find the ways through which Instagram can be used to counter the ‘unsafe’ image of countries such as Lebanon. Survey responses provided tangible statistics as to the importance that users credit the platform with when it comes to discovering new places on the platform, their beliefs surrounding places such as Lebanon, and the ways through which they have formed these beliefs. On another level, interviewees contextualized these statistics by explaining how the discourse presented by traditional media outlets and/or Instagram affects the image and beliefs they hold about Lebanon or neighboring countries, and how their reach impacts the extent of these beliefs.

However, what about users who use Instagram to promote a positive image of their country?

Future studies can use qualitative methods to research the extent to which Lebanese users find Instagram a useful tool to promote their country as a tourist destination to other users. Such studies could also find out if the use of Instagram for such purposes has led to image restoration of Lebanon and if the number of tourists to the country has increased. Furthermore, the current study’s methodology did not allow measurement of long-term changes in respondents’ perception of Lebanon. Future studies can focus on an experimental component and ask Canadian respondents to view #LiveLoveLebanon posts for an extended period of time and compare their perceptions of the country before and following the exposure period. A focus group including both Lebanese and Canadian respondents could also prompt further insights since respondents might interact differently when presented with varying opinions on the issue.

Another study could focus more extensively on the extent to which the Instagram algorithm affects the content that users are exposed to, and as such if it can ever truly compete with the dominant discourse presented by traditional media outlets. Finally, interviewees might have felt pressured to voice out positive descriptions of Instagram posts when discussing #LiveLoveLebanon. Thus, a content analysis of such posts could serve to clearly find out how countries such as Lebanon are represented by users on the country and the kind of responses that such posts receive on the platform.

To conclude, while traditional media outlets and news still hold power over the dominant discourse surrounding representations of the ‘other,’ Instagram has been shown to provide alternative ways and tools to represent countries such as Lebanon by locals and tourists. Lately, Lebanese people have taken to Instagram to attempt dictating the main discourse surrounding the financial collapse in the country. They have done so to provide other users with the ‘real’ story surrounding the crisis, and as an alternative to ‘fake’ news being disseminated by the country’s traditional media outlets. Thus, while to date, initiatives such as #LiveLoveLebanon have aimed to show the positive and touristic aspects of the country, it seems that Lebanese users don’t seem to refrain from depictions that might show the country in a state of turmoil to the rest of the world in times of need. As such, in the future, it will be interesting to watch out for the impact of such depictions on Instagram users and if/how they differ to traditional media depictions of the same financial crisis.

References

- Al-Hejin, B. (2015). Covering Muslim women: Semantic macrostructures in BBC News. *Discourse & Communication*, 9(1), 19–46.
- Al-Kandari, A. J., Al-Hunayyain, A. A., Al-Hajri, R. (2016). The Influence of Culture on Instagram Use. *Journal of Advances in Information Technology*, 7(1), 54-57.
- Alsultany, E. (2013) Arabs and Muslims in the Media after 9/11: Representational Strategies for a 'Postrace' Era. *American Quarterly*, 65(1), 161-169.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Avraham, E., Ketter, E. (2008). Will we be safe there? Analyzing strategies for altering places' unsafe images. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 4(3), 196-204.
- Avraham, E., Ketter, E. (2012). The social revolution of place marketing: The growing power of users in social media campaigns. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 8(4), 285-294.
- Avraham, E. (2013). Crisis communication, image restoration, and battling stereotypes of terror and wars: Media strategies for attracting tourism to Middle Eastern countries. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57, 1350-1367.
- Avraham, E., Ketter, E. (2016). *Tourism Marketing for Developing Countries; Battling Stereotypes and Crisis in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Baekgaard, M., Baethge, C., Blom-Hansen, J., Dunlop, C. A., Esteve, M., Jakobsen, M., Kisida, B., Marvel, J., Moseley, A., Stewart, P., Thomsen, M. K., Wolf, P. J. (2015). Conducting Experiments in public Management Research: A Practical Guide. *International Public Management Journal*, 18(2), 324-342.

