
Influencer Marketing in the Promotion of Cities and Regions

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Abstract:

Purpose: Promoting cities and regions effectively involves a combination of marketing strategies and tactics to attract tourists, businesses, residents, and investors. A comprehensive approach to promote cities and regions should include such elements as e.g., creating a strong brand identity, social media marketing, website and online presence or content marketing. Influencer marketing has become a powerful tool in promoting cities and regions to attract tourists, businesses, and residents. The aim of this article is to carry out a review of the literature on influencer marketing and promotion of the cities and regions, in terms of research subject.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study used elements of the systematic literature review method (SLR), case studies, synthesis and logical reasoning.

Findings: The review of the literature showed that the research on influencer marketing in the promotion of cities and regions is a very topical and important issue.

Practical Implications: The results show a small number of publications dedicated to this topic, so it still needs to be analyzed, both on a practical and research basis.

Originality/Value: Research into influencer marketing in promotion of the cities and regions is still at an early stage of development. The results of the analysis may be of interest to both scientists and practitioners, in particular government and local government organizations responsible for the promotion of cities and regions.

Keywords: Social media, influencer marketing, promotion, cities and regions promotion.

JEL codes: M31, L82.

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1. Introduction

Influencer marketing is a promotional tool that has become significantly more popular in recent years. Social media, which constitute the main area of activity of the large number of influencers, play a significant role in the increase in interest in this form of promotion.

Influencer marketing in social media is a type of marketing that involves using popular social media personalities, known as influencers, to promote a brand or product (Coates and Boyland, 2021) to their large following (De Veirman *et al.*, 2019). This type of marketing has become increasingly popular in recent years, as more and more people turn to social media platforms for information and entertainment.

The idea behind influencer marketing is that by partnering with influencers who have a large and engaged audience, brands can increase their reach and exposure, and potentially drive more sales or conversions. Recent research has pointed out the emergence of new online actors, “social media influencers” (Ouvrein *et al.*, 2021) or SMIs, who are defined as “people who possess greater than average potential to influence others due to such attributes as frequency of communication, personal persuasiveness or size of and centrality to a social network” (Audrezet *et al.*, 2020).

The advantage of influencers over celebrities is evidenced by the fact that people identify more with influencers than celebrities, feel more similar to influencers than celebrities, and trust influencers more than celebrities (Schouten *et al.*, 2020).

Influencers can promote a product through a variety of methods, such as sponsored posts, product reviews, and endorsements. The success of influencer marketing largely depends on finding the right influencer who is a good fit for the brand and its target audience. It's also important to ensure that any sponsored content is clearly labeled as such, to avoid any issues with transparency or ethics.

Influencer marketing can be a powerful tool for brands looking to increase their visibility and reach on social media, but it's important to approach it a well-thought-out strategy and to carefully consider the potential benefits and risks. By working with a portfolio of influencers with distinctive positioning, firms can imbue their own brand with unique elements and thereby improve their positions in dynamically changing attribute spaces (Leung *et al.*, 2022).

Social media refers to online platforms and websites that enable users to create and share content, engage with others, and participate in virtual communities (Haenlein *et al.*, 2020). Users can post text, photos, videos, and links, and interact with content through likes, comments, and shares. Social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok, and many others. It has become a popular means of communication, information sharing, entertainment, and

networking in today's digital age. Influencer marketing is especially popular in industries related to fashion, beauty, food, and travel, but it can be used in any industry, also in the promotion of cities and regions.

2. Data and Methods

The study used the elements of the systematic literature review method (SLR). The time scope of the analysis covered the period of July–September 2023. The aim of the SLR was to identify the research subject. In order to achieve the research goal, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Which elements should a comprehensive approach to promote cities and regions contain?
2. What are the key aspects which should be taken into consideration in cooperation with social media influencers?
3. Can cooperation with influencers have a positive impact for the promotion of cities and regions?

The first stage of the research was the selection and aggregation of literature. The process of selecting and aggregation literature for an in-depth analysis of the full content was carried out by the process of scoping review. An in-depth review of the selected literature allowed in particular to:

- development of a theoretical background for in-depth literature research,
- verification of the current state of theoretical knowledge,
- indication of directions for further research.

