
TRAVEL INFLUENCERS AND INFLUENCER MARKETING IN TOURISM: THE CASE OF LIBYA

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Abstract

Influencer marketing has become an increasingly popular tool for promoting tourism, but the use of this strategy in Libya is not well understood and it is not widely implemented. The current study is meant to investigate the existing situation of influencer marketing in the tourism industry in Libya, a country that is currently facing political and economic challenges after the Arabic spring. A qualitative research design was used, with the utilization of online interviews as the primary source of data collection. The participants in the study were selected through a random sampling technique and included two travel influencers, two tourism professionals, and four travel agency managers. The interviews were conducted in the form of online video meetings which they were held through the google meet application and the data collected was scrutinized and then grouped accordingly using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the current use of influencer marketing in promoting tourism in Libya is limited. Some participants reported that they have not yet implemented influencer marketing in their tourism promotions, while others have recently begun working with a few travel influencers on Instagram. The study also found that the main challenges faced by participants in implementing influencer marketing in their tourism promotions are identifying the right influencers and measuring the success of influencer marketing campaigns. Participants reported difficulties in finding influencers with a large following who are also knowledgeable about and passionate about Libyan tourism. This aligns with the literature which indicates that recognizing suitable influencers is one of the main challenges of influencer marketing.

Keywords: Tourism, Influencer, Marketing, Libya.

Introduction

1.1 Definition of Influencer Marketing

Indeed, influencer marketing is demarcated by many scholars and researchers, one of which is Carter (2016) who says it is "a rapidly growing industry that attempts to promote products or increase brand awareness through content spread by social media users who are considered to be influential". This means that companies and marketers use individuals who possess a hefty base of supporters and positive influence on social media platforms to promote their products or increase brand awareness. Furthermore, Amagsila et al.

(2022) explains that influencer marketing relies on technology to amplify word-of-mouth by working with individuals who have a large reach and are relevant and resonant with the brand. This can include both unpaid micro-influencers and paid endorsements from macro-influencers, brand advocates, and brand ambassadors. Jin et al. (2021) describes influencer marketing as a strategy to build mutually beneficial relationships with relevant individuals through the use of social media platforms. This means that the relationship between the marketer and the influencer is not one-sided, but rather a partnership where both parties benefit.

According to Swant (2016), influencer marketing uses individuals with a strong reputation and huge base of followers on social media, rather than just well-known celebrities, to promote products or services. These individuals, known as "handheld names", have a significant influence on their followers through their online presence which means that influencer marketing is not limited to celebrities, but also includes individuals who have built a reputation and following on social media. Emphasizing the importance of social media platforms and fanbase websites, Krasniak (2016) hearsays that the most important platforms for influencer marketing are Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, and Snapchat. Dwivedi et al. (2021) stated that there are a number of important metrics of influence in social media. The most important ones include the size of an individual's audience, how often they post, and engagement rate. These metrics are useful for companies and marketers because they help them determine whether or not an individual's posts are having an effect on their target audience.

1.2 Importance of Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has been gaining traction as a powerful tool for businesses. Studies show that a significant portion of consumers have made a purchase after seeing a product endorsed by an influencer or social media activist on multiple social platforms such as Instagram or YouTube (Gretzel, 2018). Marketers are turning to influencers for a variety of reasons, including increasing brand loyalty, expanding brand visibility, expanding to reach different types of people with different tastes and preferences, boosting brand's commercial variety, and boosting sales revenue (Nanji, 2017). Moreover, the rise in ad-blocking and ad-avoidance among consumers is another reason for the increasing use of influencer marketing. Recent research also suggests that influencer marketing is becoming an essential part of social media marketing for many companies. For instance, a survey conducted on marketing professionals revealed that the majority of them hired online social influencers and bloggers as part of their essential marketing strategies in 2016, mainly to reach different or hard-to-reach audiences (Krasniak, 2016). Influencer marketing industry and professionalism network value is in fact projected to be estimated around \$10 billion, and it is expected to continue to increase steadily in the forthcoming years (Haenlein et al., 2020).

1.3 Influencer Marketing Practices

In most recent times, there has been a considerable surge in hiring social media influencers as a marketing strategy in the travel and tourism industry. The effectiveness of this tactic is due to the importance of word-of-mouth in the travel industry (George et al., 2021). As blogs became important sources of information for travelers, tourism marketers began working with bloggers early on (Yetimoğlu & Uğurlu, 2020). With the rise of digital connectivity and international openness, the travel and tourism sector has seen positive growth trends. According to the 2019 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, the sector represented 7% of global trade in 2019 and is expected to continue to grow. However, measuring the success of influencer marketing campaigns can be a challenge for marketers. Identifying the right influencers and determining the return on investment are some of the main difficulties faced in this tactic (Lee et al., 2021). To overcome

these challenges, marketers can use tools such as blog search engines, social media influencer ranking tools, and performance measurement tools like Traackr, Snaplytics, and content monetization platforms (Gretzel, 2018). These tools can help track audience reach, impressions, engagement, sentiment, quality of content, and conversion rates to determine the success of an influencer campaign.