- Brenner, J., Smith, A. (2013, August 5). 72% of Online Adults Are Social Networking Site Users Retrieved from: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/08/05/72-of-online-adults-are-social-networking-site-users/>
- Campbell, R., Martin, C. R., and Fabos, B. (2006). Media and Culture. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Campo, S. & Alvarez, M. D. (2010). Country versus destination image in a developing country. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 27(7), 749-765.
- Campo, S., & Alvarez, M. (2014). Can tourism promotions influence a country's negative image? An experimental study on Israel's image. *Current issues in Tourism*, 17(3), 201-219.
- Crompton, J. (1979). An assessment of the Image of Mexico as a Vacation Destination and the Influence of Geographical Location Upon That Image. *Journal of Travel Research*, 17(4), 18-23.
- Chua, T.-S., Juanzi, L. & Moens, M.-F., 2014. Mining user generated content. 7 ed. CRC: Chapman and Hall.
- Dahlan, K. (2011). Between Us and Them: Deconstructing Ideologies behind the Portrayal of Saudi Women in Canadian Media (M.A. Thesis, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada). Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/10393/20145>
- Davis, K. 2011. Tensions of Identity in a Networked era: Young People's Perspectives on the Risks and Rewards of Online Self-Expression. *New Media and Society* 14(4), 634–651.
- Dion, N. A. (2016). The Effect of Instagram on Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction (Honors Theses, Salem State University, Massachusetts, USA). Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.salemstate.edu/honors_theses/91

- Eltantawy, N., & Cheshier, D. (2007). U.S. newspaper representation of Muslim and Arab women post 9/11 (Doctoral Dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations &Thesis Global database. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304876086/>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S.-A, Alkassim, R. S. (2015). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4.
- Galletta, A. (2012). *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*. New York: NYU Press.
- Georgiou, M. (2013). Diaspora in the Digital Era: Minorities and Media Representation. *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, 12(4), 80-99.
- Gilboa, E. (2006). Public diplomacy: The missing component in Israeli foreign policy. *Israel Affairs*, 12(4), 715–747.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- Guynn, J. (2017, August 21). Facebook may have a grown up problem: Young People leaving for Instagram and Snapchat. Retrieved from:
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2017/08/21/facebook-teens-tweens-instagram-snapchat/588406001/>
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. *Culture, Media, Language*, 128-38. London: Hutchinson.
- Herman, E. S. (2001). The ‘Islamic Peril’ Deconstructed. *SAIS Review*, 21(2), 211-215.
- Homeland angers minister over depiction of Beirut. (2012, October 19). Retrieved from:
<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-20002148>

- Karstan, M. (2017). 25 Awesome Instagram Travel Photographers You Need to Follow.
Retrieved from: <https://expertvagabond.com/instagram-travel/>
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., Gurevitch, M. (1973) Uses and Gratifications Research In The Public Opinion Quarterly, 37(4), 509-523.
- Kunczik, M. (1997). Images of nations and international public relations. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Live Love Lebanon – Ministry of Tourism. (2014, June 3). Retrieved from: <http://campaignme.com/2014/06/03/15551/live-love-lebanon-ministry-tourism/>
- Macale, S. (2011, October 7). 98% of Online US Adults aged 18-24 Use Social Media. Retrieved from: <https://thenextweb.com/socialmedia/2011/10/08/98-of-online-us-adults-aged-18-24-use-social-media/>
- Madsen, A. K. (2016). Beyond the Bubble: Three Empirical Reasons to Re- conceptualize Online Visibility. Journal of Media and Communication Research, 59, 6-27.
- Martin, I., & Eroglu, S. (1993). Measuring a multi-dimensional construct: Country image. Journal of Business Research, 28(3), 191-210.
- Mishra, S. (2007). Saving Muslim women and fighting Muslim men: Analysis of representations in the New York Times. Global Media Journal, 6(11), 1–20.
- Molinillo, S., Liébana-Cabanillas, F., Anaya-Sánchez, R., & Buhalis, D. (2018). DMO online platforms: Image and intention to visit. Tourism Management, 65, 116–130.
- Moon, J.-H., Lee, E., Lee, J.-A., Choi, R.-T., Sung, Y. (2016). The Role of Narcissism in Self-Promotion on Instagram. Personality and Individual Differences, 101, 22-25.
- Mossberg, L., & Kleppe, I. (2005). Country and destination image – different or similar image concepts? The Service Industries Journal, 25(4), 493-503.

