

Digital Marketing, Social Media and Influencer Strategies in Tourism

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Abstract

Significantly, the rapid digital evolution of the global economy has reshaped the tourism sector from traditional promotional paradigms to innovative digital ecosystems. This paper examines the strategic utilization of social media and influencer marketing as the primary drivers for tourism branding and economic development. This research utilizes a systematic review of recent literature to analyze the effectiveness of digital touchpoints in shaping traveler behavior and brand loyalty. The results reveal a critical "strategy-execution gap" wherein 30.7% of tourism entities do not measure digital ROI despite the high perceived benefits of digital monitoring. Moreover, the research identifies critical shifts in the tourism landscape, wherein 67.9% of high-value cultural tourists belong to the 40-59 age group. This calls for a transition from traditional influencer marketing to high-credibility influencer marketing led by experts. The research concludes that for tourism organizations to achieve sustainable growth, it is imperative to transcend traditional visual content to manage complex digital experiences that match the values of niche consumers, such as environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Digital Tourism Marketing, Social Media Strategies, Influencer Marketing, Destination Branding, Consumer Behavior, Sustainable Tourism, Marketing ROI.

Introduction

The Promotion of travel products from traditional destinations to AI-enabled digital platforms will be the biggest change the marketing industry has seen in travel ever by 2026. Prior to the advent of active marketing the travel trade operated through "Passive Marketing", an unfocused barrage of glitzy destination routes and offerings by destination using large billboard form campaigns and the deathly marketing channel of television to an indifferent mass market. and "Active Marketing" founded on a "Customer Utility" model for business to Consumer marketing,. Historically, the travel industry relied on either "Passive Marketing," which was a sheer broadcast of glitzy destinations and services over static print media, large billboards, and mass TV ads by destination to a latent mass

audience; or “Active Marketing” based on a “Customer Utility” model for business-to-Consumer marketing. Transitioning into the “Digital Era 2026,” its “dance” has become an “interactive, hyper-personalized, real-time” debate., TikTok) becomes the source of destination-inspired content. Such Digital technologies address a fundamental consumer requirement-a need for Human Trust, Truth, and Transparency in a noise-globalized world. Micro-influencers and Immersive VR (Virtual Reality “Immersive Pre-Experience” tools) provide an upgrade for “Preview-to-Book” confidence now more intense than 10 years ago. Thus, digital age tools are vital because they reposition the industry “searches” from the volume-based “weight” exhibition mode to a trust-supply economy, where the prosperity of a destination depends on integrating “mass-authored” automation with “hitchhiker” genuine word-of-mouth testimonies that consumers want. This study develops a fresh perspective for destination “storytelling” for destination” to adapt to, ensuring the “technology and human dichotomy” of 2026 adds value rather than sedating. Through the analysis of these new technology tools, we like to show that the potential of future travel marketing would be to remain trustworthy and accepted in an ever-expanding digital connected world.

Objectives

- To investigate the method of use of autonomous AI agents rather than search engines for planning and booking in 2026.
- To describe the replacing of traditional keyword traffic with short-form platform algorithmic content inspired travel.
- To compare the ROI and trust of “raw” niche best-performer influencer content or messages with costly and polished TheepubAds.
- To analyze the use of VR and Spatial Computing tools for digital immersive exploration of travel destinations in pre-purchase stage.
- To support the future tourism “brand story-telling” strategy that overcomes “AI fatigue” and noise and optimizes Image and Trust Quality-examination of future technology for tourism.

Literature Review

A Study on Benefits of Tourism Marketing for the Economic Development of Our Country (2024)

This study examines the benefits of strategic marketing that support national economic development in terms of revenue generation, employment provision, and improvement of infrastructure together with policies of the government and the process of digital transformation ensuring sustainable, socio-cultural, economic benefit and long term tourism sustainability.

