

THE ROLE OF THE INFLUENCERS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL AND HERITAGE TOURISM

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Abstract: Over the last decade, Social Media has been opening up new opportunities for marketing in tourism. Guests have become "promoters" of the destinations they visit, sharing their impressions with their followers and friends through the "Social Media world". Culture and history are among the most important resources for a destination in order to attract visitors. Guests trust other guests and influencers more than official marketing organizations. That is why in order to capture the attention and interest of a broad public, marketers begin more and more to link cultural attractions to an emotional story. They use communication technologies, like social media to deliver their content in an interesting way to the potential guests. Tourism and culture - both have a lot to do with emotions and experience. The usage of Social Media and Influencers is perfect way to provoke emotion and "influence" experience in cultural tourism. The aim of this study is to determine the influence of social media and Influencers in promoting cultural and heritage tourism and analyze good examples of social media marketing promotion forms used to boost the interest in cultural tourism.

Keywords: Social media, influencers, Cultural Tourism, Heritage Tourism, influence, emotions, experience.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development and penetration of new information technologies and their derivatives in tourism (social networks, databases, virtual reality, augmented reality, Internet of Things / IoT /, artificial intelligence / AI) have created a new wave of changes in tourism behaviour and models of tourism business. For the tourism business, the Internet reveals the opportunity to make information and reservations available to a large number of tourists at relatively low costs.¹

For the tourists the development of information technology and access to the Internet has changed the available information regarding tourism, and affected their way of planning and making travel decisions. The constant advancement of the Internet has influenced the development of social media websites such as blogs, forums, social networks, and YouTube, which have become a reliable source of information and have gained immense popularity among tourists.² To determine the best travel options, users use social media, searching for information about possible destinations, viewing images and reading posts from previous travelers.³ People publish and share comments, opinions and experiences related to their trips, including during the trip, which ultimately serve as a source of information for other tourists and provide them with valuable tips and details. In social media, people develop a sense of community and therefore trust the comments posted online.⁴ The advent of social media has changed people's daily lives, creating new phenomena such as the boom in digital influencers and influencer marketing. As tourism is uniquely visual, influencers frequently use these platforms for sharing videos, images, and opinions about destinations. Consumer participation in the Internet, and especially in social media, is becoming an

¹ Ilieva 2015.

² Kapoor et al. 2018.

³ Sicilia, Ruiz 2010.

⁴ Utz, Kerkhof, van den Bos 2011.

interesting phenomenon for researchers, especially in the field of tourism marketing.⁵ Tourism marketing researchers and practitioners pay close attention to how tourists are influenced by interactions with other users, primarily so-called social media influencers.

Social media plays an increasingly important role in nature tourism, city tourism, sports tourism as well as in cultural tourism. Guests and visitors alike have become "ambassadors" of the destinations they visit, sharing their impressions with their followers and friends via the "Social Media world". Cultural travellers rely on information provided by so-called "travel influencers", in order to show the authentic side of the destination visited.

As cultural tourism is constituted of cultural resources of a destination, meaning its intangible, tangible and natural heritage,⁶ it could be said that it offers visitors a wide range of experiences, whether aesthetic, emotional, intellectual or psychological. That is why it could be concluded that social media and influencers are the best marketing tools to transfer these emotions and "influence" experience to the potential customers. They can also be the best way to promote different cultural traditions, customs, festivals, local specialties and crafts that can hardly otherwise reach the broad public. Researchers as well as practitioners argue that, in order to capture the attention and interest of a broad public, the marketers must link cultural attractions to an engaging narrative, while using information and communication technologies – like social media – to deliver their content and trigger interactions.⁷ Popular social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, are used by destination marketing organizations, including national tourism organizations, to post information on attractions and events, while at the same time inviting followers to share their own experience and opinion through images, videos or text to provoke trust and interest of the potential visitors.⁸

The purpose of this study is to reveal the influence of social media and Influencers in promoting cultural and heritage tourism and analyze good examples of social media marketing promotion forms used to boost the interest in cultural tourism.

