



GREEN POWER OF INFLUENCERS: SHAPING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract:

In the era of widespread social media use, travel influencers have become immensely popular, serving as a significant source of inspiration for travellers globally. This paper aims to examine how travel influencers not only stimulate travel but also influence tourists' behaviour, particularly in the context of sustainability. The goal is to understand the extent to which these influencers shape tourists' preferences for sustainable travel, encompassing choices related to eco-friendly destinations, responsible itinerary planning, environmentally conscious lodging selections, and sustainable activity preferences. Furthermore, this paper scrutinizes the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of travel influencers among tourists and explores their potential role in shaping eco-conscious attitudes. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of how travel influencers impact tourists' sustainable behaviour, industry stakeholders can devise more effective marketing strategies and cultivate collaborations that cater to the distinctive preferences and concerns of this target audience within the tourism sector.

Keywords:

travel influencers, consumer behaviour, sustainability, tourism industry, travel decisions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid rise and widespread adoption of social media platforms have brought about a transformative impact on various facets of our lives. This digital evolution has been extended to the tourism industry, fundamentally altering the way travellers consume information, make decisions, and connect with destinations (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2023; Hermanto et al., 2023; Mude & Undale, 2023; Wu et al., 2023). Within this context, sustainability has become an increasingly vital consideration. The tourism industry has witnessed a substantial transformation due to social media's influence. These digital platforms now serve as influential tools, significantly shaping travellers' journey planning and experiences (Živković et al., 2014; Živković et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2023). Social media channels have become integral parts of travellers' lives, playing roles as virtual travel guides, sources of inspiration, and platforms for sharing travel experiences (Nasution et al., 2023). The visual appeal of social media, coupled with its capacity to connect people, has created an immersive and interactive environment for travellers and industry stakeholders alike. Of particular relevance to sustainability, social media has democratized information access in the tourism sphere (Schönherr et al., 2023). Travellers can now readily access a wealth of information, including destination recommendations, eco-friendly travel tips, and user-generated reviews (Blaer et al., 2020; Nasution et al., 2023). Real-time updates on sustainable travel trends, events, and news empower tourists to make environmentally conscious choices during their trip planning. Furthermore, this information about democratization empowers tourists to share their sustainable travel experiences, contributing to a collective knowledge base (Arica et al., 2022).

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Within this evolving landscape, travel influencers have emerged as instrumental figures, wielding significant influence over tourists' behaviour. They leverage their recommendations, visually appealing content, and engaging narratives to sway travellers' decisions not only in terms of destination selection but also in choosing eco-friendly accommodations, sustainable dining options, and eco-conscious exploration. In response to this influence, destinations and tourism businesses are increasingly partnering with influencers to enhance their sustainability-focused promotional efforts (Bican & Brem, 2020). However, it is essential for influencers to bear the responsibility of delivering high-quality and genuine content to instil trust and establish themselves as reliable sources of sustainability-related travel information (Ramos-Soler et al., 2019). The aim of this paper is to assess how these influencers affect tourists' sustainable travel choices and examine their credibility among tourists, with a focus on their role in shaping eco-conscious attitudes. The expected outcome is a better understanding of how travel influencers impact tourists' sustainable behaviour, leading to more effective marketing strategies and collaborations within the tourism sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. From Clicks to Check-Ins: The role of the Internet and social media in modern tourism marketing

The Internet marketing, also referred to as online marketing, harnesses digital platforms and methodologies to promote brands while targeting specific market segments. It's essential to recognize that the Internet marketing isn't the sole method for generating interest and awareness about a product. Its primary aim is to channel traffic to the advertiser's website through diverse means (Alčaković et al., 2021). One of the foremost advantages of the Internet marketing is its potential to reach a vastly larger audience compared to traditional methods, thanks to the global reach of the Internet (Jović, 1999; Liu et al., 2013). Additionally, this marketing approach empowers organizations to focus on potential customers who are inclined towards sustainable consumer behaviour (Kurdi et al., 2022). Several online methods, including email marketing, social media marketing, text messaging, banner ads, and affiliate marketing, provide organizations with opportunities to engage consumers with sustainability in mind (Gvaramadze, 2022; Živković & Brdar, 2018). The Internet serves as a conduit for businesses to advertise, communicate with customers, and facilitate sustainable consumer behaviour (Brdar, 2023). A well-executed Internet strategy can profoundly impact the effectiveness of sustainability-focused marketing and product sales. The significance of the Internet marketing for sustainable business success arises from

the heavy reliance on the Internet by both businesses and customers, making it crucial for businesses to implement structured Internet marketing practices (Mathews et al., 2016; Živković & Brdar, 2018).

