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## **Powerful Content, Powerful Impact**

**Instagram Content Messaging, Engagement,  
and Visit Norway's National Tourism Strategy**

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## **Abstract**

Customer engagement is repeated interactions between customers and organizations (Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014). Content marketing is an essential element of digital marketing strategy (Hollebeek & Macky, 2018, p. 27) with the main objective of creating content that adds value to the audience's life and creates long-term engagement (Baltes, 2015). This is particularly important within tourism as the focus is to maintain a long-term relationship with the consumers. There has been much research conducted about what customer engagement is and different types of engagement. However, research into how content marketing in social media can generate engagement is rare. Thus, this dissertation aims to identify which content messaging on Visit Norway's Instagram account generates engagement, and if the national tourism strategy is being reflected in the content. In order to achieve this aim netnography, which is a qualitative research method, has been applied. Furthermore, data in the form of comments and likes for this dissertation was collected from content (i.e., pictures and reels) posted on the Instagram account of Visit Norway. The findings suggested that Visit Norway has been using three messaging themes on their Instagram account: rational, emotional, and unclear content messaging. Unclear content messaging generates the least engagement, whereas the combination of rational and emotional messaging generates the most. Conversely, if the unclear messaging is combined with an emotional picture or reel, it could create high engagement due to the emotional aspect within the engagement construct. Secondly, the combination of rational and emotional messaging generates the highest 'advocacy' engagement. The same applies to posts with nature and adventure content characteristics. Moreover, city content, train journeys, and other content that present Norway's unique nature (northern lights), lifestyle (ice bathing), and culture (trolls) are all among those content characteristics that generate an engagement higher than the average for that month, which in this dissertation, is considered as high engagement.

Lastly, a limited number of strategy posts on Visit Norway's Instagram account is evident, starting from June 2022. Nevertheless, the number of related posts has been increasing from a 12.7% to a 37.2% in March 2023. These posts encompass a rational or unclear content messaging, lacking the emotional aspect which could be the key to gaining higher engagement.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

With the emergence of internet technologies, a growing number of people have begun to use social media to interact with one another and build relationships with their favorite brands (Hajli, 2014, p. 388). Therefore, businesses began redefining their traditional marketing strategies towards a more digitalized one, focusing on interaction (Kaur, 2017, p. 72). Interactivity with customers can be achieved through content marketing as the focus is providing valuable information online to the right consumers (Vinerean, 2017, p. 92). Hollebeek & Macky (2018, p. 27) claimed content marketing is an essential element of digital marketing strategy. According to Whittington et al. (2023), a strategy is an organization's long-term direction. Within tourism, the focus now is to maintain a long-term relationship with the consumers and get to know them with the intent that the services being provided are exactly what the consumers demand (Kaur, 2017, p.73). According to Kaur (2017), the abundance of online services and offers available have made travel purchases easier than before, making digital marketing strategies and the online presence of tourism organizations on social media notably more important. Moreover, social media includes different web pages such as Instagram, and Facebook which according to Kaur (2017, p. 76), should be considered the main two social media platforms in tourism. Furthermore, social media is known to be the main enabler of customer engagement (CE) (Harrigan et al., 2016, p. 598). According to Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie (2014), CE is repeated interactions between a customer and an organization, and it is the main focus of marketing campaigns as it can create a mutually beneficial relationship between consumers and different companies (Vinerean & Opreana, 2021, p. 2634). These interactions enhance a customer's (here, tourist's) emotional, psychological (cognitive), and physical investment in the organization leading to loyalty, trust, and brand evaluation (Harrigan et al., 2016, p. 597). Moreover, through social media



tourism companies have the opportunity to build a sense of destination identity which can increase tourist's trust in the experience leading to a growing number of visitors (Rather et al., 2019, p. 519). Inevitably, the concept of customer engagement has become increasingly significant within the tourism sector (Shawky, Kubacki, Dietrich, & Weaven, 2020; Vinerean & Opreana, 2021). Much research has been done about what CE is and different types of engagement, but rarely about how content marketing in social media can generate engagement. Therefore, this dissertation aims *to identify which content messaging on Visit Norway's Instagram account generates engagement, and if the national tourism strategy is being reflected in the content*. Visit Norway is a destination marketing organization (DMO) chosen by the ministry of trade, industry, and fisheries as the official travel guide to Norway. This includes promoting more responsible travel and developing national tourism strategy in which different measures and values are mentioned (Visit Norway, 2023). Out of the given 23 measures, four of them are relevant and can be demonstrated on Instagram and therefore, will be highlighted in this dissertation. After the Covid pandemic, rebuilding the Norwegian tourism product has become more important than ever. Marketing, therefore, is an important asset to inform and engage audiences (Innovasjon Norge, 2021). Moreover, it should be noted that this dissertation focuses only on the behavioral aspects within the three components of engagement's multidimensional concept as mentioned by various authors including Hollebeek et al. (2014), and So, Kings & Sparks (2014).

## **1.2 Research Objective and Research Questions**

As Harrigan et al. (2016) mentioned, social media is the enabler of customer engagement. Creating engagement with one's customers brings a competitive advantage for tourism companies (Shawky et al., 2020, p. 569). Thus, this dissertation aims *to identify which content messaging on Visit Norway's Instagram account generates engagement, and if the*

*national tourism strategy is being reflected in the content.* To fulfill this aim, the following questions will be addressed:

RQ1: What type of content messaging is Visit Norway using on their Instagram account?

RQ2: Which content messaging generates audience engagement?

RQ3: Is Visit Norway's national tourism strategy reflected in the content?