CULTURAL TOURISM

While there are more than one hundred definitions for the concept of culture, they all share two common points: culture is a way of living built upon a system of shared meanings and it is conveyed from generation to generation through this very system.⁹

Similar to the many definitions of "culture", there are many definitions for cultural tourism as well. In the tourism industry's glossary, cultural tourism is defined as "a journey to experience the art or the history of a certain destination or a journey to immerse yourself in the language, the lifestyle or the culture in an area" (Travel Industry Dictionary). Culturally oriented travel is mainly aimed at visiting cultural sites and cultural events in order to familiarize oneself with the culture of one's own country, as well as the cultures of foreign countries.

Culture and tourism are linked because of their obvious interactions and potential for growth. Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing global tourism markets and cultural and creative industries are increasingly used to promote destinations. The increasing use of culture and creativity to market destinations also contributes to the differentiation of regional identities and images, and an increasing range of cultural elements are used to serve to brand or promote regions. Today's tourists do not want to be isolated from the places they visit as if in a cultural bubble. They want to engage and participate in the local culture. From enjoying local cuisine to celebrating regional festivals and holidays, local experiences are becoming some of the top travel trends to be seen more and more.

Visits to cultural destinations, or visits to destinations to learn about the culture and cultural aspects of a destination, have been done since ancient times. According to McKercher and Du Crosse, examples of

⁵ Constantinides 2014.

⁶ Bonn et al. 2007.

⁷ Egberts 2014.

⁸ Uşaklı et al. 2017.

⁹ Danesi, Perron 1999.

what we now call "culturally motivated" travel were observed as far back as the Roman era.¹⁰ One of the main reasons for travelling has always been to see architectural buildings and monuments, to get to know other cultures and civilizations or different customs and events. As a separate category, cultural tourism began to be considered in the late 1970s, when the tourism industry established that a large percentage of tourists have travelled to gain knowledge about the culture and cultural heritage of other destinations. Over the years, cultural tourism has evolved from a specialized niche for well-educated people to a mass phenomenon.¹¹ In the late 1980s and 1990s, cultural and historical resources contributed largely to tourists' satisfaction with a certain destination.

McKercher and Du Crosse believe that moving to another place for the purpose of tourism itself involves an element of culture: people who leave their native places to visit other destinations temporarily experience something new in a different cultural dimension. In 2007, in his research, Moisa also pointed out that people travel to experience something different culturally and that this motive is one of the main motives especially in the case of young tourists to take a trip. The presence of culture in modern tourism is evident, and even trips that are not focused on a cultural attraction also contain cultural elements and experiences.¹²

Many definitions have been given for cultural tourism. According to the World Tourism Organization, cultural tourism is "a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions". In its official report on cultural policy in 1994, the Australian Government defined cultural tourism as the full range of experiences that visitors can undertake to learn about what makes a destination special - the way of life, its heritage, its arts, its people - and the business of providing and interpreting that culture for visitors.¹³

Rakadzhyska and Marinov define cultural tourism (or tourism of culture) as a subset of tourism related to the culture of the country or region, and especially to the lifestyle of the people in that geographical area, to the history of these people, to their art, architecture, religions and with other elements forming their way of life.¹⁴

Cultural tourism also refers to the historical, traditional and contemporary ("living") aspects of a local culture that allow visitors to gain insight into the unique cultural identity, way of thinking and distinct sense of place of the respective cultural destination.¹⁵

New trends in cultural tourism include "experiential tourism" or "creative tourism", where the interactions between tourists and residents become a key part of the tourism experience and overall customer satisfaction.

Creative tourism, especially in rural areas, has become an important strategy for cultural tourism to remain competitive within today's mass tourism market. The survey from Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) shows that the experiences most enjoyed by cultural travellers are those offering a real taste of the local culture. By creating their own souvenirs, travellers are more likely to have a lasting emotional attachment to the creative travel destination, to talk, blog, or tweet about it in a positive way, and to make a return visit. Essentially, creative tourism addresses travellers who are looking for time, space, and energy to unlock and unfold their creative potential, who truly wish to be in touch with the local communities they visit. Creative travel allows travellers to bridge the gap between being a mere observer and being an active participant in the local fabric of the place they are visiting.¹⁶

¹⁰ McKercher, Du Cros 2003.

