THE USE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING IN MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF PLACES

Anna ŁASZKIEWICZ

University of Lodz, Faculty of Management; anna.laszkiewicz @uni.lodz.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-6202-6239

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to identify the use of influencer marketing in place communication.

Design/methodology/approach: For this purpose, a systematic literature review was conducted using Scopus and Web of Science databases.

Findings: A total of 28 articles were identified. Finally, after rejecting duplicates and publications that did not meet the established criteria, the content of 9 articles was analysed. The main thematic threads and research methods were presented and leading journals and countries addressing the analysed issues were identified.

Research limitations/implications: The analysis only considers publications in English, which has the effect of limiting the number of publications analysed.

Practical implications: The results show a small number of publications dedicated to this topic. The phenomenon of influencer marketing is relatively new and some of the social media platforms have been established over the last few years. This makes it clear that, despite the great popularity of influencers as brand ambassadors or creators worth including in building marketing communications, the topic still needs to be analysed, both on a practical and research basis.

Originality/value: This is the first literature review focused on the issues of place marketing and influencer marketing as activities that can have a mutually beneficial impact on promoted tourism destinations. The results of the conducted analysis may be of interest to both researchers of the analysed issue and practitioners, including in particular governmental and local governmental organisations responsible for the promotion of places.

Keywords: influencer marketing, destinations marketing, promotion of places, literature review.

Category of the paper: Literature review.

1. Introduction

The marketing of tourist destinations, which for the purpose of this article will be defined broadly as place marketing, has experienced significant adversity over the last few years. The main source of problems in the tourism industry has been the months-long restrictive lockdown policy caused by the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has caused many restrictions and hindrances in the area of tourism. These were due to top-down restrictions imposed by individual countries on movement options. An additional factor influencing the restriction of tourism was the attitudes of consumers, among whom there was fear for their own and their loved ones' health and lives, fear of infection and long-term exclusion from work. The pandemic period fostered the transfer of a significant amount of activity to the internet space and triggered more intensive communication in the social media space directed at sharing private experiences and building connections and relationships. Tourist destinations began to incorporate in their communication strategy the activities conducted in the internet space on a much larger scale and also to increasingly mark and promote their presence in the social media space.

At the same time, consumers, increasingly familiar with technology and with access to ever more interesting and engaging tools and forms of communication through social media, are increasingly willing to make their purchasing decisions based on the recommendations of people known to them only or mainly from their activity on social media. These people can be called online creators, celebrities or influencers. It is based on the involvement of these personalities influencing their followers that the concept of influencer marketing was developed. Influencer marketing is defined as a strategy in which online influencers are engaged by businesses and organisations to promote specific products to their observing audiences on social media, seeking to use their unique assets to promote their offerings (Leung et al., 2020). They are therefore personalities whose influence on the decisions of others stems from their authority, knowledge and position in the community and also the quality of the relationships that connect community members. The combination of both areas, i.e. place marketing and influencer marketing, prompted an attempt to identify if and for what purpose various tourism-oriented destinations popularise their presence and promote the values associated with the promoted places within the framework of place marketing using this relatively new concept of influencer marketing.

While there are a number of publications on the use of social media in the promotion of places referring to the strategy of DMOs (Destination Management Organisations), the cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects of place promotion as well as issues related to user-generated content (Tran, Rudolf, 2022), there is a lack of review articles combining both ideas of influencer marketing and destination branding and promotion. The aim of this article is therefore to identify the current state of knowledge in the area of using the concept of influencer marketing in destination promotion and to evaluate the existing literature addressing this issue. Based on the analysis, research gaps will be identified and directions for further research will be proposed.

The literature review conducted has important implications for marketing research and practice. Firstly, an overview of publications up to the time of the analysis is provided and the key issues raised by the authors are grouped together. This is also, to the author's knowledge, the first summary of existing research linking influencer marketing issues to the idea of place promotion. In addition, based on existing research in this area, the author identifies potential directions for further research that can provide a starting point for both practitioners and academic researchers.