In the context of sustainability, social media plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer behaviour within the tourism domain (Cheng & Edwards, 2015; Pearson et al., 2016). It influences sustainable travel inspiration, the creation of authentic eco-friendly experiences, online booking with sustainability in mind, and the impact of influencers on sustainable travellers. Social networks also facilitate the sharing of sustainable travel experiences and reviews and enable destination management through sustainable engagement and interaction. This underscores the profound influence of social media on sustainability-conscious consumer behaviour in the tourism sector, emphasizing the need for destinations and tourism entities to adapt to evolving sustainability dynamics (Gaffar et al., 2020; Hadianfar, 2021; Shen et al., 2020).

2.2. Influencers in the Spotlight: Understanding Their Role in Modern Marketing

In today's digital age, influencers have become a dominant force in the realms of marketing, entertainment, and social influence. An influencer, broadly defined, is an individual who possesses the ability to sway the opinions, behaviour, and decisions of a substantial number of followers, often through various online platforms such as social media, blogs, or video content (Jin et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2022). The rise of influencers can be attributed to the evolving landscape of media consumption. Traditional advertising channels are no longer as effective as they once were (Hanekom & Scriven, 2002). Consumers are increasingly turning to social media and digital content for information, entertainment, and product recommendations (Umashankar et al., 2023). In this context, influencers offer a unique bridge between brands and consumers. Influencers come in various forms, each catering to specific niches and demographics. What sets them apart is their authenticity and relatability. Their followers often perceive them as trustworthy figures, as their recommendations and endorsements feel more genuine than traditional advertisements. Here are several classic categories of influencers:

- **Lifestyle Influencers:** These influencers share their everyday life experiences, including travel, fashion, food, family life, and more. Their audience follows them for inspiration and advice on improving their lifestyle (Gerrath & Usrey, 2020).
- **Beauty and Makeup Influencers:** These influencers are experts in makeup, skincare, and beauty. They provide tutorials, product reviews and tips for achieving specific looks (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).



- **Fashion Influencers:** Fashion influencers focus on style and clothing. They promote clothing brands, create fashion combinations and inspire their audience with their outfit choices (Quelhas-Brito et al., 2020).
- **Travel Influencers:** These influencers explore the world and share their travel adventures. They inspire their followers to explore new destinations, provide travel tips, and share beautiful photos and video content (Asdecker, 2022).
- **Fitness Influencers:** Fitness influencers promote a healthy lifestyle, exercise, and nutrition. They share workouts, recipes, and motivate their audience to take care of their physical health (Durau et al., 2022).
- **Food Influencers:** Food influencers are experts in food and culinary arts. They share recipes, restaurant recommendations, and photos of delicious dishes (Robinson & Field, 2015).
- **Gaming Influencers:** These influencers engage in video gaming and stream their gaming sessions. They attract an audience that shares a passion for gaming (Kim & Han, 2009).
- **Tech Influencers:** Tech influencers follow the latest technological trends, devices, and software. They provide reviews and advice on tech products (Trivedi & Sama, 2020).
- **Environmental Influencers:** Environmental influencers are dedicated to promoting sustainable practices, recycling, waste reduction, and everything related to protecting the planet (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023).

The power of influencers lies in their ability to create engaging and relatable content. They use their personal experiences, stories, and expertise to connect with their audience. Whether it's sharing their daily routines, providing product reviews, or documenting their travels, influencers offer a glimpse into their lives that resonates with their followers (Asdecker, 2022). For brands and businesses, influencers provide a direct channel to their target audience. Instead of broadcasting messages to a broad and often disinterested audience, they can collaborate with influencers who have already cultivated loyal and engaged followers within the desired demographic. This targeted approach yields higher engagement rates and a more significant return on investment (Jin et al., 2019).