- One Million Posts to #MyDubai Instagram Account in Just Six Months. (2 July, 2014). Retrieved from: <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/one-million-posts-to-mydubai-instagram-account-in-just-six-months-1.334885>
- Pariser, E. (2011). *What The Internet Is Hiding from You*. NY: The Penguin Press.
- Perloff, R. M. (2014). Social Media Effects on Young Women's Body Image Concerns: Theoretical Perspectives and an Agenda for Research. *Sex Roles*, 71, 363-377.
- Pieterse, J. (1996). Globalisation and Culture: Three Paradigms. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31(23), 1389-1393.
- Pieterse, J., N. (2009). *Globalization and culture: global mélange* (Second edition.). Lanham, Maryland;: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Phua, J., Jin, S.-V., Kim, J.-J. (2017). Gratifications of Using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat to Follow Brands: The Moderating Effect of Social Comparison, Trust, Tie, Strength, and Network Homophily on Brand Identification, Brand Engagement, Brand Commitment, and Membership Intention. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34, 412-424.
- Qutub, A. (2013). Harem Girls and Terrorist Men: Media Misrepresentations of Middle Eastern Culture. *Colloquy*, 9, 139-155.
- Ridouani, D. (2011). The Representation of Arabs and Muslims in Western Media. *Ruta*, 3, 3-15.
- Rubin, A. M., (1986). Uses, gratifications, and media effects research. In: Bryant, J., Zillmann, D. (Eds.), *Perspectives on Media Effects*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, 281–301.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.
- Schrauf, R. W. (2016). *Mixed Methods: Interviews, Surveys, and Cross-Cultural Comparisons*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

- Shuqair, S., & Cragg, P. (2017). The immediate impact of Instagram posts on changing the viewers' perceptions towards travel destinations. (2017). *Asia Pacific Journal of Advanced Business and Social Studies*, 3(2), 1-12.
- Smith, S. (2018). Instagram abroad: performance, consumption and colonial narrative in tourism. *Postcolonial Studies*, 21(2), 172–191.
- Statistics Canada. (n.d.). The Lebanese Community in Canada. Retrieved from: <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-621-x/89-621-x2007015-eng.htm>
- Stepchenkova, S., & Morrison, A. M. (2008). Russia's destination image among American pleasure travelers: Revisiting Echtner and Ritchie. *Tourism Management*, 28, 1529-1540.
- Stepchenkova, S., & Li, X. (2014). Destination image: Do top-of-mind association say it all?. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 45, 46–62.
- Sunstein, C. (2017). *#Republic : divided democracy in the age of social media* . Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tewksbury, D. (2005). The Seeds of Audience Fragmentation: Specialization in the Use of Online News Sites. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 49(3), 332-348.
- Thayer, H., Nancy, D., Jennifer, E., Kelly, S., Kate, N., Stevenson, J. (2010). *Survey Fundamentals; A Guide to Designing and Implementing Surveys*. University of Wisconsin.
- This is How the Instagram Algorithm Works in 2020*. (3 February, 2020). Retrieved from: <https://later.com/blog/how-instagram-algorithm-works/>
- Triling, D., Schoenbach, K. (2015). Challenging Selective Exposure: Do Online News Users. Choose Sites that Match Their Interests and Preferences?. *Digital Journalism*, 3(2), 140-157.

Turkas, S. (2017, January 31). Why Instagram is much more important than you think.

Retrieved from: <https://rdodigital.com/instagram-much-important-think/>

University of Ottawa. (n.d.). Participate in Research. Retrieved from:

<https://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/psychology/research/participate-research>

Uzunoglu, E. (2016). Using Social Media for Participatory City Branding: The case of cityofizmir, an Instagram project. *Global Place Branding Campaigns across Cities, Regions, and Nations* (pp. 94–116). Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-0576-1.ch005>

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Journal of Nursing and Health Sciences*, 15(3), 398-40.

Appendix A: Ethics Committee Approval Letter

04/02/2019

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

S-11-18-1105

Titre du projet / Project Title

The Lens of the Other:
Instagram's Influence on
Cross-Cultural Perceptions and
the Case of Live Love Lebanon.