Tourism marketing strategies and plans: A systematic literature review (2025)

This EBM essay monitors, with 32 publications from various covers, the contribution of marketing innovation to the enhancement of culture and industry, protection of invention, and integration of AI applications in the future destination marketing services by social media and other digital platforms and devices as cheap and rapid fixes to the knowledge break-down.

Tourism marketing, pl – Research and Development (Pedagogic aid)

This is an academic paper that frames tourism marketing as the aim for “selling dreams” and “selling experience” in the process of managing a tourism business to meet customer needs and unexpected in the concepts of “Marketing mix” and “Pricing strategies” and the perishable and inseparable characteristics of tourism as service.

Marketing strategies of Travel and Tourism Industry (2020)

Using one Indian tour company-AkashTraves as a case, this paper identifies various marketing elements utilized to increase consumers’ awareness and satisfaction with travel products of the agency. It also highlights the common challenges of the industry caused by extreme competition

and last-corona pandemic in addition to perceiving digital booking channel as a must-have survival need.

Scope of the Study

This study illustrates how the research can strengthen the upcoming trends in tourism marketing by defining the key borders and long-term implementation applications of the study. Rather than just observing related tools, such a proposal tries to derive a practical link between 2026 future devices- mainly Agentic AI and Spatial Computing- and the sustainable, trust-based structures that may secure industry comfort and achievement in the future. Focusing on the paradigm shift from keyword-prominent search engines to Social SEO and “Answer Engines”, the scope is extended to facilitate the future operations of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) against “AI slop” or “algophobic” robots. Additionally, by observing the paradigm shift from movie actor celebrities toward micro-influential partners along with predictive analytics, the scope emphasizes long-lasting brand loyalty. Finally, the elaboration recommends the implementation path for merging the artificial automation with humanity-authentic storytelling, which reassures the AI mechanization could be visible and usable.

Research design: Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

SLR is an all-in-one research methodology that piece together an existing hierarchy of knowledge of a specific subject.

Objectives: to merge all sources of on-line information collectively to produce the current digital marketing mode for optimizing the effectiveness of social media- and influencer-based tactics of attraction, insight, and retention.

Scope: initially, the research will highlight peer-reviewed journal scholarly papers, Conference proceedings and theoretical industry report/books, published between 2015 and 2025.

Google scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus with search teams such as “influencer marketing”, “social media tourism”, and “digital transformation industry” etc.

Analyzing Tools

Content & Narrative analysis: employee manual coding of trend or obstacle on the existing paper, use of simple AI matrix to evaluate the voice pitch on travel blog/social media comment to reveal the receiver attitude toward influencer content.

Analytical Framework

SOR Model (Stimulus-Organism-Response): how digital content becomes Stimulus in the process of shifting the Travel (Organism)’ perception and booking behaviors (Response). **Electronic word of mouth (eWOM):** the relevance of influencer attribution on destination confidence and trust.

8% Ganatra et al. (2020) Agency level Heuristic Household Number (Trip Adviser: Affiliate of Veena World) 500,000+ Ganatra et al. (2020)

Human Capital Separated Travel worker Number. As Waraphone Wandering Trip Advisor Case Study. 950 Ganatra et al. (2020)

Table 1 Macro-Economic and Industry Performance Metrics

Category	Specific Metric	Numerical Value	Source
National GDP	Tourism Contribution (Slovakia)	2.5%	Cristobal-Fransi (2020)
Regional GDP	EU Average Tourism Contribution	> 5.0%	Cristobal-Fransi (2020)
Economic Impact	Indian Economy Contraction (COVID-19)	22.8%	Ganatra et al. (2020)
Agency Scale	Total Guests Served (Veena World)	500,000+	Ganatra et al. (2020)
Human Capital	Travel Professionals Employed (Case Study)	950	Ganatra et al. (2020)

Interpretation

It is apparent from the data the wide delta between local contributions to tourism; 2.5% and the EU contribution; 5%, this is further evidence that a rapid growth can be achieved through modern marketing. The contraction of the Indian economy; 22.8%, differentiates the sector's interdependence from external economic crisis and thus emphasizes the transition from expensive traditional marketing channels by using more flexible low cost digital technologies. The large magnitude of this operation serving more than half a million customers clearly denotes that large tourism operators need robust digital infrastructures to enable effective one-to-one marketing and