2. Methods

In order to identify international literature addressing the issues of place communication and influencer marketing, a systematic literature review was conducted using leading academic databases: Web of Science and SCOPUS. The guideline PRISMA - Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (Page et al., 2021) was used in the conducted systematic literature review.

A systematic literature review was conducted in 2022 and the enquiry considered both areas, i.e. place brands and influencer marketing. Place brands were defined at the level of country brands, cities, regions, villages and places in general. The query referring to Influencer marketing included the terms influencer marketing and social media influencer, as well as the names of social media platforms (see Table 1). Keywords were searched in the sections: title, abstract, keywords defined in the article.
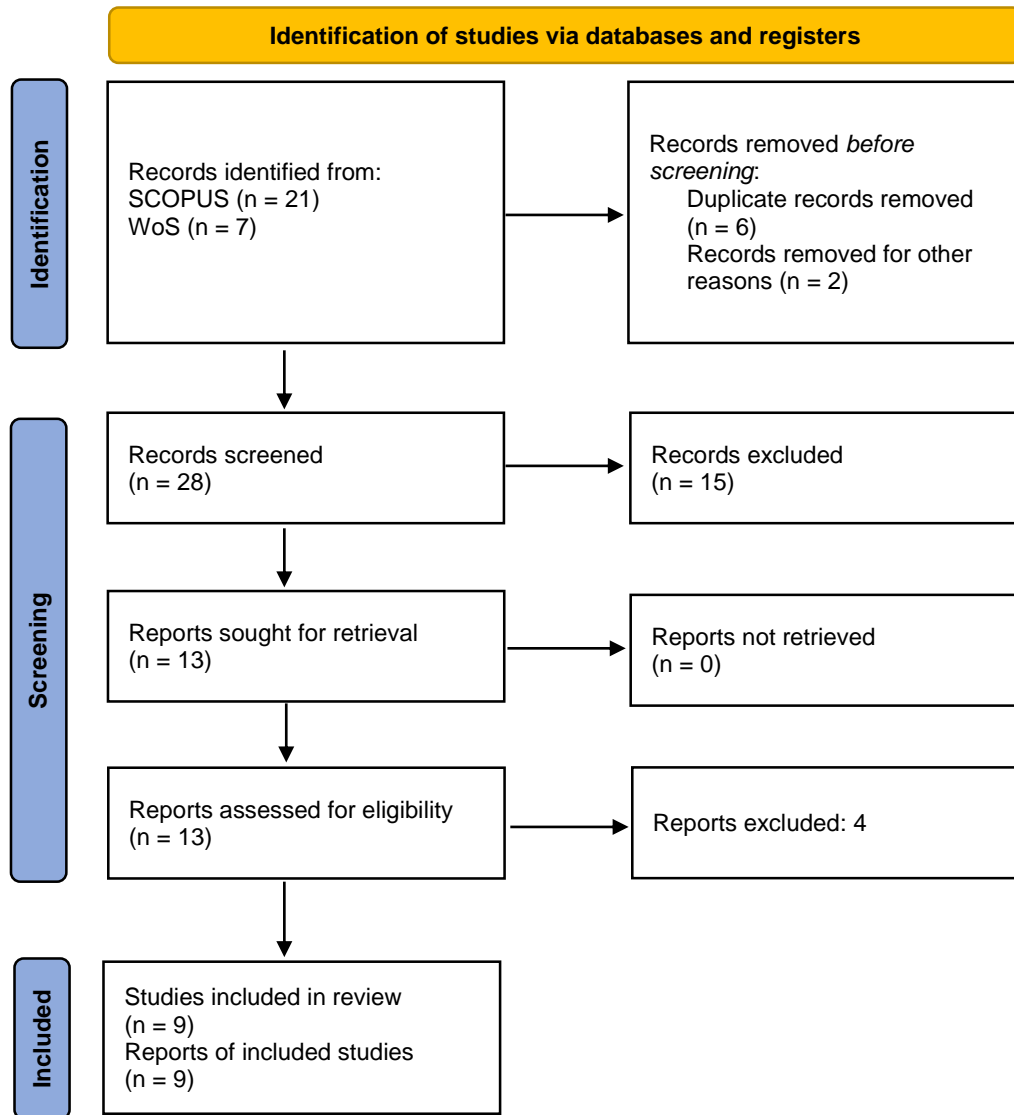
Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram.