Type de projet / Project Type

Thèse de maîtrise / Master's
thesis

Statut du projet / Project Status

Approuvé / Approved

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

04/02/2019

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

03/02/2020

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

**Chercheur /
Researcher**

Affiliation

Role

Raphaëla NEHME

Département de communication / Department of
Communication

Chercheur Principal / Principal
Investigator

Philippe ROSS

Département de communication / Department of
Communication

Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

04/02/2019

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Germain ZONGO

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For **Barbara GRAVES** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board**

Appendix B: Survey Consent Form

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study by Raphaela Nehme, a Masters of Arts student in the Communication program at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Philippe Ross, Associate Professor at the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of Study: To closely examine the impact that Instagram has on users' perceptions of each other. More specifically, using the campaign #LiveLoveLebanon on Instagram, this study will examine the likelihood that representations of the Lebanese community on the application could possibly positively contribute to the perceptions that Canadians or potential Canadian tourists have of this community.

Participation: My participation will consist of completing a survey that will take no longer than 35 minutes to finish. I will have to complete the survey online using the website Survey Monkey. Since it is an American based platform, it is subject to the patriot act, and thus my data will be stored in the United States and can be used by U.S. government officials without requiring my notification. In one of the survey questions, I will be asked if I am willing to proceed to phase two of the study, which will consist of an individual, one-hour long, face-to-face interview with the researcher in which I will discuss and be shown posts on Instagram that represent Lebanon.

Risks: My participation in this research will entail of sharing my thoughts, opinions, and judgement about a country in the middle east that has been subject to controversial media depictions due to tensions in the region, and this may cause me to feel uncomfortable due to the heaviness of the



topic. The researcher has given me assurance that my input will not be criticized, judged, taken out of context or used to push forward an agenda, but will be accurately analyzed based on pre-existing literature and research on the subject.

Benefits: I understand that my participation in this project could possibly benefit the coexistence of the Lebanese community within Canada and/or lead to a better understanding of this community. My participation will also challenge me to critically think about Lebanon, its citizens and residents, in order to answer the survey questions and give my opinions about it from an outsider's perspective based on my previous knowledge about the country.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share in the survey will remain strictly confidential and that my anonymity will be guaranteed. The researcher will guarantee my anonymity by not using my real name in the study and by referring to me in pseudonyms (eg. 'Student 1'). Any information I share that could lead to my identification will not be used in the project. Also, only the researcher and their thesis supervisor will have access to the information I share.

In order to minimize the risk of security breaches and to help ensure my confidentiality the researchers recommend that I use standard safety measures such as signing out of my account, closing my browser and locking my screen or device when I am no longer using them / when I have completed the study.

Data Conservation: The data collected in the survey will be exported to the researcher's computer. The physical version of the data will be stored in a locked file box at the researcher's home. The electronic version of the data will be stored on the researcher's computer that only they can access through a secured password. Only the researcher and their thesis supervisor will be allowed to access this information, and to use it in the written project. The data will be stored up to five years after the end of the project. The retention period will start as soon as the data collection procedure begins and after its completion. At the end of this period, the physical version of the data will be shredded and the electronic version will be securely deleted.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will not be conserved and will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Raphaëla Nehme of the Department of Communication of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ottawa, which research is under the supervision of Philippe Ross,

Associate Professor at the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or their supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research:

University of Ottawa
Tabaret Hall
550 Cumberland street, room 154
Ottawa, ON, Canada K1N 6N5
Tel. : (613)-562-5387
ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant Signature: *(Signature)*

Date: *(Date)*

Researcher Signature: *(Signature)*

Date: *(Date)*

Appendix C: Interview Consent Form

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study by Raphaela Nehme, a Masters of Arts student in the Communication program at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Philippe Ross, Associate Professor at the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of Study: To closely examine the impact that Instagram has on users' perceptions of each other. More specifically, using the campaign #LiveLoveLebanon on Instagram, this study will examine the likelihood that representations of the Lebanese community on the application could possibly positively contribute to the perceptions that Canadians or potential Canadian tourists have of this community.