¹¹ Marinov, Ilieva 2018.

¹² Moisa 2008

¹³ NSW Heritage Office 2001.

¹⁴ Rakadzhyska, Marinov 2013.

¹⁵ Ilieva 2015.

¹⁶ Social Media Guidelines for Cultural Tourism in Rural Areas 2018.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are generally defined as Internet-based, limited, and permanent channels of mass communication that facilitate perceived user interactions and derive value from user-generated content.¹⁷ Weber¹⁸ defines it as "an online place where people with common interests can come together to share their thoughts, comments and ideas". Social media play an important role in communication between people, communities and institutions and has become a communication channel where people can seek and receive information from different sources, excluding traditional ones. It has also been a tool through which they can create new content, express their thoughts and experiences, and share information.¹⁹

Photography has always been an integral part of tourism. In addition, photos are a valuable tool for perceiving a tourism destination, which not only includes a realistic description of the tourism place,²⁰ but also captures the subjective feelings of tourists.²¹ Researchers have long used photographs to conduct tourism research. Early studies have mainly focused on traditional advertising channels and tools, such as postcards,²² advertisements and travel guides,²³ to investigate the perception of tourism destinations by potential tourists.

Since the development of electronic computer systems, the Internet has played a large role in people's daily lives. Social media is changing the way consumers see and perceive destinations, especially those which they have not visited yet. The increased amount of time consumers spend on social media means that more of their "beliefs, ideas, and impressions" about destinations are moderated by the posts, images, and videos they see online.²⁴ It should be noted that visual representations are considered a more preferred online communication than text, because "making sense and perceiving pictures requires less cognitive resources and they sometimes say much more than words".²⁵

Social media platforms are often used in travel arrangements as they act as a communication link between the tourist and tourism destinations. People increasingly use social media before planning their trip, during the trip and at the end of the trip, making it an effective tool for tourists as well as for advertising the visited destinations.²⁶ The use of social networking services (SNS) by hoteliers, restaurateurs, administrative bodies at various levels and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) increases both the possibilities of information dissemination and the effect on consumers and creates a platform for engagement with the initiatives launched by these entities.²⁷ Photos posted on social media platforms are considered important factors that engage social media users in cognitive, emotional, and behavioural activities. According to Lo et al.²⁸ 89% of the tourists document their trips and more than 41% of them share their photos on SNS. A 2015 study shows that photos posted by visitors have a distinguished effect on the perception of destinations by other SNS users and their willingness to visit them.²⁹

According to We Are Social Digital's 2022 report, the number of social media users has reached 4.62 billion.³⁰ Social media platforms include photo sharing sites (Instagram, Flickr, Picasa, Photobucket), social sites (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Myspace, Fourquare, Blogs, Forums), travel sites (Holidaycheck, Holidaywatchdog, Reviewcentre, Triphub, Tripadvisor), video sharing sites (Youtube, Metacafe, Dailymotion), professional networking sites (LinkedIn, Ning), Wikis (Wikipedia, Wikia). The

¹⁷ Carr, Hayes 2015.

¹⁸ Weber 2011.

¹⁹ Dickey, Lewis 2011.

²⁰ Taecharungroj, Mathayomchan 2020.

²¹ Kim, Stepchenkova 2015.

²² Milman 2012.

²³ Garrod, Kosowska 2012.

²⁴ Bizirgianni, Dionysopoulou 2013.

²⁵ Frías, Rodríguez, Castañeda 2007.

²⁶ Ketter 2016.

²⁷ Panagiotopoulos et al. 2015.

²⁸ Lo et al. 2011.

²⁹ Kim, Stepchenkova 2015.