## **2.0 Theory**

### **2.1 Digital Marketing Through Content Management**

Accessibility of the internet has altered how customers access information, book trips, or share their travel experiences (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013, p. 211). There has been a shift from 'just seeing' advertisements on mass media to 'participating' (Evans & McKee, 2010). Thus, marketers have embodied interactivity and created two-way communication channels with potential and current customers (Vinerean, 2017, p.92). One concept within digital marketing that has become significantly more important is content marketing (Hollebeek & Macky, 2018, p. 27). Content marketing is a pull marketing strategy (Vinerean, 2017, p. 93) where the main objective is creating content that adds value to the audience's life and creating a long-term engagement (Baltes, 2015; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2015; Hollebeek & Macky, 2018, p. 28). Moreover, content marketing is executed through social media (Hollebeek & Macky, 2018, p. 29) using text, images, videos, or other formats to attract target audiences (Vinerean, 2017; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2015). However, content can be created and uploaded by either the organization or the customer (Leung, Law, Van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013, p. 95). As Hollebeek & Macky (2018) showcased, there are three main motives behind the audience's interaction with certain content, and it is important for digital content marketers to be aware of these. Firstly, the *functional motives*. This includes the desire to learn brand-related information. Second, are the *hedonic motives* which are related to the

underlying emotional desire for brand-related entertainment and relaxation. Lastly, are the *authenticity motives*. These relate to the credibility and symbolism they obtain from the content (Morhart et al., 2015 cited in Hollebeek & Macky, 2018, p. 33). To receive customer behavioral engagement defined as the time and effort spent on a brand (Hollebeek, 2011), digital content marketers must provide content that satisfies functional and hedonic motives (Hollebeek & Macky, 2018, p. 34). However, Hollebeek & Macky (2018, p. 34), emphasize that before fostering behavioral engagement, it is recommended to first build cognitive and emotional engagement. On the other hand, Pulizzi (2012) claims that having content does not necessarily mean high engagement; creating engagement with the right content is challenging. Generally, marketing encourages active interaction with consumers (Vinerean, 2017, p. 92). However, a digital marketing strategy cannot be successful without good content marketing (Baltes, 2015). Good content marketing should send the right themed message to the right audiences in order to get the right response (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 434). According to Kotler & Armstrong (2018), three types of themes that marketers can communicate with their audiences are: *rational*, *emotional*, and *moral*. Rational themes appeal to customer's needs. An example of such a message can be information about the quality of a product, or information about a destination. Emotional themes attempt to activate either a positive or negative emotion to encourage purchase. These emotions include joy, happiness, or even guilt. Lastly, moral themes are those messages that provoke a sense of what is right. These messages commonly support social causes such as the environment or various donations (p. 434). Comparing these themes outlined by Kotler & Armstrong (2018) with the audience's motives behind interacting with a brand showcased by Hollebeek & Macky (2018), it is possible that to fulfill hedonic and functional motives marketers must focus on emotional and rational content. Consequently, this could lead to behavioral engagement on online platforms.

## 2.2 Social Media within Tourism

Web 2.0, also known as social web revolves around social interactions and conversations (Evans & McKee, 2010, p. 14). Social media falls under Web 2.0 and according to Gretzel (2017), it is a web-based communication platform that allows people to create and publish content on the internet. Chaffey & Elis-Chadwick (2019) have stated that social media can be used to increase brand visibility through effective communication, sharing ideas and content, and participating with one's customers (p. 238). Thus, social media is a great platform for businesses to create multi-dimensional information flow with their consumers (Harmeling et al., 2016). Additionally, travelers depend on these platforms to gather information and be inspired regarding their future travels (Yim, Malefyt, Khuntia, 2021, p. 619). Likewise, social media is also beneficial to destinations as it can increase brand awareness, brand engagement, and trust (Királ'ová & Pavlíčka, 2015, p. 360; Harrigan et al. 2016). Therefore, social media is useful for tourism organizations, especially as tourism is an 'information-intensive industry' (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013, p. 212). Through these platforms, customers can get in contact with other customers to find relevant and real feedback about a destination which can help create a set of expectations before visiting the place (Királ'ová & Pavlíčka, 2015, P. 359). In the same way, Yim et al. (2021) have stated that these expectations create subjective interpretations which leads to developing a mental image of a tourism experience. These mental images can be both positive and negative which can affect the decision-making process when purchasing a trip (Yim et al. 2021, p. 620). However, through content marketing strategies portrayed on social media, businesses can share honest and informative information about their services which can lead to higher trust and engagement levels (Vinerean, 2017); this can result in increased visitor numbers for the destination (Rather et al., 2019, p. 519). On the other hand, engagement on social media can be influenced by other features than just the quality of content users publish. Algorithms

affect social media content (Darma, 2019; Cotter, 2019). These are a set of processes in a computer program that logically arrange the data online, which can influence what audiences on social media see based on their daily usage of the internet (Cotter, 2019, p. 898). Darma (2019) suggests that only 20% of a page's followers can see content posted online. This can increase depending on the number of interactions a post gets within the first 60 minutes (p. 744).

### **2.3 Engagement as a Multidimensional Construct**

The word 'engagement' has been defined and expressed in many different academic fields (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 786). Within marketing, customer brand engagement is defined by Hollebeek (2011, p.790) as a customer's level of motivational, brand-related, and context-dependent state of mind characterized by cognitive, emotional, and behavioral characteristics when in direct interaction with the brand. A customer's 'cognitive (C)' brand-related activities include an individual's level of concentration on the brand. The 'emotional (E)' brand-related activities are expressed by the level of pride a consumer has over a brand (Hollebeek, 2011, p. 790). Examples of customer's 'behavioral (B)' brand-related activities may be conveyed through the level of energy and interaction with a brand (Van Doorn et al, 2010). According to Van Doorn et al. (2010), a customer's behavioral construct towards a brand goes beyond purchase behaviors and can be both positive and negative actions (p. 254). Positive, such as recommendations and positive word of mouth (WoM) (Bijmolt et al. 2010). Negatives, for example: organizing public actions against the brand (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 254).

