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## CASTING A DIGITAL SPELL: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS SHAPE DESTINATION MARKETING

**Abstract.** *In a time when social media has taken the front stage, the travel and tourism industry has changed dramatically. The development of social media influencers as important players in destination marketing has been a major driving force behind this change. This essay aims to explore the significant impact these digital trendsetters have on destination marketing. It explores the strategies and achievements of influencer marketing efforts, demonstrating how these digital pioneers are changing the travel landscape and impacting the choices made by travelers. To investigate the impact of influencer marketing and provide a summary of studies in these areas, a review of the literature was conducted as part of this study.*

**Keywords:** *tourism industry, digital technologies, marketing, social networks, travel.*

**Introduction.** A significant transformation is underway in the travel and tourist industry in an age where social media is pervasive. The dynamic and powerful social media influencers who have emerged as key players in the field of destination marketing, are at the center of this change[28]. These influencers, who are digital trend setters, have enormous power that extends beyond conventional advertising avenues and radically changes the buying decisions of the customers with trusted messages[23].

The influencers have transformed into potent storytellers in the narrative of travel experiences, frequently admired for their creativity,

authenticity, and well-cured material. Their capacity to captivate viewers with aesthetically captivating and emotionally impactful content has propelled them to the leading edge of influencing travel decisions. Currently, the number of followers of an individual is often used to identify noteworthy hubs, providing an indicator for both network scope and popularity. As a result, having a larger number of followers has the ability to widen the reach of a message, enhancing the impact of this type of extensive word-of-mouth[7].

Modern customers have grown to rely heavily on the tactics used by celebrities in the digital sphere, which range from engaging images to

immersive vacation narratives. The accomplishments and triumphs of influencer marketing initiatives highlight the effectiveness of using these digital innovators to augment brand recognition, sway travel decisions, and eventually shape consumer conduct. Consumers who spend more time on social media want entertaining material, discount-related information, and interesting updates. They are dependent on influencers in a variety of fields, including regular people and celebrities, and they place a premium on consumer feedback. The fundamental motivation for following influencers on various social media is trust, which stems from neutral evaluations and a large follower base[8].

An in-depth examination of the literature was a critical component of this research in order to fully analyze the effect of influencer marketing. As an academic investigation, this analysis of the literature offers insights into the changing dynamics of influencer advertising in the travel and tourist industry.

#### The New Destination Marketing Paradigm

Any tourism destination has the potential to be perceived as the basis for tourism's existence, offering a combination of tourism products such as infrastructure, attractions, and events that react to the demands and desires of the visitor [5]. In addition, destinations are viewed as a set of items provided by a diverse range of partners such as, travel agencies, travel companies, lodging facilities and other service providers. The system of these actors determines the industry's competitive edge [6].

Social media influencers are one such actor. They are a new type of autonomous outsider promoter who uses tweets, blogs, and other social media platforms to influence customer attitudes [9]. The age of the internet has given regular individuals new options to get attention from the media, which can then be utilized into promotional attempts such as influencer advertising [4].

Influencer marketing is becoming increasingly crucial to companies as social media grows in popularity. Instead of pushing commercials to their wanted audience, corporations are resorting to reliable internet celebrities to publicize their products and messages[7]. A diverse variety of business sectors are represented in the influencer marketing landscape, although major categories

including fashion, music, gaming, cars, health and fitness, food and drink, technology, parenting, and travel are primarily highlighted. This strategy is especially advantageous for new and small firms with tight finances. As traditional advertising approaches struggle to get attention in a world where there is an abundance of material, well-planned influencer campaigns are a very powerful substitute[12].

Many social media users have attained online fame by constructing attractive and engaging social media profiles, supported by a huge number of followers. They established a strong online personality by first sharing their interests and thoughts on personal blog posts, then quickly switching to social media as social networking sites grew in popularity[14]. The basic explanation for influencer success is that the audience feels connected to the people in the images and believe what they say. Furthermore, a creatively produced photo portrays a more fun-loving and intriguing place, separating the images from other common online photographs available on hotel and vacation websites [20].

Social media as well as the latest methods of digital interaction are having a huge impact on holiday decisions regarding planning. Social networking channels and photo sharing or video streaming sites have grown in popularity hence they are seen as vacation planning websites. Examining the perspectives and help of other travelers has evolved into one of the most beneficial activities one can do online, especially during the online preparation stage. Considering that mobile devices are becoming more prevalent, having the capacity to utilize the Internet anywhere, at any time has an immense effect on holidaymakers' querying and planning conduct[28].