1.4 Influencer Marketing in Travel and Tourism

There has been a significant increase in the use of influencer marketing within the travel and tourism industry in recent years, as social media platforms have become increasingly popular among consumers. Many travel influencers have built a large following on social media and are considered a valuable asset for tourism marketers. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report of 2019 showed an increase in air transportation, digital connectivity, and international openness globally in 2019, highlighting the importance of digital T&T services. This is evident as the internet has become easily accessible and travel has become more affordable for many consumers. As a result, the tourism sector continues to show positive growth and represented 7% of global trade in 2019. The use of influencers in this industry can help to tap into the power of word-of-mouth and reach targeted audiences, ultimately leading to increased brand advocacy, awareness, and sales.

1.5 Aim of the research

The aim of this research is to examine the current state of influencer marketing in the tourism industry in Libya, a country that is currently facing political and economic challenges after the changes been done post the Arabic spring.

Research methodology

This study adopts a qualitative design, using interviews as the primary data collection method. Participants were selected through a random sampling technique. The interviews were conducted in the form of online video meetings using google meet platform, and the data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis.

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were selected through a random sampling technique. The sample included two travel influencers, two tourism professionals, and four travel agency managers.

2.2 Random sampling technique

The participants of this study were chosen through the use of random sampling method. This method was chosen as it is considered to be the most convenient for the current study. The goal of random sampling is to ensure that the results obtained from the sample are representative of the entire population. It is a technique in which each individual from the population has an equal chance of being selected (Sharma, 2017). A list of travel influencers, tourism professionals, and travel agency managers was created and a sample of eight participants was randomly chosen from the list.

2.3 Data collection method

In this study, interviews were used to collect data. Interviews are a good way to gather information because they help researchers to obtain clear explanations, gain better understanding of the subject and explore their opinions, behavior and experiences in more depth (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interviews were conducted in the form of online video meetings using google meet platform. The questions were designed to

elicit information about the participants' experience and knowledge of influencer marketing in the tourism industry in Libya. The interview questions covered topics such as the participants' current use of influencer marketing, the encounters they come across while trying to utilize influencer marketing, and their perceptions of the potential of influencer marketing in promoting Libyan tourism.

2.3 Data analysis

The data collected from the interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method used to identify patterns or themes within a dataset. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying the underlying patterns and relationships in a large data set by writing each related group of ideas into its own paragraph. This way, it's easier for readers to follow the path through the analysis of details to reach specific conclusions (Lochmiller, 2021). The analysis was conducted by first copying and interpreting the interview data and then analyzing through it multiple times to categorize and highlight any key themes. The themes were then grouped together and coded. The coded data was then used to create a summary of the findings. The data was analyzed manually by the researcher, with the goal of identifying patterns, themes and insights that arose from the data.

Findings and discussion

3.1 Current Use of Influencer Marketing in Promoting Tourism in Libya

The study finds that the current use of influencer marketing in promoting tourism in Libya is limited. Some participants reported that they have not yet implemented influencer marketing in their tourism promotions, while others have recently begun working with a few travel influencers on Instagram. These findings align with previous research which suggests that influencer marketing is still an emerging practice in the tourism industry, with many marketers experimenting with it and only a small percentage having integrated influencers across all marketing activities (Nanji, 2017). Additionally, some previous studies have shown that calculating the revenue of investment of an influencer or social activist campaign remains challenging (eMarketer, 2015).

3.2 Challenges in Implementing Influencer Marketing in Tourism Promotions in Libya

The study finds that the main challenges faced by participants in implementing influencer marketing in their tourism promotions are choosing the suitable social influencers and measuring the success of influencer marketing campaigns. Participants reported difficulties in finding influencers with a large following who are also knowledgeable about and passionate about Libyan tourism. This aligns with previous research which indicates that spotting the suitable social activists and influencers is one of the main challenges of influencer marketing, often achieved through the use of tools like blog search engines and social capital ranking tools (eMarketer, 2015). Additionally, participants cited difficulties in measuring the success of their influencer marketing campaigns, including tracking the impact of an influencer's posts on tourism bookings or website traffic. Previous research has also identified the challenge of measuring the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns. Marketers are currently using various methods such as QR codes, coupons, and trackable links to assess the impact of influencer activities on product purchases. They are also utilizing tools like Traackr and Snaplytics to gather performance data (Gretzel, 2018).

3.3 Perception of the Potential of Influencer Marketing in Promoting Libyan Tourism

The findings from the third question suggest that the participants perceive influencer marketing as having potential for promoting Libyan tourism. They acknowledge the power of influencers' large and engaged

following on social media to reach new audiences and increase awareness of tourist destinations. However, they also recognize the importance of being strategic in the selection of influencers, by aligning them with the brand and message of Libyan tourism (De Veirman et al., 2016). This aligns with previous research that emphasizes the need for authenticity and relevance when selecting influencers for marketing campaigns (Radey, 2015; Krasniak, 2016).