Therefore, all the behavioral expressions coming from a customer due to various motivations are considered behavioral engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2010, p. 253). Some researchers such as Brodie et al. (2011); Hollebeek (2011) consider CE a multidimensional construct that focuses on a combination of the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of an individual for interacting with a brand (p. 790). On the other hand, others only regard engagement as a

behavioral construct (Bijmolt et al., 2010; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Nonetheless, So et al. (2014, p. 307) implied that engaging in activities does not necessarily assure a long-term engaged consumer. Therefore, focusing on behavioral aspects alone is not sustainable as there can always be an ulterior motive behind interacting with a brand (p. 307). Thus, in compliance with Hollebeek (2011), So et al. (2014) have stated that truly engaged customers also have a psychological investment in the brand, hence CE has a multidimensional construct. Furthermore, Hollebeek et al. (2014) proposed three dimensions that corresponded with the original C, E, and B nature of engagement. These respectively include: ‘cognitive processing’, ‘affection’, and ‘activation’ which implies the amount of time and effort spent on a company. Moreover, this proposed scale was tested by Obilo et al. (2021), with the use of social media studies and was validated. Nevertheless, Obilo et al (2021, p. 640) have proposed a new scale based on four factors: ‘*content engagement*’, ‘*advocacy*’, ‘*co-creation*’, and ‘*negative engagement*’. Firstly, content engagement is seen as interaction with any object related to the brand. Any interaction within social media advertisements is a good example of this. Secondly, advocacy relies on consumer’s recommendations about the product. In other words, they go out of their way to create earned value for the brand (p.640). This also supports WoM engagement proposed by Bijmolt et al. (2010) as a part of the behavioral construct. Thirdly, Obilo et al. (2021) have proposed ‘co-creation’. This entails that engaged customers give constructive suggestions to the brand that add value to the products. Lastly, ‘negative engagement’ includes informing the brand about a product that did not meet expectations. Further, if the quality did not increase, then they post negative comments on social media for others to see. Ultimately, an engaged customer attempts to inform the brand about their defaults, rather than just replacing them (Obilo et al., 2021, p. 640). As regards to engagement on Instagram, it should be noted that it can fluctuate from business to business, and realizing the factors influencing engagement is important as it illustrates the content

strategy is successful (Foxwell, 2021). According to Newberry (2022), engagement on Instagram is a measure of how well the audience is interacting with the content posted.

### **3.0 Method**

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

The aim of this dissertation is *to identify which content messaging on Visit Norway's Instagram account generates engagement, and if the national tourism strategy is being reflected in the content*. In order to achieve this aim, this dissertation is applying netnography as the main research approach. Netnography is a qualitative research method that stems from the terms 'network' and 'ethnography' (Kozinets, 2010). It does adapt procedures from ethnography since it is a method of investigating cultural interactions but applied to social media and online communities (Kozinets, 2019). It is therefore differentiated from ethnography due to a few factors. Firstly, netnography is based upon the study of 'online traces'. Online traces according to Kozinets (2019, p. 16) are all the content posted on social media; these traces are then collected by netnographers and investigated. Digital ethnographers, however, according to Pink et al. (2015), do not necessarily have to input digital technologies into their methods. Secondly, netnography research can be done without having to meet people face-to-face, which is not the same case for ethnography (Kozinets, 2019, p. 17). Netnography is a flexible method that allows an in-depth understanding of data online derived from social media (Kozinets, 2019). De Valck et al. (2009) and Cherif & Miled (2013) have acknowledged netnography as an appropriate research method when it comes to virtual communities and brand success. Cherif & Miled (2013) have emphasized the importance of customer co-creation, and confirmed that netnography is the best method to examine customer behavior. In line with this, Kozinets (2018) have also claimed that netnography seeks to reveal habits, preferences, social behavior, and various characteristics that support companies in solving their issues. Furthermore, there are four types of

netnography. Firstly, auto netnography which focuses on autobiographical aspects with personal reflections as the main focus. Secondly, Symbolic netnography tackles decoding behaviors in order to understand consumers. This is especially useful for manager's decision-making processes. Thirdly, digital netnography which undertakes a more global focus by using statistical data to detect patterns and reveal different cultural elements. Lastly, is the humanistic netnography with a focus on critical research guided by social issues (Kozinets, 2018). This dissertation's purpose is to figure out what brings out audience engagement on Instagram by coding audience behaviors in form of comments and likes online. Thus, symbolic netnography is the appropriate approach to undertake. Regarding ethical considerations, it is important to note that this dissertation has only collected publicly available data and has not mentioned any usernames to indicate real identities. In addition, it is essential to consider both the reliability and validity of a research. Reliability in qualitative research (here, netnography) is associated with how the data is collected, where it is collected from, and how it is interpreted (Johannessen et al., 2016, p. 232). Since the interpretation of data is subjective in qualitative research, no other person can duplicate it. Johannessen et al. (2016) have also added that for reliable work, the researcher must showcase all the procedures and methods done throughout the experiment in a way that makes it traceable (p.232). Reliability in netnography has been a challenging topic since when collecting data online, one should rely on the authenticity of the participants assuming the absence of fake profiles (Rageh et al. 2013). However, this is not always the case. Further, validity in qualitative research indicates to what extent the result correctly reflects the aim of the research and reality (Johannessen et al., 2016, p.232). Ultimately, the reliability and validity of a qualitative approach display the overall quality of the research (Golafshani, 2003, p. 602).



## 3.2 Research Design

To achieve this dissertation's aim which is *to identify which content messaging on Visit Norway's Instagram account generates engagement, and if the national tourism strategy is being reflected in the content* this dissertation is focusing on analyzing data (i.e., likes and comments) through the coding technique on each content posted on Visit Norway's Instagram account. This is done by categorizing each content into different content messaging and into different content characteristics.