When a consumer is trying to make a purchase decision, interpersonal influence and word-of-mouth which could be among friends, family, or popular bloggers, are commonly acknowledged to be among the most reliable means of knowledge. These characteristics are especially significant for the tourist business since intangible products and services are challenging to assess prior to being utilized. With different sources like mass media and motivations such as self-interest or paying back for a favor, the originator spreads the

information to the listener who makes the buying decision evaluating the data according to source evaluation or brand familiarity, which may result in customer loyalty or product acceptance[16].

The notion of word of mouth has been expanded to the digital sphere when it comes to influencers. Influential individuals, who are viewed as highly skilled and who offer intimate and honest information with those who follow them, might gain more followers and exert more influence over their choices 14(Hudders et al., 2021).The confidence of followers in influencer generated content could be strengthened by the educational value of the influencers' posts and their credibility. The chance of making a purchase and brand recognition are subsequently influenced by this trust[17].

Influencer Marketing Strategies. Social media might be useful in the modern technological era for real people like travel bloggers having pioneered the investigation of how visitors transform their encounters into individually meaningful memories. Bloggers commonly personalize tales of risk, difficulty, novelty, and learning by emphasizing emotions and self-reflection, highlighting the need of a sophisticated knowledge of emotions in crafting meaningful experiences[3]. Another trustworthy source could be celebrities. A celebrity endorsement is defined as the promotion activities of those who has widespread public awareness and utilizes it to sell a consumer product by appearing in close proximity to it in a commercial [19]. Visit intentions towards the endorsed places are revealed to be highly favorably influenced by their impressions and consumers' ideal self-images. As a result, destination marketers should think about using them to advertise tourist-related products and locations [29].

Celebrity branding is often regarded as a successful commercial approach [1]. Related to celebrity branding, Online influencer marketing is an advertising strategy in which a firm selects and encourages online influencers to connect with their followers on social media in order to use these influencers' unique resources such as followers and their network, personal branding, material within their interaction and faith among followers to promote the company's offerings and ultimately improve the performance of the company [15]. Influencers come in several forms: micro-

influencers, key opinion leaders, blog influencers, social media influencers, and celebrity influencers [2].

It looks like becoming an influence is a simple task. Creating content takes an extended period of time. Moreover, the influencers must also deal with the attention and the frequent upload requirements. It is critical to consistently develop latest material and have the creativity or expertise to do so in order to attract attention and generate traffic, which results in success in the long run, establishes and sustains an audience. Not only is core talent required, but also extra talents such as entertaining and technical skills are needed. Furthermore, the skill sets of personality, dedication, and devotion are vital to consistently feed the audience. So as to be an influencer, one is required to possess the ability to put them out there, generate their own material, and express their thoughts [11].

Considering the substantial influence that social media influencers exert on the whole trip planning process once they gain credibility, strategic planning and techniques are required to improve destination marketing. By offering more reliable travel-associated data than other sources, influencers can enhance a place. Companies have an impact on customer choices because consumer confidence in influencers affects brand awareness, travel motivation and purchase decisions. They also improve the travel experience, which has a favorable effect on repeat business and client loyalty over the long run[23].

Businesses are able to manage the influencer marketing better when they choose influencers who align with their marketing goals. Then they observe the content production process of influencers, evaluate the process, and leverage influencers' content in company-driven advertising campaigns[15].Selecting the appropriate platform for influencer marketing is essential in an environment where attention is very competitive. Aligning with the audience's presence across several channels is necessary. It makes sense to do inexpensive campaigns on several channels. Various platforms accommodate a range of characteristics. Effective communication now requires video material, especially on sites like Reels, Instagram IGTV, and Tik Tok. Although live streaming has become more popular,

especially on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook Live, YouTube is still a reliable source, but TikTok has grown significantly. Twitch used to be mostly used by gamers, but today a wider audience uses it. Furthermore, it is clear that incorporating influencer campaigns into other media such as magazines, billboards, and paid advertising helps produce real and compelling content [12].

Influencers prioritize authenticity when integrating advertising into their audience service and brand-building strategies, which help them make ethical judgments'. This entails choosing products that complement their image, creating material tailored to their audience, carefully scheduling pieces that aren't as relevant, and leaving out unpleasant experiences. These strategies are used by influencers to keep their audience relationships intact while meeting brand obligations [27].