³⁰ We Are Social 2022.

most popular and widely used social media sites are Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Youtube, Whatsapp, Twitter .

The tendency to use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, etc. have removed borders and limitations on access to information distribution. Additionally, Li et al.³¹ noted that "Trivago and TripAdvisor are some of the most popular social media platforms for tourism, enabling hospitality and tourism businesses to promote their brand to customers and connect with tourists beyond the service encounter". The many-to-many nature of social media is the advantage that effectively has transformed the processes of advertisement and consumption. The statement is proven by the way consumers create an image or mental picture of what the destination and its tourism products will look like even before the visit.³²

In the globalizing world, it is necessary to take part in the virtual world in order to gain new markets and competitive advantage or not to lose the existing market and advantage.³³ Web pages and social media provide an effective and unconventional way for companies to interact with their consumers, and make it possible to build strong customer relationships.

Cultural features such as arts and entertainment, crafts, traditional architectural areas, economic activities, traditions and ceremonies, man-made elements such as theme parks, casinos, special events such as festivals, fairs and sports competitions are values that represent cultural resources that form the basis of cultural tourism. Due to their specific characteristics, these resources require strategies to gain public appreciation, attract more visitors and retain customers. These strategies must also respond to the need to increase brand engagement among visitors. In this sense, conveying brand personality through social media can be an effective strategy for interacting with travellers interested in cultural tourism.³⁴ Social media is an excellent medium for presenting emotions in cultural tourism and thus serves to connect people who share the culture.

INFLUENCERS

The past few years have seen an increase in the use of social media influencers to promote products and services. These influencers cover a wide range of products and industries. Social media influencers are defined as third-party endorsers who help for shaping audience attitudes.³⁵ There are many large multinational corporations and even government departments that use influencers to generate awareness or reach new audiences, including NIKE, Tourism New Zealand, etc.

Social media influencers are considered opinion leaders and usually have some level of expertise in areas such as makeup, technology or travel. They are based on different platforms like YouTube and Instagram. Influencers are individuals who, with their established authority, influence the behaviour of their followers. Their fans follow them because they like their content, admire them and want to be like them. Unlike celebrities, they are friends with their fans, maintain a more personal relationship with them and thus gain their trust. Influencers are often role models for their followers, who gladly seek and accept their advice when choosing a product or service. People tend to be influenced by existing public opinion, and it is even easier to be influenced by someone they admire. It is precisely for this reason that influencers often end up as ambassadors for the brands they use. Conducted research prove that influencers are more likely to be sought for advice than, for example, a CEO or other administrative company personnel, and they also have a positive impact on purchase intention.³⁶ Social media influencers post very regularly, therefore their recommendations can be integrated into their updates more seamlessly and will be seen as electronic word of mouth rather than advertising.³⁷ Babić Rosario highlighted the power of electronic word of mouth on consumer decisions, stating that consumers trust other consumers more than advertisers.³⁸ Previous

³¹ Lim, Cheah, Wong 2017.

³² Ilieva, Spring Han 2022.

³³ Karaca 2022.

³⁴ Liasidou 2018.

³⁵ Freberg et al. 2011.

³⁶ Freberg et al. 2011; Lim, Cheah, Wong 2017.

³⁷ De Veirman et al. 2017.

³⁸ Babić Rosario 2016.

studies have shown, that electronic word-of-mouth in the hospitality industry is a strong predictor of online hotel bookings for all ages.³⁹

The profession of travel influencers has seen a rapid rise in the last few years, especially due to the powerful development of social media. The power of influencers is based on communities that follow them on a daily basis. Follower numbers are expected to continue to grow as younger generations create social media accounts at an ever earlier age. Young subscribers make up a large portion of influencers' communities and are most influenced by their posts. 37% of young people say they are influenced by social media when choosing a holiday destination.