### 3.2.1 Data Collection

Data (i.e., comments and likes) for this dissertation was collected from content (i.e., pictures and reels (videos)) posted on the Instagram account of Visit Norway. This specific account was chosen because Visit Norway is known as the main traveling guide for Norway with approximately 802K followers at date of research (Visit Norway, 2023). Contact was made with Visit Norway via email, which revealed that the resources used for their digital marketing are equally divided between Instagram and Facebook (Visit Norway, email correspondence, March 2023). Thus, Instagram has been chosen as the main social media for this dissertation since it was defined as the best social media platform for people to connect with brands (Newberry, 2023). Data was collected in April 2023 for posts starting from March 2023 going back to June 2022. Given that March 2023 is the most recent data available and, at this point, that they should have adapted the national tourism strategy guidelines. This strategy centralizes green shift and digitalization (Innovasjon Norge, 2021) with 23 primary measures to reach their goals of which only four of these are relevant in this dissertation. The data was coded dating backward and every first month of each season was analyzed. Furthermore, the data retrieval began by collecting all the content (i.e., pictures and reels) and gathering it into an Excel sheet. In addition, all the comments were then exported from each post using Exportcomments.com. Afterward, all the likes and comments in each month were

added and divided by the total number of posts in order to discover the average engagement per month.

### 3.2.2 Sample

Data collection in the form of images, reels, and comments was collected from Visit Norway's Instagram page in April 2023. Four months of data were analyzed for this research. The first month of each season was selected to give a mean spectrum of a year's analysis. In chronological order going backward, the following months were examined: March 2023, December 2022, September 2022, and June 2022. Within these four months, a total of 217 posts (i.e., reels and pictures), and an accompanying 7,048 comments were analyzed (please refer to Table 1 for a detailed showcasing of each month's total likes, comments, and average engagement).

**Table 1**

*Total and Average Engagement Levels (i.e., Likes and Comments) in Each Month*

Months	Total number of likes	Average likes per post	Total number of comments	Average comments per post
March 2023	242,512	4,110	1,539	23
December 2022	492,566	8,796	2,926	52
September 2022	180,757	3,544	1,203	23
June 2022	175,582	3,625	1,380	27

Based on these findings, this dissertation considers any number of likes and comments surpassing the average as high engagement. Moreover, every month's engagement level has been compared to its own engagement average. This was concluded as engagement levels can vary from month to month due to numerous reasons (i.e., algorithm, holiday season with more

free time, etc.), thus comparing them to themselves can give a more accurate understanding of engagement in that specific month. In addition, it is important to note that every account's comments were counted as one quantity, meaning if a person has commented two times, it was still analyzed just as one. Some accounts were disregarded in the analysis process. These include fake accounts which try to promote other robotic accounts (due to it not being an expression of engagement measured in this study), Visit Norway's comments or replies in each content (because this dissertation is focusing on audience engagement and not the company's interaction with consumers), private accounts due to privacy settings and thus, their comments were not exported through exportcomments.com, and lastly, comments which were not written in English or Norwegian language, except those on December 24<sup>th</sup> due to Visit Norway directly asking people 'how do you say merry Christmas in your language?' and any reply, would be considered as a direct reply to the question, and therefore belong to the 'content engagement' category. With regards to content, there were two types of videos that were in collaboration with two different artists from December 2022 dating back to June 2022. These reels include 'people of Norway' with emotional and rational messaging, and 'dance videos' with emotional messaging. These were used frequently due to their significantly high engagement levels, both in the form of likes and comments. These could affect the results of this dissertation inadequately if all were involved in the analysis section due to their high quantity of engagement. Thus, a total of 17 videos were disregarded due to this reason. However, two 'dance videos' averaging 364 comments dating December 30<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> were coded, and two videos from 'people of Norway' averaging 343 comments dating December 28<sup>th</sup> and December 19<sup>th</sup> were also included in the analysis as a representation of their kind. These were the first videos that came across during coding and were picked randomly. Furthermore, there was no additional knowledge that could be retrieved from these videos due to their overrepresentation of the same content messaging and content

characteristics. Thus, it could not add to the further understanding of engagement in this study and that is the reason behind the decision to disregard other similar content.

**Table 2**

*Highest and Lowest Liked Post in Each Month*

Months	Highest liked post	Content messaging + content characteristic	Lowest liked post	Content messaging + content characteristic
March 2023	18,548	E*, R** + adventure	739	U*** + other
December 2022	69,961	E* + city/nature	1,434	R** + adventure
September 2022	14887	E*, R** + nature	767	U*** + city break
June 2022	10837	E*, R** + adventure	847	R** + event

*Note.* \*Emotional messaging, \*\*Rational messaging, \*\*\* Unclear messaging

Table 2 illustrates the highest and lowest-liked content in each month accompanying the content messaging and content characteristics linked to each post. This will be further discussed in section 4.1.

### **3.2.3 Data Analysis**

During the analysis, engagement in terms of frequency of likes and comments on every content was captured. The analysis framework used in this dissertation was to code different content in the form of both pictures and reels based on three content messaging themes: *Emotional messaging*, *rational messaging*, and *moral messaging* (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Moreover, the content was then coded based on the four measures highlighted in Visit Norway's national tourism strategy. These include *food and culinary experiences*, *nature*, *cultural experiences*, and *Sami tourism*. Further, the comments were then

coded based on Obilo et al. (2021) scale introducing four elements within engagement: *content engagement* (i.e., any emojis or interaction with the brand), *advocacy* (i.e., tagging friends or any recommendations), and *negative engagement, co-creation* (here, if their pictures have been used). This dissertation will only focus on the first three aspects, since on social media being tagged and thanking the account for being tagged is considered more to be a content engagement. So, to avoid any misunderstanding and changes in the results, co-creation will be excluded. Moreover, to explore the extent of strategy content in each month, all the relevant posts were taken from the Excel data sheet, written down manually and summarized in Figure 6, page 30. Further, to discover any common patterns between different types of engagement, all the posts with high advocacy were selected manually and summarized in Table 2, page 20.