Participation: After having completed the survey for the abovementioned research study and indicated as a response to one of the survey questions that I am willing to be interviewed by the researcher, I've been chosen to proceed in phase two of the study, which will consist of an individual, one-hour long, face-to-face interview with the researcher in which I will discuss Lebanon and be shown posts on Instagram that represent the country, which will be generated by the hashtag #LiveLoveLebanon.

Risks: My participation in this research will entail of sharing my thoughts, opinions, and judgement about a country in the middle east that has been subject to controversial media depictions due to political tensions in the region, and this may cause me to feel uncomfortable due to the heaviness of the topic. The researcher has given me assurance that my input will not be criticized, judged, taken out of context or used to push forward an



uOttawa

agenda, but will be accurately analyzed based on pre-existing literature and research on the subject.

Benefits: I understand that my participation in this project could possibly benefit the coexistence of the Lebanese community within Canada and/or lead to a better understanding of this community. My participation will also challenge me to critically discuss this country, its citizens and residents, and give my opinions about it from an outsider's perspective based on previous knowledge and additional Instagram posts representative of Lebanon that I will be shown.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share during the interview will remain strictly confidential and that my anonymity will be guaranteed. The researcher will guarantee my anonymity by not using my real name in the study and by referring to me in pseudonyms (eg. 'Student 1'). Any information I share that could lead to my identification will not be used in the project. Also, only the researcher and their thesis supervisor will have access to the information I share.

Data Conservation: The data collected during the interview will be exported to the researcher's computer. The physical version of the data will be stored in a locked file box at the researcher's home. The electronic version of the data will be stored on the researcher's computer that only they can access through a secured password.

The information I share during the interview will be audio recorded. Only the researcher and their thesis supervisor will be allowed to access the audio recordings, to listen to them, and to use and/or quote them in the written project. The data will be stored up to five years after the end of the project. The retention period will start as soon as the data collection procedure begins and after its completion. At the end of this period, the physical version of the data will be shredded and the electronic version will be securely deleted.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will not be conserved and will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Raphaëla Nehme of the Department of Communication of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ottawa, which research is under the supervision of Philippe Ross, Associate Professor at the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or their supervisor.

Appendix D: SurveyMonkey Questionnaire

Demographics

2

* 1. Please indicate your age.

* 2. Please indicate your gender.

☐ Male

☐ Female

Other (please specify)

* 3. Please indicate your program of study.

Part 1: Social Media Use and Instagram

* 4. In a typical day, which of the following social media applications do you use most often? (rank the following options in order of preference, 1 being the application you use the most)


Facebook
☐ N/A
* | | *


Instagram
☐ N/A
* | | *


Reddit
☐ N/A
* | | *


Twitter
☐ N/A
* | | *


Snapchat
☐ N/A
* | | *

* 5. On a typical day, about how many hours do you spend looking at and/or sharing content on social media?

- ☐ 0-1
☐ 2-3
☐ 4-5
☐ 5-6
☐ More than 6

* 6. On a typical day, about how many hours do you spend looking at and/or sharing content on Instagram?

- ☐ 0-1 ☐ 5-6
☐ 2-3 ☐ More than 6
☐ 4-5

* 7. What is the main purpose for your use of Instagram? (choose as many as apply)

- ☐ For updates on your followings' content (stories, posts, live videos, IGTV)
☐ To post personal content (stories, posts, live videos, IGTV)
☐ For exchanging direct messages with other users
☐ To discover new content through the search tab
☐ Other (please specify)

* 8. Which of the following features do you mostly use on Instagram? (choose as many as apply)

- ☐ Posts
☐ Stories
☐ Live videos
☐ IGTV
☐ Search bar

* 9. What kind of Instagram profiles constitute the gist of your 'following'? (choose one answer only)

- ☐ Friends
☐ Family
☐ Acquaintances
☐ Social media influencers
☐ Celebrities (movie stars, singers, etc.)
☐ Pages that focus on specific content (travel, art, memes, fashion, etc.)