3. SUSTAINABILITY SHAPERS: THE GREEN INFLUENCE OF TOURISM INDUSTRY INFLUENCERS

Travel influencers hold substantial influence over consumer behaviour in the tourism context, and their role is closely intertwined with sustainability considerations. In the digital age, social networks have been transformed into hubs of sustainable information and inspiration. Influencers have emerged as pivotal figures, engaging their target audience in ways that directly impact their sustainable travel preferences (Abou-Shouk & Hewedi, 2016; Seeler et al., 2019). Travel influencers primarily wield their influence through travel inspiration, crafting a compelling mix of visuals, videos, and narratives that showcase various adventures and sustainable experiences. They ignite a strong desire for sustainable travel by presenting viewers with transformative and eco-conscious journeys, aligning with the growing trend of sustainability (Kilipiri et al., 2023; Palazzo et al., 2021; Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020). Additionally, travel influencers play a pivotal role in shaping genuine and immersive sustainable experiences for modern-day tourists (Agyeiwaah et al., 2021; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In response to changing preferences, travellers increasingly seek to immerse themselves in local culture, explore lesser-known places, and embrace sustainability. Influencers facilitate this trend by connecting travellers with local communities, revealing authentic and sustainable experiences beyond traditional tourist routes (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020). Their digital narratives and storytelling techniques resonate strongly with eco-conscious travellers, guiding them towards sustainable exploration (Shen et al., 2020). Furthermore, travel influencers significantly influence travellers' sustainable choices regarding accommodation, dining venues, and activities during their trips (Lee et al., 2021). Their endorsements and reviews hold substantial weight in the decision-making process, acting as valuable social proof of the sustainability and authenticity of destinations and service providers. This influence is particularly potent among discerning travellers who actively seek reliable information and authentic sustainable experiences (Kilipiri et al., 2023; Latif et al., 2020). Furthermore, influencer-driven promotions contribute to the long-term perception of a destination. Positive portrayals and reviews foster a favourable image, sustaining interest over time and solidifying the destination's reputation as an attractive and sustainable place for travellers (Jun & Yi, 2020). Beyond traditional advertising, influencers inject authenticity and enthusiasm into their content, building trust and credibility among their audience (Lee et al., 2021).



Influencers can significantly impact sustainable tourist behaviour in several ways:

- **Inspiration for Sustainable Travel:** Influencers often promote destinations and experiences that are environmentally friendly and responsible. Through their content, they can inspire their followers to consider sustainable travel options, such as eco-tourism, visiting national parks, or staying in environmentally certified accommodations (Sultan et al., 2021).
- **Education on Sustainability:** Influencers can act as educators on sustainability by providing information about environmental challenges in specific destinations, offering guidance on proper behaviour towards nature and culture, and raising awareness about environmental conservation (Caldevilla-Domínguez et al., 2021).
- **Recommendations for Sustainable Choices:** Through their recommendations and reviews, influencers can steer tourists toward sustainable options, including eco-friendly tours, locally sourced food, and other activities that support local communities and the natural environment (Kilipiri et al., 2023).
- **Promotion of Waste Reduction and Recycling:** Influencers can encourage tourists to practice waste reduction and recycling during their travels, contributing to the preservation of nature and reducing the negative impact of tourism on the environment (Cao et al., 2023).
- **Advocating Responsible Animal Interaction:** Influencers can inform tourists about ethical animal interactions during their travels, promoting visits to reserves and conservation centres instead of activities that involve the exploitation of wildlife (Zhang et al., 2023).
- **Engagement with Local Culture and Communities:** Influencers often explore local culture and support local communities. Through their content, they can encourage tourists to engage in sustainable tourism activities that benefit the local population (Kilipiri et al., 2023).
- **Encouragement of Low Environmental Impact Travel:** Influencers can promote ways of travel that reduce the ecological footprint, such as using public transportation instead of private vehicles or staying in accommodations that practise environmentally sustainable measures (Cao et al., 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

The influence of travel influencers on consumer behaviour within the tourism context is not only significant but also holds a direct connection to sustainability considerations. Through inspiring content, authentic sustainability recommendations, and direct engagement with their dedicated audience, influencers exert a profound and widespread impact on traveller preferences. Simultaneously, they cultivate a propensity for exploring sustainable destinations and participating in eco-conscious experiences. Travel influencers play a vital role in promoting sustainable tourism by showcasing eco-friendly destinations, responsible travel practices, and sustainable experiences. Their ability to narrate authentic sustainability stories resonates deeply with sustainability-conscious travellers, encouraging them to make responsible choices during their journeys. In an era where sustainability is a growing concern, influencers have the potential to drive travellers towards more sustainable and responsible travel decisions, ultimately contributing to the conservation of natural and cultural resources. Furthermore, their role as advocates for sustainable tourism brands and destinations amplifies this influence. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, partnerships with travel influencers become increasingly essential for tourism enterprises seeking to gain a competitive edge and attract discerning and sustainability-minded travellers. This area offers significant potential for further research, providing an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the intricate mechanisms underpinning the influence of travel influencers and their pivotal role in shaping patterns of sustainable tourism consumption and the industry. Understanding how influencers can effectively promote sustainability in tourism is crucial for the industry's long-term viability and positive impact on the environment and local communities.

5. LITERATURE

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