### **3.3 Limitations**

Because social media includes a wide range of different platforms, this paper is only going to concentrate on Instagram as the main social media platform. In addition, only the content in the main timeline of the visit Norway's Instagram page is coded, excluding reels that have not been added to the main page, and the stories they post daily. When it comes to the actual engagement, there are limitations when coding material due to the privacy setting of some of the accounts, and so not all comments were coded from each post. It is also realized that Instagram is affected by algorithms, however, the consequences of this have not been considered in this dissertation.

### **3.4 Visit Norway's National Tourism Strategy**

The main objectives for the national tourism strategy 2030 are in sync with the three primary sustainable development pillars: environmental, sociocultural, and economical sustainability (Puris et al., 2019). Green shift and digitalization are the main driving factor for this strategy. This dissertation attempts to discover whether these factors are evident on their

Instagram account. There are 23 primary measures to reach the national tourism strategy's objectives. Only four of them are relevant to this dissertation and can be fulfilled through digital marketing on social media. These measures include:

1. *National concept for food and culinary experiences*. Providing tourists with a flavor of the destination and lifestyles. Linking food experiences with Nordic lifestyles, building up market interest.
2. *Nature the Norwegian way*. Using product development to reinforce Norway's unique nature and communicate with stakeholders about the expectations of 'using' nature properly.
3. *Innovative cultural experiences*. This focuses on increasing the year-round demand by uniting tourism and culture. An important aspect is to reach new audiences using higher technologies and new ways of reaching the market.
4. *Sami tourism*. A concentration on sustainable indigenous tourism can lead to local pride, increased awareness, and greater value creation in Sami areas.

## **4.0 Findings and Discussions**

The following findings and discussions of this dissertation are divided into three parts to best visualize how the findings reflect the main research questions.

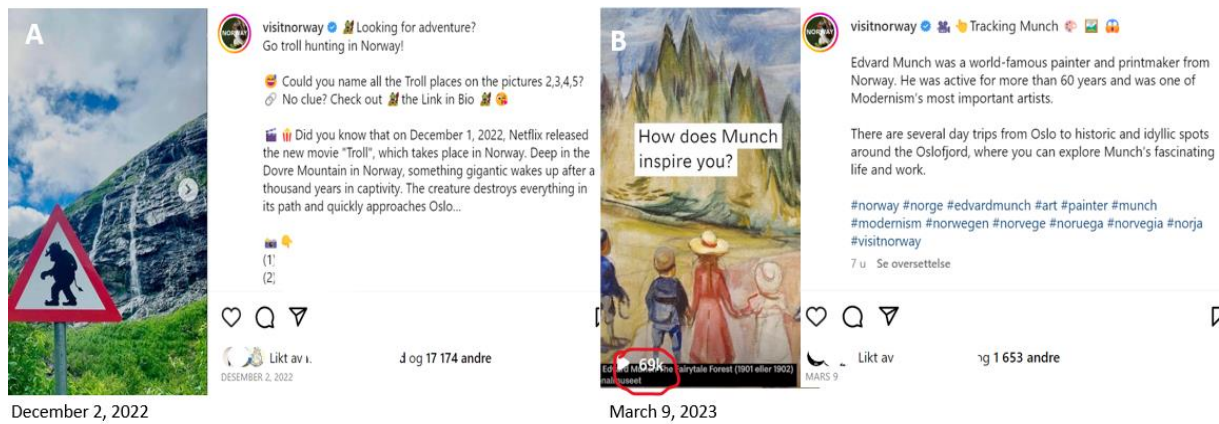
### **4.1 Content Messaging Used on Visit Norway's Instagram Account**

There were originally three main categories for content messaging. These were *emotional*, *rational*, and *moral messaging* (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). However, as the process began, another category was added to the messaging themes. Hence, '*Unclear content messaging*' which includes all other themes that do not fall under the original three, particularly those with no specific content messages. There was no moral messaging found throughout the analysis. Mostly, the content was divided between rational, emotional, and

unclear content messaging. It was evident throughout the four months that the combination of emotional and rational messaging results in higher engagement levels than those with single messaging. This is in line with Hollebeek & Macky's (2018) theory in which they emphasize that to achieve behavioral engagement (here, likes and comments) audience's functional and hedonic motives need to be fulfilled. In this case, rational messaging satisfies functional motives, and emotional messaging, satisfies hedonic motives. Evidently, the use of just one theme was not enough to gain high engagement. Especially if the messaging does not include any emotional context. This can be viewed in the posts with the lowest likes throughout the four months. Both March 1<sup>st</sup> and September 8<sup>th</sup> had unclear messaging, whereas December 2<sup>nd</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup> had rational messaging (please refer to Table 2, page 20). This can relate back to the aspect of engagement being a multidimensional construct, claimed by Hollebeek (2011). In other words, the concept of engagement goes much more in-depth than just the behavioral aspect. In order to gain customer's behavioral engagement, it is recommended by Hollebeek & Macky (2018) that the emotional and cognitive aspects must be built as well. Thus, to construct emotional and cognitive engagement, the brand must connect with the audience. This is done by posting content that adds value to their life (Baltes, 2015, Hollebeek & Macky, 2018).

Furthermore, another interesting pattern discovered was that posts that were unique for Norway got high engagement (i.e., likes or comments). For instance, sauna and ice bathing posts (fall under adventure content), troll posts (fall under culture or city content, depending on the content), and northern lights posts (nature content). On 19<sup>th</sup> March: sauna post (adventure) with 113 comments, on 2<sup>nd</sup> December: Troll post (culture + adventure) with 17,175 likes (please refer to Figure 1, image A on page 24), and on 7<sup>th</sup> September: northern lights post (nature) with 14,883 likes and 110 comments. These content surpass the monthly average likes and comments which are showcased in Table 1 and are, therefore, considered as

generating high engagement. Notably, all these unique posts also possess emotional and rational messaging which highlights the importance of this combination.