4. Results

In the first step an in-depth analysis of the literature allowed to distinguish the main subject of research which is social media influencers roles in promotion of cities and regions. Promoting cities and regions effectively (Dril et al., 2016) involves a combination of marketing strategies and tactics to attract tourists, businesses, residents, and investors. A comprehensive approach to promote cities and regions should include such elements as (Greene *et al.*, 2007; Paskaleva-Shapira, 2007; Zimmerbauer, 2011; Pociovalisteanu and Thalassinou, 2009):

1. creating a strong brand identity: at first defining what makes the city or region unique and appealing; secondly creating a compelling brand identity, including a memorable logo, tagline, and messaging that reflects city or region strengths.
2. website and online presence: developing a user-friendly, informative, and visually appealing website showcasing the city or region's attractions, history, culture, and opportunities; optimizing the website for search engines (SEO) to ensure it ranks well in online searches; using social media

- platforms to regularly share updates, images, and stories about the city or region.
3. content marketing: creating valuable content such as blog posts, videos, and infographics highlighting the best aspects of the city or region; sharing this content on website, social media channels, and through email newsletters to engage and inform the audience.
 4. social media marketing: maintaining active and engaging social media profiles on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn; sharing user-generated content and encourage visitors and residents to share their experiences using specific hashtags.
 5. influencer partnerships: collaborating with influencers who have a strong following in travel, lifestyle, or relevant niches to showcase the city or region - these influencers can provide authentic and engaging content that reaches a broader audience.
 6. tourism marketing: working with local tour operators, hotels, and travel agencies to create travel packages and promotions that highlight the city or region; participation in travel trade shows and exhibitions to attract tourists and travel industry professionals.
 7. investor attraction: developing marketing materials and initiatives to attract businesses and investors; highlight economic incentives, infrastructure, and growth opportunities in the region.
 8. cultural and sporting events: organization or sponsoring cultural festivals, sporting events, and conferences that draw attention to the city or region; using these events as opportunities to promote tourism, business, and investment.
 9. partnerships and collaborations: partnering with neighboring cities or regions to create regional tourism campaigns that showcase multiple destinations; collaborating with local businesses, cultural institutions, and organizations to cross-promote each other.
 10. infrastructure development: investing in and maintaining essential infrastructure such as transportation, accommodation, and recreational facilities; highlighting infrastructure improvements and innovations in marketing efforts.
 11. community engagement: engaging with the local community and encourage residents to become ambassadors for the city or region; creating initiatives that involve residents in promotional activities.
 12. visitor information centers: establishing visitor information centers at key locations within the city or region to provide maps, brochures, and assistance to tourists.
 13. data and analytics: using data and analytics to measure the effectiveness of marketing campaigns and adjust strategies accordingly.
 14. sustainability and responsible tourism: promoting sustainability and responsible tourism practices to attract eco-conscious travelers and protect the environment.

15. public relations: building relationships with media outlets and journalists to secure positive press coverage and feature stories about the city or region.

Promoting cities and regions requires a comprehensive and ongoing effort that involves collaboration with various stakeholders, strategic planning, and the use of modern marketing techniques to reach and engage your target audience effectively. Influencer marketing has become a powerful tool in promoting cities and regions to attract tourists (Hernández-Méndez and Baute-Díaz, 2023; Jakubowska, 2019), businesses, and residents. The key aspects to consider when using influencer marketing for the promotion of cities and regions are (Banks, 2022; Kaple *et al.*, 2017; Nam and Dân, 2018; van Eldik *et al.*, 2019):

1. identification of relevant influencers: influencers who have a strong following and a genuine interest in travel, lifestyle, or the specific niche of the city or region; searching for influencers who align with the values, culture, and attractions of the destination.
2. authenticity and local connection: prioritize influencers who have a genuine connection to the city or region, either because they live there or have a strong affinity for it; authenticity is the key in influencer marketing, so influencers who can naturally incorporate the cities and regions destination into their content should be chosen for cooperation.
3. content strategy: working with influencers to create content that showcases the unique aspects and attractions of the city or region; encouraging them to share personal experiences, stories, and recommendations to make the content relatable and engaging.
4. diverse content formats: utilizing a variety of content formats, including photos, videos, blogs, and live streams, to reach different audiences and platforms; leveraging platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and travel blogs, depending on the cities or regions target demographic.
5. collaborative campaigns: planning collaborative campaigns with multiple influencers to maximize reach and impact; considering organizing influencer meetups, tours, or events in the city or region to generate interest.
6. user-generated content: encouraging influencers' followers to share their own experiences in the city or region using a specific hashtag, creating a user-generated content (UGC) campaign; repost UGC on official channels to build a sense of community and authenticity.
7. measure ROI: establishing clear key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the success of the influencer marketing campaigns, such as website visits, social media engagement, and bookings; tracking ROI by analyzing the increase in tourism, business investments, or other desired outcomes.
8. compliance and disclosure: ensuring that influencers disclose their partnerships with the city or region transparently and comply with relevant advertising regulations; working with influencers who align with ethical and responsible marketing practices.