Source: Page, McKenzie, Bossuyt, Boutron, Hoffmann, Mulrow et al., 2021.

Table 1.
Search queries on SCOPUS and Web of Science databases

Database	Search Query
SCOPUS	(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("destination brand *" OR "nation * brand *" OR "cit * brand *" OR "region * brand *" OR "countr * brand *" OR "place brand *") AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("influencer marketing" OR "social media influencer" OR "Facebook" OR "Instagram" OR "Twitter" OR "Youtube" OR "Tiktok")) AND LANGUAGE (English) AND DOCTYPE (ar) AND SUBJAREA (busi)) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2014))
Web from Science	TS=((("destination brand *" OR "nation * brand *" OR "cit * brand *" OR "region * brand *" OR "countr * brand *" OR "place brand *") AND ("influencer marketing" OR "social media influencer" OR "Facebook" OR "Instagram" OR "Twitter" OR "Youtube" OR "Tiktok"))) and 2022 or 2021 or 2020 or 2019 or 2018 or 2017 or 2016 or 2015 or 2014 or 2012 (Publication Years) and Article (Document Types) and Business Economics (Research Areas) and English (Languages)

Source: own study.

Articles published after 2014 up to and including 2022 were searched. However, it should be noted that data were extracted in August/September and not all publications included in the database in 2022 were therefore included in the query. Peer-reviewed articles published in academic journals were searched, excluding articles published in languages other than English. A total of 28 publications were identified. The search results were reduced to publications in Business and Economics.

The publications thus acquired in both databases were checked for duplicates and the articles were then scanned for a match to the query. In the end, only nine articles were qualified. The articles that were rejected at this stage included influencer terms that did not relate to influencer marketing, the phrase 'influencer marketing' in the titles of publications included in the bibliography or social media names that did not relate to influencer marketing.
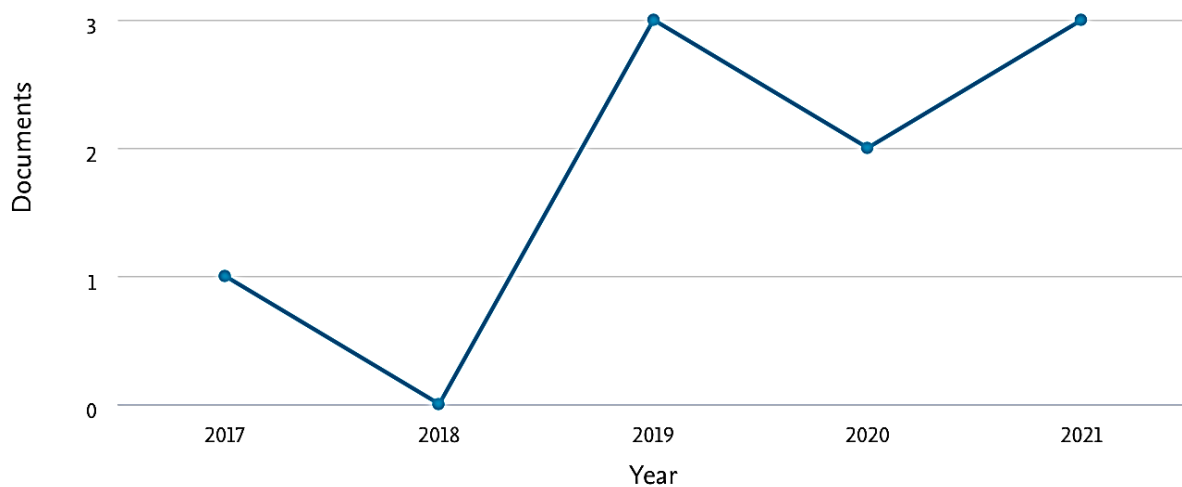

Figure 2. Number of publications in the period 2017-2022.