3.4 Methods of Identifying and Selecting Influencers for Promoting Libyan Tourism

The findings from the fourth question indicate that the participants use a combination of social media research and content analysis to identify and select influencers for promoting Libyan tourism. They specifically look for influencers with a large following and strong engagement rate, as well as those whose niche and content align with their brand and message (e.g. if they want to promote a specific tourist destination, they look for influencers who have previously visited and shared content about that destination). They also mention reaching out to potential influencers to gauge their interest and availability for working with them. This aligns with previous studies that suggest using tools like blog search engines and social media ranking platforms, as well as considering factors like niche and alignment with brand and message, in the process of identifying and selecting influencers (e.g. Neoreach, 2016; eMarketer, 2015).

3.5 Successful Influencer Marketing Campaigns in Libyan Tourism

The findings from this question suggest that the respondents have had experience implementing successful influencer marketing campaigns in the past. These campaigns involved working with influencers who possess considerable amount of followings on social media platforms and a niche that aligns with the brand and message of the tourism promotions. The influencers were used to promote specific tourist destinations in Libya and their content received a lot of engagement from their followers, resulting in increased interest and bookings for those destinations. This is in fact similar to previous studies that have found influencer marketing to be a decisive method of increasing business awareness and guiding lines of sales (Swant, 2016; Kirkpatrick, 2016; Nanji, 2017).

3.6 Measuring the Success of Influencer Marketing Campaigns in Libyan Tourism

In summary, the findings from this question indicate that the participants measure the success of their influencer marketing campaigns by tracking metrics such as engagement rate, reach, website traffic, and bookings or enquiries for specific tourist destinations promoted by influencers. They also conduct surveys with influencers and their followers to gather feedback and gauge their perception of the brand and the campaign. Accordingly, such findings are in fact in terms with prior research that has highlighted the significance of measuring the performance of influencer campaigns in order to determine their effectiveness (eMarketer, 2015) and the utilization of tools such as Traackr, Snaplytics, or platforms like rewardStyle to track performance indicators.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study aimed to scrutinize the current situation of influencer marketing in the tourism industry in Libya. Through qualitative interviews with travel influencers, tourism professionals, and travel agency managers, the study found that the current use of influencer marketing in promoting tourism in Libya is limited. Some participants reported that they have not yet implemented influencer marketing in their tourism promotions, while others have recently begun working with a few travel influencers on

Instagram. The study also identified the main challenges faced by participants in implementing influencer marketing as identifying the right influencers and measuring the success of influencer marketing campaigns. Participants reported difficulties in finding influencers with large followers who are also knowledgeable about and passionate about Libyan tourism. Additionally, measuring the success of their influencer marketing campaigns, including tracking the impact of an influencer's posts on tourism bookings or website traffic was also a challenge. However, the study also found that participants perceive influencer marketing as having potential for promoting Libyan tourism, acknowledging the power of influencers' large and engaged following on social media to reach new audiences and increase awareness of tourist destinations.

The study also found that participants used a combination of social media research and content analysis to identify and select influencers for promoting Libyan tourism. They specifically look for influencers with a large following and strong engagement rate, as well as those whose niche and content align with their brand and message. The study also found that the participants have had experience implementing successful influencer marketing campaigns in the past and measure the success of their influencer marketing campaigns by tracking metrics such as engagement rate, reach, website traffic, and bookings or enquiries for specific tourist destinations promoted by influencers.

Overall, the study highlights the potential of influencer marketing in promoting Libyan tourism, as well as the challenges faced by practitioners in identifying the right influencers and measuring the success of influencer marketing campaigns. The current study suggests commencing more studies to better understand the effectiveness of influencer marketing in the tourism industry in Libya, as well as strategies for identifying and selecting the right influencers and measuring the impact of influencer marketing campaign.

Recommendations

Reviewing what have been found in this current study, there are a number of areas that future research could explore so that it can acquire a deeper understanding of influencer marketing in the tourism industry in Libya which the researcher is listing hereunder.

1. Study the effectiveness of influencer marketing in promoting Libyan tourism specifically, by tracking metrics such as engagement rate, reach, website traffic, and bookings or enquiries for specific tourist destinations promoted by influencers.
2. Investigate how to identify and select the right influencers for promoting Libyan tourism, by exploring the use of tools available on the web, social media ranking platforms and considering all related factors.
3. Analyze the challenges and barriers to implementing influencer marketing in Libya, specifically in the tourism industry, and explore potential solutions for overcoming these challenges.
4. Investigate the effect of influencer marketing on the overall image of the Libyan tourism by conducting surveys and focus groups with influencers and their followers.
5. Study the long-term effects of influencer marketing on the industry of tourism in Libya, by tracking the impact of influencer campaigns over time and evaluating their impact on the overall tourism industry.

Overall, the results of the current study suggest that influencer marketing is indeed can be considered as a great method for promoting Libyan tourism, but there are challenges that need to be addressed in order to effectively implement and measure the success of these campaigns. Further research in these areas will help providing depth and understanding of the use of influencer marketing in the tourism industry in Libya.

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