9. long-term partnerships: considering building long-term relationships with influencers who consistently promote the destination; these ongoing partnerships can help maintain a positive image and generate sustained interest.
10. adapt to trends: staying up-to-date with evolving social media and influencer marketing trends to remain relevant and effective in the cities or regions promotional efforts.

Influencer marketing can be a cost-effective and engaging way to promote cities and regions, but it's essential to choose the right influencers and create content that resonates with cities and regions target audience to maximize its impact. Influencers can be also effective in promoting cities and regions when used strategically and in the right context.

The reasons why influencers can have a positive impact for city and region promotion are (Amagsila *et al.*, 2022; Glover, 2009; Huynh *et al.*, 2021; Yetimoğlu and Uğurlu, 2020):

1. authenticity: it is crucial in marketing, and influencers often bring a genuine passion for travel and exploration to their content; when they share their experiences in a city or region, it can resonate with their followers as a real and unbiased recommendation; ensuring that influencers genuinely connect with the city or region; inauthentic endorsements can damage credibility.
2. engagement: influencers typically have engaged and dedicated followers who trust their opinions and recommendations. When an influencer promotes a city or region, it can result in higher levels of engagement and interest from their audience.
3. visual appeal: many influencers specialize in creating visually appealing content, including high-quality photos and videos; this can showcase the beauty and attractions of a city or region in a captivating way.
4. targeted audiences: it is crucial to choose influencers whose followers align with the cities or regions target demographic; for example, if there's a need to attract adventure travelers, the city or a region can collaborate with influencers known for their adventure-focused content.
5. storytelling: influencers are skilled at storytelling, which can bring the unique stories, culture, and history of a city or region to life in a relatable and engaging manner.
6. diverse Platforms: influencers operate on various platforms, from Instagram and YouTube to blogs and TikTok; this allows to reach a wide range of audiences through different content formats, however, it's essential to approach influencer marketing for city and region promotion with caution and careful planning:
7. disclosure: influencers must clearly disclose their partnerships and sponsored content to maintain transparency and comply with advertising regulations.

8. relevance: choose influencers whose content and style align with the image and values of the city or region; not every influencer will be the right fit.
9. quality over quantity: prioritize quality collaborations with a smaller number of well-matched influencers over a high volume of partnerships.

A critical analysis of the literature allowed to answer all the research questions.

5. Summary and Discussion

The use of influencers in the promotion of cities and regions is a modern solution. However, it is worth remembering a few good rules that govern this type of promotion. The first and most important one is to put it in the right context. Good promotion of a brand or product with the help of an influencer is primarily tailored to the profile of his business and the group of recipients. Thanks to this, communication becomes natural and brings better results.

That's why territorial brands so often decide to cooperate with influencers closely related to travel. Influencers can be valuable in promoting cities and regions if chosen wisely and integrated into a broader marketing strategy. When used authentically and effectively, influencers can help attract tourists, residents, and businesses to your destination.

The second very important step is to verify the selected influencers. There are many tools that artificially increase social media statistics, for example the number of views, likes, comments and followers. Fortunately, there are also many tools that make it possible to verify the actual values. They also enable mediation in contact with opinion leaders, which facilitates the process of implementing influencer marketing.

The review of the literature showed that the research on influencer marketing in the promotion of cities and regions is a topical and important issue.

6. Recommendations Final remarks

The feeling of belonging to a given place is something that has accompanied humanity since forever. Its expression is also a very common phenomenon, but now it may be even more visible than ever. This is all thanks to the increase in popularity of social media. There are many people who willingly share content directly related to a given city or region. These are often the so-called micro-influencers who are highly involved in creating content, but their reach is smaller than that of traditional influencers. Establishing interaction or cooperation with such people on the part of local government units allows them to be created as ambassadors of the territorial brand.

This research has implications of interest for both scientists and practitioners involved in the promotion of cities and regions. In turn, the results obtained can support future research focused on influencer marketing in the promotion of cities and regions. More research is needed to understand the impact of the influencers on their audiences in the subject of cities and regions promotion.

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