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## Social Media Influencer Marketing in the Promotion of Tourist Destinations

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The aim of the article is to indicate the role of influencers in the promotion of tourist destinations.

**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 tourist destinations is a very important issue. The allure of social media influencers lies not only in their ability to showcase destinations but also in their capacity to redefine travel trends. Destinations that might have once been hidden gems are brought into the limelight, while conventional hotspots are experienced through a fresh lens. The ripple effect of this phenomenon is felt across industries, as businesses, hospitality sectors, and local economies adapt to cater to the evolving preferences influenced by social media influencers.

**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:** The paper is based on own research. Research into influencer marketing in promotion of tourist destinations 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 tourist destinations.

**Keywords:** Social media, influencer marketing, promotion, tourism, tourism destinations.

**JEL codes:** M31, L83, M37.

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## **1. Introduction**

In an era characterized by instantaneous connectivity and the pervasive influence of social media, the promotion of tourist destinations has undergone a profound evolution (Paskaleva-Shapira, 2007). Traditional marketing avenues, while still relevant, are increasingly being complemented, if not eclipsed, by social media influencers. These digital trendsetters have emerged as the new-age architects of travel inspiration.

There is a relationship between the promotion of tourist destinations and the transformative impact of social media influencers (Paiano *et al.*, 2017). Digital and mobile marketing, infrastructure, branding, quality, accessibility and information factors about a specific destination which are mostly demanded by tourists are considered as an important means of promotion for the tourism industry (Florido-Benítez, 2022; Adamopoulos and Thalassinou, 2020).

As the world becomes more interconnected (Drab-Kurowska and Budziewicz-Guźlecka, 2009), the influence of social media on travel choices has reached unprecedented heights. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok serve as virtual canvases where influencers paint vivid portraits of breathtaking landscapes, cultural gems, and hidden treasures.

The curated feeds of these digital nomads not only showcase destinations but also provide a personal lens into the experiential facets of travel (Glover, 2009). The result is a captivating blend of wanderlust-inducing imagery and relatable narratives that fuel the desires of a global audience eager to explore the world.

Social media influencers, with their ability to humanize travel experiences, have become more than just endorsers; they are the storytellers who weave narratives around destinations, making them more accessible and appealing to diverse audiences.

Their authenticity, relatability, and the illusion of a shared journey create a virtual camaraderie that transcends geographical boundaries. In this digital age, travel decisions are often swayed by the recommendations and experiences of these influencers, transforming them into trusted guides for a generation seeking unique and immersive adventures.

The allure of social media influencers lies not only in their ability to showcase destinations but also in their capacity to redefine travel trends. Destinations that might have once been hidden gems are brought into the limelight, while conventional hotspots are experienced through a fresh lens. The ripple effect of this phenomenon is felt across industries, as businesses, hospitality sectors, and local economies adapt to cater to the evolving preferences influenced by social media influencers.

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## 2. Literature Review

The relationship between social media influencers and the promotion of tourist destinations has become a subject of increasing interest in academic and industry discourse. Tourism promotion is the efficient management of a destination's resources and strategic plans by destination marketing organizations to adapt the tourism supply to market trends and will empower tourists to visit such destinations (Florido-Benítez, 2022).

Scholars and researchers have delved into various facets of this dynamic interplay, examining the mechanisms, impacts, and challenges associated with harnessing the power of digital tastemakers to shape travel narratives. The literature review explores key themes and findings in the existing knowledge, providing a comprehensive understanding of the role social media influencers play in the destination marketing.

### 2.1 The Rise of Digital Word-of-Mouth

A substantial body of literature underscores the transformative impact of social media influencers as conduits for digital word-of-mouth marketing (Patria *et al.*, 2021). Researchers have observed that the authentic and relatable content produced by influencers transcends traditional advertising, creating a sense of trust and connection with their audiences (Litvin *et al.*, 2008; Wang, 2015). This digital word-of-mouth, disseminated through platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, has been shown to significantly influence travel decisions, shaping destination choices and itineraries (Nixon, 2023; Kuzmina *et al.*, 2023; Kadkubek *et al.*, 2022).

### 2.2 Authenticity and Relatability

Authenticity emerges as a recurrent theme in the literature, emphasizing its pivotal role in the success of influencer-driven tourism promotion. Scholars argue that audiences are drawn to influencers who present genuine, unfiltered portrayals of their travel experiences. The perceived authenticity and relatability of influencers contribute to the formation of a virtual community, where audiences feel a personal connection with the influencer's journey, thereby fostering a desire to replicate those experiences (Schouten *et al.*, 2020; Thalassinou *et al.*, 2019).

### 2.3 Metrics of Influence and Engagement

Researchers have developed frameworks to assess the impact and effectiveness of influencer marketing in the tourism sector. Metrics such as reach, engagement, and conversion rates are examined to gauge the success of influencer campaigns (Ghosh and Mukherjee, 2023; Huynh *et al.*, 2021). The literature suggests that while follower count remains a significant metric, the depth of engagement, including

likes, comments, and shares, provides a more nuanced understanding of an influencer's actual influence and resonance within the target audience.

## **2.4 Challenges and Ethical Considerations**

While the benefits of leveraging social media influencers for tourism promotion are evident (Amagsila *et al.*, 2022; Hernández-Méndez and Baute-Díaz, 2023; Yetimoğlu and Uğurlu, 2020), scholars also address the challenges and ethical considerations associated with this practice (Fedeli and Cheng, 2023).