**Figure 1.** Content Engagement Examples

*Note.* Image A: December 2<sup>nd</sup>- Troll post, image B: March 9<sup>th</sup>- Munch post

In line with Evans & McKee (2010) claiming that there has been a shift of marketing focus from audiences ‘just seeing’ the advertisements to wanting customers to ‘participate’ with the brands, there was evidence of videos that had many views, but fewer likes. This is considered undesirable, particularly when the focus is interaction. To clarify, regardless of the number of viewers, if the number of likes and comments are lower than the monthly average, they have been considered as low engagement in this dissertation due to a lack of interaction with the brand. For instance, the reel from June 5<sup>th</sup> (rational messaging, other content) with 23K viewers, but 2864 likes and 35 comments. Also, a reel from March 9<sup>th</sup> (rational messaging, culture content) with 69K viewers, but 1654 likes and 10 comments (please refer to Figure 1, image B on page 24).

Out of the three messaging categories that have been used by Visit Norway, the unclear content messaging was the one that failed mostly to gain engagement (even though there were some exceptions with the city content which will be further elaborated in section 4.2). Since unclear content messaging is mainly ‘no messaging’, subsequently the content



does not fulfill any of the three main motives for interaction showcased in Hollebeek & Macky's study (2018). In addition, it does not add any value to their lives which is an indication of creating a long-term engagement, according to Baltes (2015) and Järvinen and Taiminen (2015). This was evident throughout most of the months, especially in March and September. Example 1<sup>st</sup> March with 739 likes, showcased in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** *Lowest Liked Post in March*

#### 4.2 Different Types of Engagement Based on Different Content Characteristics

A combination of emotional and rational messaging not only gives the highest engagement but also higher levels of 'advocacy' engagement. This is evident throughout most months involved in the analysis.

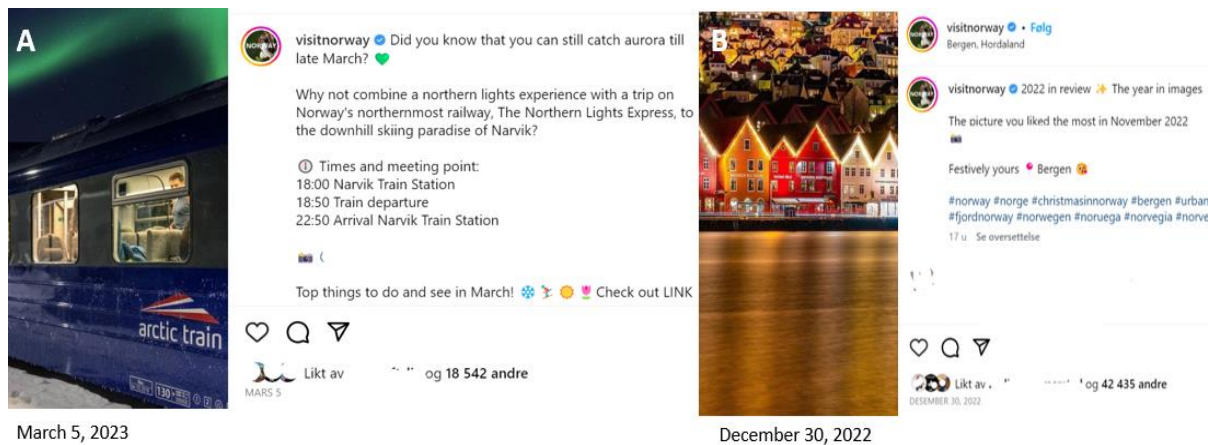
#### Table 3

*Content with the Highest Advocacy Engagement Throughout the Months*

Month	Content messaging	Content characteristics	Total number of comments	Comments with advocacy engagement	% of advocacy engagement	Comments with content engagement	% of content engagement	Date
March 2023	Rational + emotional	Adventure	76	40	52.6%	36	47.4%	10th
December 2022	Rational + emotional	Nature	29	15	51.7%	14	48.3%	24th
September 2022	Rational	Adventure (train)	46	16	34.7%	30	65.3%	7th
June 2022	Rational + emotional	Adventure (train)	108	51	47.2%	57	52.8%	16th

As shown in Table 3, September has the lowest level of advocacy engagement. Moreover, there was more cultural content, ‘city break, the Norwegian way, and ‘cultural triangle’ posts which are series used to reflect national tourism strategy on Visit Norway’s Instagram (for a detailed explanation, please refer to section 4.3) and all created low engagement. Nevertheless, one thing in common between all these posts mentioned in Table 3, is that posts with either nature or adventure characteristics led to a higher advocacy engagement.

Another common pattern found in the analysis is both the city and train rides (which here belong to the ‘adventure’ category) generate high engagement, if not in the form of advocacy, then in the form of likes or the number of comments. For instance, the 5<sup>th</sup> of March with emotional and rational messaging has an adventure (train) content characteristic. This post received 18,543 likes and was the highest liked post in March (Figure 3, image A on page 27).



**Figure 3.** Content with High Engagement

*Note.* Image A: March 5<sup>th</sup>- train content, image B: December 30<sup>th</sup>- emotional city content

Furthermore, there have been cases such as on December 30<sup>th</sup>, a ‘city’ content with ‘unclear’ content messaging had 42,436 likes and is the second best-liked post in December. This goes back to the emotional aspect of the engagement. Hence, even though the content messaging was unclear, the picture itself represented an emotional message leading to higher engagement (please see Figure 3, image B). This is evident from the response this post has received. All the comments had an emotional aspect which is illustrated in Figure 4 (page 28) with the words ‘beautiful’, ‘awesome’, and ‘great fairytale’ being used multiple times. These emotional responses could be triggered by memories of being in that city. Hence a person commenting: ‘our hotel!!! <3 <3’ or the desire to want to visit. For instance, someone has commented: ‘I want to go someday...’, yet another person commenting: ‘Bucket list stuff!’. Consequently, this is in line with Hollebeek & Macky’s (2018) claim that building an emotional engagement can lead to behavioral engagement in return, and that is the reason why an unclear content messaging and city content resulted in high engagement.