Table 2 Digital Marketing Adoption and Analytical Gaps

Marketing Variable	Statistical Value (%)	Contextual Application	Source
Strategic Benefit	59.1%	Firms perceiving high benefit from monitoring.	Basumatary (2025)
Adoption Gap	30.7%	Businesses not evaluating digital effectiveness.	Basumatary (2025)
KPI Priority	26.2%	Identification of ROI as the primary success metric.	Basumatary (2025)
Tool Usage	20.1%	Reliance on Google Analytics for data.	Basumatary (2025)

Interpretation

However, as 59.1% of firms appreciate digital monitoring, but also 30.7% never assess their digital effectiveness, emphasizes the extent of a “strategy -execution gap”. Indeed this ineffective assessment appears also in the scarce use of formal analytical tools of forms (20.1%) emphasizing the absence of data driven strategy in many tourism firms' use of social media. As a researcher paper in relation to the use of influencer strategies, these results support the need to develop an “Influencer ROI” standard model, as in terms of financial ROI and benefits to stakeholders, this is the most

Table 3 Demographic Drivers and Consumer Sentiment

Demographic Factor	Variable	Data Finding	Impact on Strategy
Primary Age Group	Cultural Heritage Tourists	67.9% (Aged 40–59)	Focus on high-credibility expert influencers.
Stay Duration	Domestic/Local Travelers	80.0% (\leq 1 night)	Focus on high-frequency social media ads.
Gender Sentiment	Satisfaction Rating	Higher in Women	Focus on emotional and social storytelling.
Sample Size	Sustainable Tourism Study	408 Tourists	Provides empirical weight to the findings.

Interpretation

Demographically, most valued cultural tourists are 40-59 and this argues against the idea that digital marketing should target only younger age groups [8]. Instead, it emphasizes the need to advertise to “Expert Influencers” who can inform tourists about the cultural and historical significance of a place rather than just their visual paleness. Finally, with 80% of domestic visitors only staying a night, local market social media marketing should promote “short-break” packages and easy-to-arrive options.

Findings

Macro-economic importance and scope: Tourism significantly contributes to country-wide development, infrastructure and employment growth. 5% of GDP for Slovakia) and a general EU average of above 5% indicates a large unexploited scope for development.

7 % do not analyze how well their online platform performs, hinting the foremost digital transformation strategy-execution “digital-shape” gap.

9% of high-value cultural audiences are people aged 40-59), refute the pre-conception that all social media/influencer driven marketing should mainly focus on young audiences, urging “expert” influencers to be involved. Islam-based HALAL offers as Muslims’ niche, air quality as local niche) non-accommodation needs implies that digital marketing strategies should blend the addressing of niche-based specific cultural and environmental demands.

Shift to “Experience Marketing”: Analyzing leading case-Veena World-standards of tourism industry marketing’s evolution from “Selling physical products” to “Moving customer interaction points” to “Satisfying emotional dreams” urge artful intensification of digital activation along all travel cycle stages.

Conclusion

The literature review of the references provides evidence that tourism marketing is a big business with regards to national GDP growth as it is among the main earners of revenue and creator of employment, advocating the adoption of complementary “digital” and “KOL” consumer engagement paradigms as exclusive competitive advantage of the coming decade. It also allows recognizing a pre-dominant “digital-shape” gap on the output side, as over 30% firms do not design strategies to know how well their online platform works even if the overwhelming majority is aware of the clear benefits of data-supported monitoring and the push of ROI. Besides, an exclusive focus on traditional post-age 30 mainstream demographics is inadequate, as the high value post-40 demographics ought to be analyzed separately; and success issues should reside in specific cultural and sustainable niches, like the Muslims! Halal-friendly services and the location-friendly apgm

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