When used correctly, travel influencers have the potential to change the content and quality of the travel industry. The more people emphasize authentic relationships with people they trust, the more power influencers appear to have. The result is the creation of an influencer partnership that can be used to create an engaging user experience that will inspire and encourage other users to do the same. At a time when social networks are indelibly present in our daily lives, travel influencers are becoming the new driving force in the tourism sector. Travel influencers are perceived as authentic and inspiring and thanks to social media, it is easy for them to connect with their communities. Their thoughts and emotions are shared through texts, videos and photos that allow their followers to travel with them. It is even possible to follow their journeys in real time thanks to stories and other reels. Instagram, TikTok, Blog or YouTube are the tools that allow them to make us dream of a destination through photos, videos and texts, each new post more inspiring than the previous one. Trust is a vitally important topic in influencer and tourism marketing and is responsible for creating and maintaining successful long-term relationships between organizations and consumers. The growing influencer popularity encourages more and more destinations to use influencer marketing for their promotional campaigns.

Traditions Influencers and Bloggers are public figures who talk about different family traditions and different cultures. Primarily, they try to raise awareness of the different traditions in the world and the versatile cultures of every country. In that process, they can promote mostly services that can help any social media user find out more about the different traditions. Folk (Traditions) Influencers and Bloggers use many ways to get their content in front of the right audience. They take pictures of traditional elements of a specific culture, visit traditional places in one country, or talk about traditional recipes and cuisine. It's their job to bring every culture closer to the ideal customer. Representing culture means to deeply understand, process and reveal cultural values that may be important for followers.⁴⁰ These influencers are said to have significant influence on small, hidden corners of the world unknown to the general public. Whether it's a street, a building, a lake or many other places. Places that they like to highlight in their posts and which are quickly grabbed by crowds of tourists.

EXAMPLES OF THE APPLICATION OF INFLUENCER MARKETING IN CULTURAL AND HERITAGE TOURISM

Travel influencers have not only gained a lot of popularity in the past few years, but they have also gained credibility among institutional players in tourism. More and more destinations show interest in this growing phenomenon and decide to use influencers in their promotional campaigns.

There are many highly successful campaigns, such as ENIT - the National Tourism Agency's partnership with six top women social influencers (Francesca Crescentini of Tegamini, Rocío Muñoz Morales, Francesca Rocco, Irene Colzi, Ilaria Di Vaio, Fiore Manni) to spread the beauty of Italy to young people. It is #Protagonisteitaliane, which has involved six top women social influencers to tell the story of seven Italian cities that are symbols of culture, art, fashion, food and lifestyle, all under the banner of sustainability: Milan, Rome, Florence, Naples, Matera, Parma and Perugia. The goal of the campaign is to develop a storytelling of Italian beauties, through the eyes of influencers whose task is to capture an audience sensitive to these issues and thus convey to the younger segments the feeling of beauty and closeness. This promotion, based on the social analysis elaborated by the Enit study office, promises two million more visitors interested in visiting Italy.

³⁹ Confente, Vigolo 2018.

⁴⁰ Pouloupoulos et al. 2018.

Enit also partnered with influencer Anna Nooshin to promote Veneto's Unesco Sites in the Netherlands. Anna Nooshin's main destination was the Prosecco Hills of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2019, which is focusing heavily on open-air tourism, garnering increasing appreciation from both domestic and international visitors and in particular from the Netherlands, which accounts for 9% of travellers to the area. The goal was to deliver different messages and images of Italy as seen through an outsider's eyes. The use of the influencer is a way the identity of a country with a great history to be told in a more up-to-date, more modern, more viral way.

Museums also use influencers as part of their social media and marketing strategies. Institutions collaborate with Instagram influencers by using the influencer's specific niche to strategically target the audience gaps within their museums.

There are numerous highly successful campaigns, such as the partnership that the Metropolitan Museum of Art began with an Instagram influencer Dave Krugman. The Met worked with the Photographer and Social Media consultant, David Krugman on a project to improve its relationships with influencers including introducing its own hashtags dedicated specifically to Instagram influencers such as #EmptyMet and hosting nights where influencers could visit the museum for free and take photos uninterrupted specifically for their Instagram feeds. These influencers then shared their photos under the specialized hashtag and tagged The Met on Instagram encouraging their followers to visit their own museums and galleries and to seek out their own similar experiences and photo opportunities. After the Met first posted their Instagram pictures in collaboration with Mr. Krugman, the account suddenly gained thousands of followers and traffic jumped significantly.