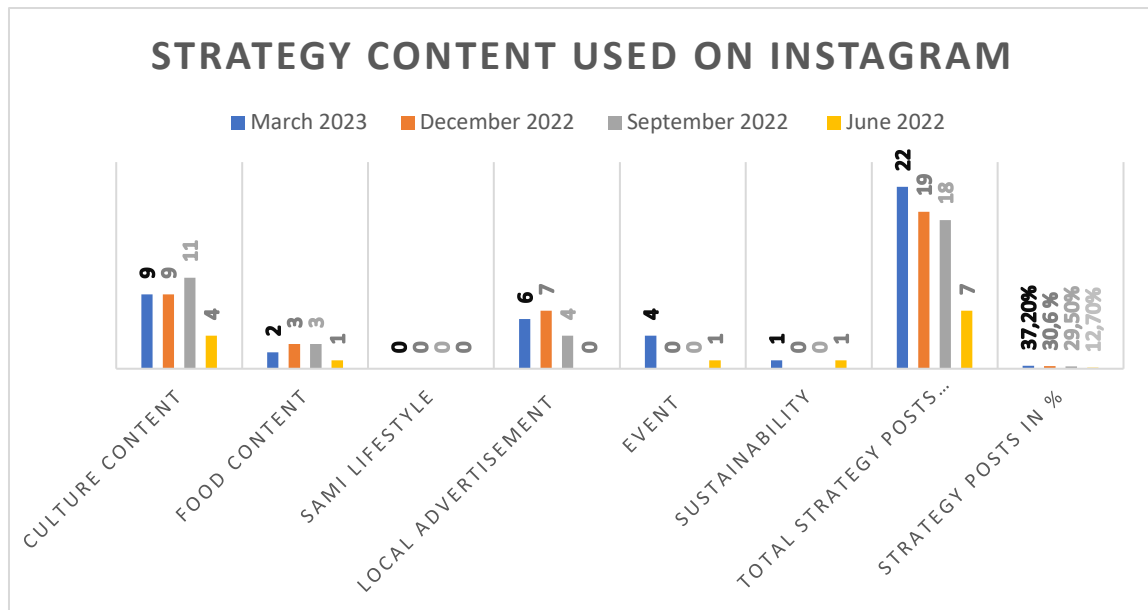
page which is not ideal for any business (please refer to Figure 5 for the post and some of the negative comments).



**Figure 5.** Giveaway Content with Negative engagement

#### 4.3 Visit Norway's Tourism Strategy in their Social Media Marketing

There were four categories highlighted from Visit Norway's national tourism strategy in this dissertation. These include *nature*, *Sami tourism*, *food*, and *culture content*. Under content analysis, there were more categories that were added due to their repetitive nature throughout the months. These include *city*, *adventure* (i.e., extreme sports and train journeys), *dance videos*, *people of Norway*, *Pride*, *advertisement* and *others* (i.e., any other content that do not fall under the given categories). There is chiefly very limited indication of the four categories in tourism strategy on Visit Norway's Instagram account in June 2022, however, it has increased from 12.7% in June to 37.2% in March 2023.



**Figure 6.** *Strategy Content used on Visit Norway's Instagram Account*

There is a high quantity of posts with nature content throughout every season. Nonetheless, it does not mean that they only post nature content because it was mentioned in the national tourism strategy. Therefore, in order to explore to what extent the national tourism strategy is implemented on their social media, this dissertation is excluding nature posts and focusing on other categories used. In addition, events, local advertisements, and sustainability content have also been included in the analysis, as these categories promote local businesses, and their focus is in line with the national tourism strategy. Hence, green shift and sustainability with local gain being an important pillar (Innovasjon Norge, 2021). As illustrated in Figure 6, there has been an increase in extent of strategy used from a 12.7% in June to 29.5% in September to 30.6% in December and lastly, 37.2% in March. In addition, there was no evidence of Sami tourism content. Accordingly, just because the total number of strategy content has been limited, it does not mean that they are not trying. There are a few posts throughout the months which confirm their attempt to keep the strategy guidelines on their social media. An example of this is illustrated on June 5<sup>th</sup> (please refer to Figure 7, image A on page 31). They posted a reel with rational messaging giving nine tips on

sustainable traveling. This reel had 24K views and 2,864 likes. However, this, plus four other culture content, one food content, and one local event are all that was evident of the national tourism strategy on their social media, representing 12.7% of their posts in June (considering they posted 55 posts in total).



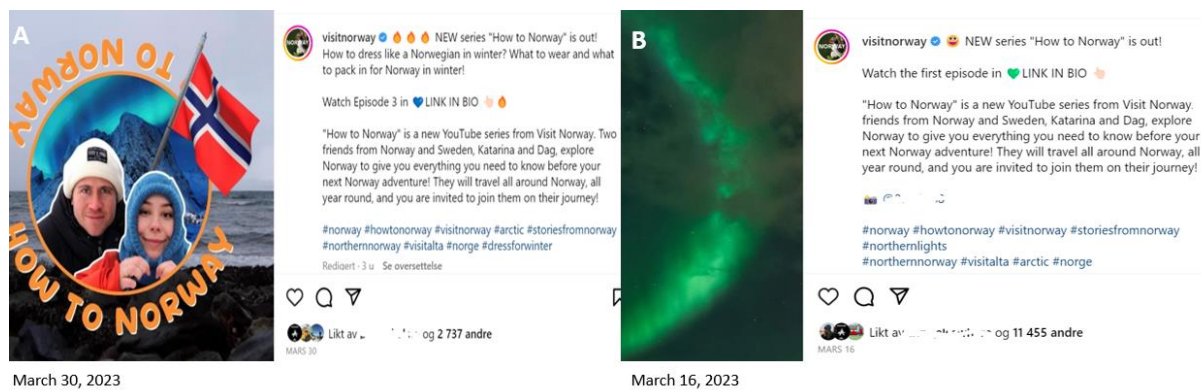
**Figure 7.** Posts reflecting the national tourism strategy

*Note.* Image A: June 5<sup>th</sup>- sustainability tips, image B: September 6<sup>th</sup>- city break, the Norwegian way, image C: September 22<sup>nd</sup>- the cultural triangle.