Other (please specify)

* 10. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Instagram allows me to discover new communities, places, and people that I wouldn't know about otherwise.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 11. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I am able to control the kind of content I want to see and am exposed to on Instagram.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 12. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Compared to traditional media outlets (TV, radio, movies, newspapers), Instagram allows me to better discover new communities, places, and people.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 13. Have you ever travelled to a new destination after discovering it on Instagram?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

* 14. Have you considered traveling to a new destination after discovering it on Instagram?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Lebanon

* 15. If you were to have a conversation about the cultural and social aspects of Lebanon, how would you rate your knowledge of the country?

- ☐ Expert knowledge
- ☐ A lot of knowledge
- ☐ Moderate amount of knowledge
- ☐ A little knowledge
- ☐ No knowledge at all

* 16. How much do you know about the Lebanese community in Canada?

- ☐ Expert knowledge
- ☐ A lot of knowledge
- ☐ A moderate amount of knowledge
- ☐ A little knowledge
- ☐ No knowledge at all

* 17. What comes to mind when you think of Lebanon, Lebanese culture, and Lebanese people? (you may use keywords and/or spell out ideas)

* 18. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Lebanon is a country that has yet to modernize.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 19. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Lebanon is an unsafe country.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 20. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Lebanon is a war-torn country.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 21. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Women in Lebanon do not enjoy the same freedoms as Western women.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 22. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Conflict in Lebanon is due to various religious affiliations.

- ☐ Completely Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 23. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Lebanon is a country worth visiting.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 24. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Lebanon is an appealing tourist destination.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 25. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Lebanon has a great night life.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 26. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Lebanon has beautiful, natural, scenic locations.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 27. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Lebanon has tasty cuisine.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

* 28. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Lebanon has an outgoing, open-minded, and modern society.

- ☐ Completely agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree moderately
- ☐ Agree a little
- ☐ Don't agree at all

Lebanon Depictions in the Media.

* 29. In your opinion, how is Lebanon typically depicted in traditional media outlets (ie. TV, movies, radio, newspapers)?

- ☐ Positively
- ☐ Neutrally
- ☐ Negatively
- ☐ Don't know, I've never seen Lebanon depicted in traditional media outlets

* 30. To what extent do you think that traditional media depictions of Lebanon are accurate?

- ☐ Completely
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

* 31. To what extent have traditional media outlets shaped your image and opinion on Lebanon?

- ☐ Completely
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

* 32. In your opinion, how is Lebanon typically depicted on Instagram?

- ☐ Positively
- ☐ Neutrally
- ☐ Negatively
- ☐ Don't know, i've never seen Lebanon depicted on Instagram

* 33. To what extent do you think that depictions of Lebanon on Instagram are accurate?

- ☐ Completely
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

* 34. To what extent has Instagram shaped your image and opinion on Lebanon?

- ☐ Completely
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all

* 35. To what extent have other social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) shaped your image and opinion of Lebanon?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| ☐ Completely | ☐ A little |
| ☐ A lot | ☐ Not at all |
| ☐ Somewhat | ☐ I haven't seen Lebanon depicted in other social media platforms |

* 36. To what extent have Lebanese community and cultural events in Canada shaped your image and opinion on Lebanon?

- ☐ Completely
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ I haven't attended any Lebanese community and cultural events

* 37. To what extent have word of mouth (friends, family, etc.) shaped your image and opinion on Lebanon?

- ☐ Completely
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ I haven't been told anything about Lebanon from family, friends, etc.

* 38. To what extent have online campaigns (Live Love Lebanon, etc.) shaped your image and opinion on Lebanon?

- ☐ Completely
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ A little
- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ I haven't seen any online campaigns on Lebanon

* 39. Which of the following options have most impacted your views and opinion on Lebanon (rank the following options in order of preference, 1 being the option that has influenced your opinion and image on Lebanon the most)



Traditional media outlets (TV, radio, etc. etc.)

☐ N/A



Social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

☐ N/A



Online campaigns

☐ N/A



Word of mouth (family, friends, etc.)