In 2015 the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum launched a campaign called #HowDoYouMuseum using digital media to keep up the recent demand. This campaign used celebrities such as Will Farrell and Instagram influencers that had thousands of followers. The influencers appeared in several videos created by both institutions where they shared their individual perspective of their visit to the museum hoping to inspire others to attend and create their own experience. To launch this campaign, both institutions invited 50 influencers from a variety of niches in the Los Angeles area to visit the museums and share their experiences using the hashtag #HowDoYouMuseum. Using influencer marketing, both museums were able to generate more than three million video views and reach more than 2.3 million viewers who were able to see their UGC (User Generated Content) posts in just a matter of months.⁴¹

Another good example is the collaboration between Louvre and Béyonce and Jay-Z. The release of Béyonce and Jay-Z's Apeshit music video gave the Louvre the record-breaking year of visitorship. The video used the Louvre as a backdrop, showcasing works of art throughout the museum. Following its release, the Louvre welcomed 1.2 million visitors in 2018, a 25% increase over 2017. Béyonce and Jay-Z effectively endorsed the Louvre as a contemporary, relevant, all-round cool place to be, and the increase in visitorship proves that the world took note.

In 2019 Ruddington Village Museum in Nottingham, England, attracted close to half a million viewers from China when Vlogger and Museum and Heritage Development Student, Feixue Huangdu, visited the museum and took a virtual tour with around 434,000 viewers. Despite having only received around 75,000 physical visitors since 1968 the museum was delighted to find itself the focus of the webcast and have its profile raised by the event. Whilst the mainly Chinese audience may never visit the museum physically, the press and interest the story generated for the museum was huge and they are sure to see a rise in visitors after the story made national newspapers. For every small museum with an entry fee of £2.50 the smallest increase in supporters can make a huge difference and engaging any new visitors should be celebrated.

Tourists trust more other tourists who have had similar cultural tourism experiences, instead of nice, eye-catching presentations of companies from websites, brochures, leaflets, TV, etc. Influencers are people who post for other people, and their posts always contain helpful information which audiences can actually use. When they post information about landmarks and other sites, they add valuable tips for their followers and present the history of the landmark in a very picturesque and attractive way. One good example is the post for Meteora from Calum Snape (@CalSnape), photographer from Vancouver, BC,

⁴¹ Naiditch 2021.

Canada, with 785 thousand followers on Instagram, where he indicates what transport to use to get there, where it is advisable to stay, what transport to use to explore around. He reminds them that there is a dress code, not to forget that if they want to visit, and that there is a by-donation entry fee, and gives a suggestion of a typical local dish to try. (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CpataVvj3Tf/>)

CONCLUSION

During the last few decades, traditional tourism information sources have been replaced by Internet-based travel websites and social media, which provide users with travel information and allow them to share their travel experiences in an interactive platform. Social media is increasingly taking up the daily time of users and becoming a major source of impressions about tourism destinations. The role of the intermediary is also changing dramatically, which today largely overlaps with the role of the influencer. The benefits of developing a partnership with travel influencers are many for institutions in the tourism sector. First of all, it is the visibility and notoriety spread in various publications, stories and other means of communication. Also, a tourism destination or attraction that is still relatively unknown can become known to the general public and thus receive benefits quite quickly. Second, travel influencers can offer authentic personal testimony of the real situation in the destination and they can be particularly helpful in 'giving a voice' to smaller destinations, whose authorities have less experience or leverage in shaping mainstream media coverage. Cultural products and services well promoted and presented in the media become a stimulus for tourism, empowering the entrepreneurs to reach the broad public and enriches visitor satisfaction.

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