In September 2022, they released the ‘*city break, the Norwegian way*’ series. This series encourages discovering various cultural, local destinations and natural places by foot, inspiring sustainability amongst the visitors, with some having a rational messaging whilst others having unclear messaging. Despite their attempt, the response in the form of engagement has been low. These types of content are a great verification of what Pulizzi (2012) claimed about just having content does not guarantee high engagement. This is evident on September 6<sup>th</sup> with 790 likes and 6 comments (please see Figure 7, image B). Another example worth mentioning is also in September 2022: ‘*the cultural triangle*’ where known Norwegians give advice for their favorite local or cultural places to visit (please refer to Figure 7, image C). This post received 3,335 likes and 14 comments which fall under the

average number of likes and comments illustrated earlier in Table 1 (page 18), and thus is considered as low engagement in this study.

Another great example can be their latest series called: ‘*How to Norway*’ released in March 2023. Its content has rational messaging and each time gives information about Norwegian lifestyles, habits, or places to visit. Even though these get higher likes and comments than ‘*city break, the Norwegian way*’ in September, they still have not gained enough engagement to exceed the average engagement in March. Hence, 4,110 likes and 23 comments. This is evident on March 30<sup>th</sup> with 2,738 likes and 16 comments (please refer to Figure 8, image A).



**Figure 8.** *How to Norway* Content

*Note.* Image A: March 30<sup>th</sup>- how to Norway, rational messaging, image B: March 16<sup>th</sup>- how to Norway, emotional messaging

On the contrary, there was a post on 16<sup>th</sup> March where Visit Norway introduced the ‘*how to Norway*’ series (rational messaging) using a northern lights picture (nature content) leading to 11,456 likes (please refer to Figure 8, image B). This is high compared to the usual response they receive. Notably, the emotional aspect of the northern lights posts influenced the responses (similar to the city case mentioned in 4.2, page 27) which ultimately confirms the need for emotional messaging besides the rationale to generate higher engagement levels.



## 5.0 Conclusion and Final Remarks

In conclusion, this dissertation set out *to identify which content messaging on Visit Norway's Instagram account generates engagement, and if the national tourism strategy is being reflected in the content*. The findings provide insight into content and engagement in Visit Norway's social media marketing strategy and answer the following research questions:

*RQ1: What type of content messaging is Visit Norway using on their Instagram account?*

Visit Norway has been using rational, emotional, and unclear content messaging on their Instagram account. The combination of rational and emotional messaging generates the most engagement, whereas unclear content messaging generates the least which is lower than the average engagement for that month. This is due to the fact that unclear messaging adds no value to the audience's life and that is an important element for successful content marketing (Baltes, 2015; Hollebeek & Macky, 2018). However, if the unclear messaging is combined with an emotional picture or reel, it could create high engagement due to the emotional aspect within the engagement construct. This is seen evident in most city content.

*RQ2: Which content messaging generates audience engagement?*

The combination of rational and emotional messaging was seen to generate the highest 'advocacy' engagement. Likewise, posts with nature and adventure content characteristics lead to higher 'advocacy' engagement amongst the comments. Moreover, city content, train journeys, and other content that present Norway's unique nature (northern lights), lifestyle (ice bathing), and culture (trolls) are all among those content characteristics that generate high audience engagement.

*RQ3: Is Visit Norway's national tourism strategy reflected in the content?*

There has been a limited number of strategy posts on Visit Norway's Instagram account starting from June 2022. However, the number of related posts has been increasing from a 12.7% to a 37.2% in March 2023. These posts encompass a rational or unclear content messaging, lacking the emotional aspect which could be the key to gaining higher engagement. Especially since strategy content on Visit Norway's Instagram account does not get high levels of engagement.

Based on the findings, it is evident that Visit Norway is trying to adapt their national tourism strategy on their social media, but they are not gaining engagement in those posts. A suggestion is to concentrate on combining their informative strategy content with more emotional content messaging. In this way, they can also fulfill the emotional motives of their audiences, in addition to the rational ones. Even though there was an increase in creating strategy-related content, 37.2% (March) is still limited especially since digitalization and brand visibility are important elements mentioned in the national tourism strategy.

Furthermore, Visit Norway has posted much nature content on their Instagram page, but this cannot be considered as following the strategy guidelines. The unique nature of Norway is one of the main pull factors of their tourism and therefore posting nature content is inevitable, unlike the other three categories highlighted in the national tourism strategy. Hence, food content, cultural content and Sami tourism can be given more attention when it comes to Instagram posts. Further, December 2022 was the month with the highest engagement, whereas September 2022 was the one with the lowest. There could be many reasons why some months generate higher engagement than others, with the Instagram algorithm being one of them. Nevertheless, December being a holiday season with people having vacation days and more time on their hands for social media could be a reason for it. On the other hand, considering the highest engagement content analyzed in this dissertation (in December) consisted of 8.7% of the total followers, and all the negative engagement they

received due to Freya's death on their giveaway content (20<sup>th</sup> June 2022), it is necessary to ask the question of how important audience engagement on social media really is. If this is a priority for Visit Norway, then they need to reassess their content messaging and find ways to enhance their Instagram engagement. Hence, avoiding posts that have unclear content messaging. Moreover, shifting focus to produce content with a combination of emotional and rational messaging, particularly when it is strategy related. As Kotler & Armstrong (2018) claimed, sending the right themed message to the right audience is the key to get the right response.

Undeniably, further research should be done on the importance of social media engagement for tourism companies and explore which type of engagement is considered high-quality and worthwhile.

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