☐ N/A



Lebanese community and cultural events in Canada

☐ N/A

Consent for Interview

* 40. Would you be interested in a one-on-one interview with the researcher to elaborate on your responses? (please note that the interview is considered a separate study, and you will thus be awarded more credits towards your ISPR participation if you agree to it)

☐ Yes

☐ No

* 41. Can you please provide your contact information? (please note that the researcher guarantees your anonymity in the study)

Name

Email Address

Phone Number

Appendix E: Interview Guide

General questions about the Interviewee and their social media use:

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself? (studies, hometown, etc.)
- What is the primary way you access news?
- What is your daily regimen of social media use like?
- What do you use Instagram for?
- How often do you share posts on Instagram?
- What do you mostly post about?
- In your opinion, what are the costs and benefits you associate with the use of Instagram?
- Do you think Instagram impacts the way you view yourself or others around you? Can you think of an example of a time when it impacted your opinion?
- Do you feel like you are actively selecting the content that you are exposed to on Instagram or is it more of a passive process of scrolling through what they recommend to you?
- Have you ever discovered new places through Instagram? How did it shape, inform, or alter your perception of this place?
- Compared to traditional media outlets, do you believe that Instagram allows you to better discover new communities, places, and people? Why?
- Have you ever considering travelling to a new place after discovering in on Instagram? Can you tell me which place was that? What about its depiction on Instagram made you want to visit that place?

Lebanon-specific questions:

- What comes to mind when you think of Lebanon?
- What kind of exposures (word of mouth, traditional media outlets, social media, etc.) have led you to gain your knowledge of Lebanon?
- What comes to mind when you think of the people who live in Lebanon?
- What comes to mind when you think of Lebanese food?
- What do you think of religion in Lebanon?
- What do you think of conflict in Lebanon?
- What do you think of the nightlife in Lebanon?
- What comes to mind when you think of women in Lebanon?
- What do you think of the Lebanese community in Canada?
- Have you ever been exposed to/taken part of a Lebanese cultural event in Canada? If yes, what was that experience like?
- What comes to mind when you think of Lebanon's and/or the Middle East's representation in the media? Do you recall any specific examples (eg. TV shows, newspaper story, news broadcasting clip, social media images/videos/posts, etc.)
- If you went to Lebanon what would you like to do there? What would you avoid there?

Posts:

We will now spend some time going through some #LiveLoveLebanon campaign posts on Instagram. The campaign's aim is to promote tourism in Lebanon by showing images that Lebanese residents/citizens/tourists themselves share of the country. We will discuss the posts as we scroll through them and I will ask specific questions about these posts and your impressions of them when we are done.

Posts questions:

- Are you familiar with the hashtag #LiveLove? What do you think of it? Have you ever seen a Lebanon post on Instagram captioned with this hashtag before? Or another country captioned with the hashtag?
- What did you think of the posts we just saw?
- Which post caught your attention the most? Why?
- What did you think of the use of Instagram to showcase Lebanon?
- Do these pictures correlate with how you would typically imagine Lebanon to be like? If yes, how? If not, how is that image different?
- Do you think these pictures portray an accurate or real representation of Lebanon? Why?
- Would you trust the portrayal of Lebanon on Instagram to make an informed decision of whether you would want to travel there?
- Do you have anything else to add?

Appendix F: #LiveLoveLebanon Posts





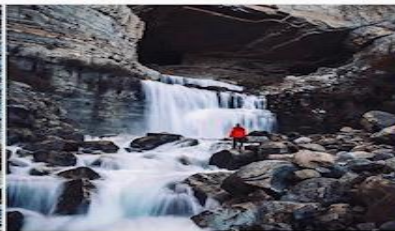
Lebanese: livelovelebanon



Religion: Livelovelebanon



Nature: livelovelebanon



Appendix G: Coding Frame

Global Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic themes (codes)
Use of Instagram as an inspirational platform	Keeping up with friends' lives on Instagram.	Discovering new destinations on Instagram through friends' travel posts.
		Communicating with friends on IG through content sharing.
	Being inspired by public figures of interest	Hobby pages to keep up with hobby news and crafts.
		Travel bloggers/ celebrities to discover travel destinations and other cultures.
New Resources	Getting news from phone applications	Being a content consumer rather than a content creator.
	Getting news from social media	flip board, apple news, headline collectors of reputable sources: CBC, CNN, etc.
		Twitter for 'serious news'
Exposition to content on Instagram	Effective relaxation and communication tool	Instagram for 'fluffy' news (i.e. celebrities, scandalous news)
		TV and Radio not accessed as much
	'Going down the rabbit hole'	Use of social media in spare time for entertainment and procrastination purposes.
		wasted time/ attempting to use less of social media (deleting/ restricting notifications) during study times.
		Self comparisons in response to 'perfected' IG pictures.