One more way to promote products is to utilize micro-influencers. They are endorsers who don't qualify as celebrities but have significant and passionate communities that are typically more particular, with less than a few thousand followers [18]. Micro-influencer support of a product, as opposed to mega-influencer promotion, is related with a higher impression of authenticity. This increased authenticity results in higher positive ratings of the endorsed product resulting in influencer and product authenticity[21]. When publications from influencers with less followers are taken into account, the relationship between attitude towards the area and intention to visit is stronger among respondents[13].

Micro-influencers are available in a variety of channels and provide flexibility to work together. Once a micro-influencer has been chosen, assignments may be given to them, such as writing posts about services, posting online reviews, or showcasing the products on their profile. The main segment and audience of this company is no more than average. This allows them to have direct contact with the audience, as well as the ability to adjust content thanks to feedback from subscribers. This kind of interaction makes the job easier, since you are talking directly to the customers or, in this case, to the subscriber [2].

Truthful posts and reliable information increase the effectiveness of advertising. Direct interaction with the subscriber in the question-

answer scheme allows the company to influence the behavior of the main segment and change some elements of the process.. Thus, social influence is directly related to the process of delivering the final product. Micro-influencers also have the ability to influence the crowd, as a rule they work in various fields and advertise several products, but also create an atmosphere. A good influencer marketing strategy must have well-defined goals, a budget, and take influencer negotiations into account [22].

The platform selection offers a range of approaches for delivering brand value, which has advanced in recent years from merely raising awareness to really boosting sales. Product seeding, clever use of discount codes and the development of thorough campaign briefs are all successful strategies. Improved outcomes may be attained by comprehending the Instagram algorithm and determining the best periods for the audience to be online. To overcome the issues related to influencer marketing, campaign success demands strategic planning, a focus on organization and planning and the flexibility to allow influencers to highlight their skills[12].

Tourism destination managers could give preference to influencers whose content is considered valuable by their followers since trust in influencer-branded content has a significant influence on social networks users' brand views and purchasing intentions. The degree to which followers believe influencers to be reliable, appealing, and similar can be used to measure this trust. This knowledge might help authorities run more successful influencer marketing efforts rather than depending just on follower and engagement analytics data. Furthermore, travel companies looking to increase brand recognition among a wide range of potential customers could look for social media influencers that project a positive image and have specific knowledge related to the products or services the company provides. Additionally, since influencers produce content, marketers should make sure that their partnerships result in the production of educational material [17].

Influencers with competence, honesty, and the capacity to develop an impression of a relationship, intimacy, or connection with those who follow them, have a substantial influence on influencing

their audience's travel preferences. To get a competitive advantage, companies and planners must engage with influencers recognized for continuous, dependable, and honest content sharing. Recognizing that influencer's content has a significant influence on the choices made by the followers, marketers and planners should make an effort to understand the material made by influencers and regarded as valuable by potential visitors. Furthermore, influencers should prioritize not just raising their number of followers but also creating genuine and authentic posts to increase engagement and increase their followers' desire to travel. Despite an obvious inclination to attractive influencers, when it comes to travel intention, trustworthiness and knowledge, rather than appearance, have a considerable impact on followers [30].

When influencers have a relationship with a product, their endorsement message should make it clear adding advertising disclosure. Advertising disclosure is the information that informs people that a message is, in fact, an advertisement. Disclosures must be visible, strategically placed, and easily understood in order to convey their significance[10].A disclosure statement has the effect of increasing the attractiveness of the advertised message affecting the buying decision indirectly [26].

**Case Studies.** One case study illustrates how influencer marketing may effectively leverage smaller enterprises' adaptability as a competitive advantage. Sun Peaks, a Canadian ski resort, wanted to raise publicity of its wintertime attractions, which included free of congestion ski routes, seasonal events and natural beauty. Travel Mindset, an influencer company, coordinated a campaign aimed at those who enjoy adventure with Callum Snape, a leading outdoor photographer and Instagram endorser. The campaign's efficacy was evident in the stunning images, daily stories on Instagram, and video posts on Facebook that got more than two hundred thousand article hits spanning three minutes or more. Sun Peaks was intentionally promoted attracting attention away from crowded competitors such as Whistler[24].

The Istria Tourism Board in Croatia has used new marketing methods, by including notable bloggers, tourism journalists, and opinion leaders

in its Share Istria campaign. to generate awareness, interest, desire, and action by promoting Istria as an appealing year-round destination. The influencer-led campaign started in 2015, with the 2019 version including 16 world-renowned influencers reaching a total of 29 million social media followers with the cooperation of BMW and Turkish Airlines. The findings indicate the campaign's effectiveness in worldwide marketing and participation, demonstrating the increasing significance of social media in modern tourism[25].