Issues such as transparency, disclosure of sponsored content, and the potential for influencer bias are explored. Researchers emphasize the need for industry stakeholders to establish ethical guidelines and best practices to maintain the integrity of influencer-driven campaigns.

## **2.5 Case Studies and Success Factors**

A large number of case studies in the literature examines successful influencer collaborations in tourism promotion (Avraham and Ketter, 2017; Cristea *et al.*, 2015; Florido-Benítez, 2022; Liu *et al.*, 2024; Lorgeoux and Pradeep KumarPonnamma Divakaran, 2023; Mariani *et al.*, 2016; Paiano *et al.*, 2017). These studies focus on the strategies used by destinations and influencers, highlighting success factors and lessons learned. From destination branding to engaging storytelling, the literature provides valuable insights into the elements that contribute to the effectiveness of influencer campaigns.

The literature review underscores the evolving landscape of tourism promotion through social media influencers. From the nuanced dynamics of authenticity and relatability to the development of metrics for assessing influence, the existing body of knowledge provides a rich foundation for understanding the multifaceted role influencers play in shaping the narratives of global travel experiences.

## **3. Methodology**

The study used the elements of the systematic literature review method (SLR). The time scope of the analysis covered the period of July–October 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. What are the modern methods of promoting tourist destinations?
2. What is the role of social media in the promotion of tourist destinations?
3. Do social media influencers play significant role in the promotion of tourist destinations?

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The initial phase of the study involved choosing and compiling relevant literature. The scoping review methodology was employed to systematically select and aggregate literature, facilitating a thorough examination of the complete content. This comprehensive review of the chosen literature served several key purposes:

- establishing a theoretical foundation for in-depth exploration of the literature,
- assessing the existing state of theoretical knowledge,
- identifying potential avenues for future 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 role in the promotion of tourist destinations. Considering the massive and growing popularity of digital media, the varied use of picture-based social media tools or applications such as Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr and others picture-based social media in promoting and marketing tourism destinations has been seen as the current trends in the tourism industry (Li and Xie, 2020).

Online communication about destination is increasingly dependent on visual media rather than text, due to the growing popularity of picture-based social networks.

To effectively promote tourism destinations in an online environment, there are a number of different strategies that can be successfully used. One of the key tools is to develop an attractive online presence through dedicated websites (Ghorbanzadeh *et al.*, 2023) and travel blogs (Gholamhosseinzadeh *et al.*, 2023). Creating inspiring travel stories, rich in information about various destinations, can attract the attention of potential travelers.

Social media are an extremely important communication channel. Active use of platforms such as Instagram (Aramendia-Muneta and Olarte-Pascual, 2022; Fatanti and Suyadnya, 2015; Kilipiri *et al.*, 2023; Teruel-Gutierrez and Maté-Sánchez-Val, 2021) or Facebook (Alghizzawi *et al.*, 2020; Kumar *et al.*, 2022; Mariani *et al.*, 2016; Pastor Marín and Paniagua Rojano, 2020) allows to share visual attractions, curiosities and interact with potential tourists. Content marketing is another effective method, which involves creating a variety of content such as articles, e-books and videos that not only provide information but also inspire to discover new places.

In today's technological world, the use of modern solutions such as virtual reality or augmented reality (Altınay Ozdemir, 2021) makes it possible to create virtual tours, which can provide potential tourists with realistic experiences and make them decide to travel.

Additionally, email marketing campaigns, cooperation with travel companies, organizing online competitions and participation in industry events are additional strategies that can contribute to the effective promotion of tourist destinations on the Internet. Flexibility, creativity and adapting the strategy to the specificity of a given place are key to achieving success in promoting online tourism.

Collaborating with influencers from the travel industry can further increase the level of online community engagement (Ferreira *et al.*, 2022). Opinions and reviews of satisfied travelers, posted on websites or booking platforms, play an important role in building the reputation of a given place (Huang Liuying and Xie Liqiong, 2013). Social media influencer marketing has become a powerful tool in the promotion of tourist destinations. It leverages the popularity and credibility of social media influencers to reach a wide and engaged audience.

In summary, social media influencer marketing can be a highly effective strategy for promoting tourist destinations. When done right, it can help increase visibility, engagement, and ultimately drive more visitors to destination. However, careful planning, collaboration, and transparency are key to a successful influencer marketing campaign.

## **5. Discussion**

The role of social media in almost every field nowadays cannot be ignored (Drab-Kurowska, 2013), especially in tourism.

Nowadays internet and social media platforms are one of the most popular information channels used by potential tourists and have become one of the main sources of online travel information. The promotion of tourist destinations applies not only to tourism in the classical sense, but also to its interesting varieties, such as culinary tourism (Soltani *et al.*, 2021).

In tourism, the intention to visit a destination often depends on the information that is obtained, where photo and video ads are one of those sources of information. Videos and photos that include celebrities and influencers as main characters are common and influence tourists to visit destinations they have not visited before.

The very important step in social media influencer marketing 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 tourist destinations is a topical and important issue.

## 6. Conclusion

Promoting tourist destinations effectively requires a well-rounded marketing strategy that encompasses both traditional and digital methods, e.g., website and online presence, tourism events and festivals, destination branding, brochures, billboards and of course social media influencer marketing.

Social media influencer marketing has become a powerful tool in the promotion of tourist destinations. It leverages the popularity and credibility of social media influencers to reach a wide and engaged audience. Promoting a tourist destination is an ongoing effort. It requires consistency, creativity, and adaptability to changing market trends and traveler preferences.

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

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