		Keeping up with the joneses.
		Virtual selves
‘A Whole New World’	Seeing the world through various lenses on Instagram	Partial depictions/ manipulated images
		Seeing popular destinations/ lack of underrated destinations. (i.e. Lebanon).
		Depicting the ‘real’ lives of locals.
		Intimate and personal depictions on IG vs political and fear selling depictions in traditional media outlets
		Accessibility of IG to discover places outside of the US/Canada
	IG algorithm tailored to user interests	IG algorithm recommending travel destinations if user shows interest/ connection/ or proximity to content.
		Discovering new destinations through friends or IG public figures’ travels/posts.
		Broadening research through hashtags and geolocations features
	Hidden gems	Depiction of beautiful landscapes (recurring motifs of vibrant sunsets, beaches, and tropical areas)
		Desire to go
		Difference in societal/religious norms between Canada and Lebanon; Impact on Lebanese women’s freedoms

Knowledge of Lebanon	Perceptions of cultural and religious aspects in Lebanon	
		History of religious conflicts in Lebanon
		Muslims and Christian Lebanese coexistence
		Lebanese cuisine
		The Arab and Lebanese festivals in Canada (proud display of culture)
	The Lebanese persona	National pride
		Family oriented
		Big personalities (loud)
		Warm, protective, and energetic
		Warm, protective, and energetic
		The Lebanese fashionista/beauty blogger.
Perception Formation	Word of mouth	Anecdotal
	Seeing Lebanon through Lebanese friends' and/or Lebanese public figures' posts on IG	Positive depictions
		Landscape and nightlife depictions
	Surface level knowledge of Lebanon based off of general perception of Arab countries as seen in the news.	The news selling fear and war:
		News coverage of Middle East conflicts painting a dangerous story “ <i>a lot of people may think that Muslims or Arabs are barbaric.</i> ”
		Impact on how outsiders might view Lebanon
		Conflict in Lebanon not covered/ seem as much as conflict in other countries
		Lebanon a more modern and open minded society compared to other Arab countries

Appendix H: Interviewees

Interviewees	Canadian Status (Interview excerpts)
Sarah	I actually like lived the first 4 years of my life in morocco and then we immigrated here [to Ottawa] in 2004.
Gaelle	I'm from here. Born and raised.
Lara	Born and raised.
Celine	I'm from Canada. Was born in Montreal but moved to Ottawa with my parents. They're originally from Bangladesh.
Matt	Born and raised in Canada. Grew up on the Quebec side for most of my childhood. Moved to the Ontario side recently.
Nick	My father's side is the Lebanese side and my mother's side is the Egyptian side. But the majority a lot of it is in Egypt and a lot of my family is there. None of my family is in Lebanon anymore, they call immigrated either to Canada or Egypt. I used to live in Dubai, I lived there until I was 8, then moved here.
Mary	I was born and raised in Haiti then I moved here [when she was 13].
Jad	I'm from Ottawa, so I live down in Kanata. I also went to high school here in Ottawa but originally I'm from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and we moved here right before I started high school. But my ethnicity is actually Bosnian, Serbian, so I guess Balkan state people is what you would call it.
Gabriela	yea I was born and raised here. I've visited Lebanon a couple times.
Jenny	I am from Ottawa, like I've lived here all my life.
Nour	My background is Trinidadian so I'm west Indian but I was born in Canada so I'm first generation Canadian.
Kelly	I'm from the GTA. [lived in TO all her life]
Layla	I was actually born in Iraq and then I came here 11 years ago and I lived most of my life in Toronto and then I came to Ottawa just in September of last year.
Tina	I'm from Congo so I've been here, this year will be my 6 th years
Julie	yea. actually my parents used to live here [Ottawa] and then, I was born back home in morocco. After they brought me here I stayed there for three

	years and went back to morocco and did my high school there [came back for university].
--	---