Tamdrin, a Tibetan herdsman from Litang County in China, was featured in a viral video on Douyin, the Chinese TikTok, initiating a large tourism increase in the region. Tamdrin's genuine smile and the magnificent environment of his birthplace were included in the film, which received over 1.2 billion hits in four weeks. Chinese viewers were interested in Litang's distinctive culture and landscape, which were previously unknown to the general public. Recognizing the potential for tourism, Litang's tourist authorities picked him as its representative, which resulted in an increase in hotel reservations and visitor interest. Tourist officials also offered incentives like ticket cost exemptions and accommodation discounts, promoting tourism in Litang even more.

According to Zhang&Huang publishing house, in 2022, this trend became popular especially in tourism destinations during the COVID 2022 pandemic.

Also, the key moment in the media sphere regarding the trend was the Marriot hotels project. Marriot hotels were the first to use influencer marketing. The essence of the project was to attract a new audience through viral dance videos. The main focus was on entertainment through creativity, writes the publishing house Shakhter 2024.

### **Conclusion.**

The field of tourism and travel has undergone significant changes as a result of the active use of social networks. Media personalities have played a crucial role in the development of social networks, as they influence the masses and can set a trend. It is difficult to overestimate the influence of celebrities on society, since their words, thoughts, behavior and what they are wearing are the main

driving force of the trend. This direction has knocked the concept of influence marketing into the lead.

With a clear plan with the right goals and the necessary budget with familiar faces, marketing has every chance of success. The choice of the media personality is also important, as the right choice of their segment and audience is important. Content creation is doomed to success if these factors are respected. Such marketing can serve not only for large corporations, but also for small and

medium-sized businesses. Such a scheme of work is actively used at all levels of tourism, from small hotels to huge chains of the hotel business.

Celebrities' experience, honesty and openness make them excellent candidates for advertising. With high popularity and linking of a certain product to a person, marketing does this and the company is in a position of dependence on them. Such a strategy builds proper business conduct and interaction.

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### САҢДЫҚ ТЕХНОЛОГИЯЛАРДЫ ҚОЛДАНУ: ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК МЕДИА МАҚСАТТЫ МАРКЕТИНГТІҢ ҚАЛЫПТАСУЫНА ӘСЕР ЕТЕТІН НЕГІЗГІ ФАКТОР РЕТІНДЕ

**Аңдатпа.** Әлеуметтік желілер қарқынды дамыған кезде саяхат және туризм индустриясы түбегейлі өзгерді. Әлеуметтік желілердің дамуы туризм маркетингіндегі өзгерістердің маңызды факторы ретінде әрекет етеді. Бұл мақаланың мақсаты-цифрлық технологиялардың туристік бағыттардың маркетингіне айтарлықтай әсерін зерттеу. Сонымен қатар туристік маркетинг стратегиясындағы цифрлық инновациялардың саяхатшылардың саяхат бағыттарын таңдауына қалай әсер ететінін қарастырады. Осы зерттеу аясында әлеуметтік желілердің мақсатты маркетингті қалыптастыруға әсерін зерттеу мақсатында әдебиеттерге шолу жасалды.

**Тірек сөздер:** Туризм индустриясы, цифрлық технологиялар, маркетинг, әлеуметтік желілер, саяхат.

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### ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ЦИФРОВЫХ ТЕХНОЛОГИЙ: СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ СЕТИ КАК ОСНОВНОЙ ФАКТОР ВЛИЯЮЩИЙ НА ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ЦЕЛЕВОГО МАРКЕТИНГА

**Аннотация.** В то время, когда социальные сети вышли на передний план, индустрия путешествий и туристической индустрии кардинально изменилась. Развитие социальных сетей выступает как важный фактор изменений маркетинга в туризме. Цель данной статьи - изучить значительное влияние цифровых технологий на маркетинг туристических направлений. В ней рассматриваются как эти цифровые инновации в стратегии маркетинга туризма оказывают влияние на выбор, который делают путешественники при выборе направлений путешествий. В рамках данного исследования, с целью изучения влияния социальных сетей на формирование целевого маркетинга был проведен обзор литературы.

**Ключевые слова:** индустрия туризма, цифровые технологии, маркетинг, социальные сети, путешествия.

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