Looking at the breakdown by country of published articles, it is apparent that there is interest in this topic within the European Union. The United States and India also appeared in the list (see Figure 3).
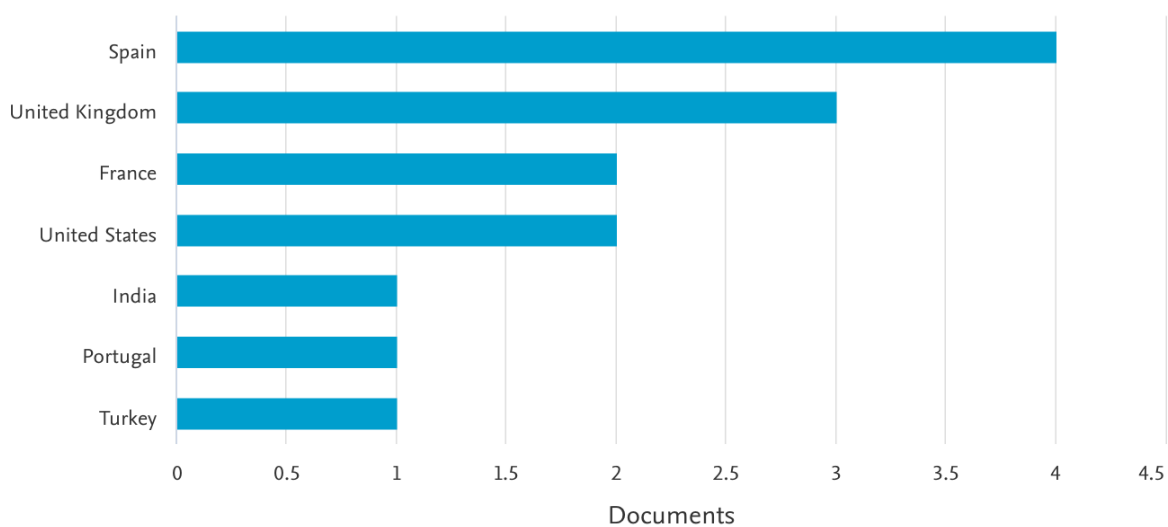

Figure 3. Publications by country.

The number of citations for each publication is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Number of citations of publications analysed

Title	Authors	Journal Title	Citations
Understanding the importance that consumers attach to social media sharing (ISMS): Scale development and validation	Dedeoğlu, B.B., Taheri, B., Okumus, F., Gannon, M.	Tourism Management	71
Classifying residents' roles as online place-ambassadors	Uchinaka, S., Yoganathan, V., Osburg, V.-S.	Tourism Management	41
#Visitspain. Breaking down affective and cognitive attributes in the social media construction of the tourist destination image	Garay, L.	Tourism Management Perspectives	30
#ILoveLondon: An exploration of the declaration of love towards a destination on Instagram	Filieri, R., Yen, D.A., Yu, Q.	Tourism Management	28
YouTube usage by Spanish tourist destinations as a tool to communicate their identities and brands	Huertas, A., Míguez-González, M.I., Lozano-Monterrubio, N.	Journal of Brand Management	23
Secrets to design an effective message on Facebook: an application to a tourist destination based on big data analysis	Villamediana-Pedrosa, J.D., Vila-Lopez, N., Küster-Boluda, I.	Current Issues in Tourism	22
The tourism effect of President Trump's participation on Twitter	Nicolau, J.L., Sharma, A., Shin, S.	Tourism Management	10
Tourism ambassadors as special destination image inducers	Morand, J.C., Cardoso, L., Pereira, A.M., Vila, N.A., De Almeida, G.G.F.	Enlightening Tourism	2
Destination Brand Communication during COVID-19 Pandemic - The Case of Iceland	Joseph, A.I., Anandkumar, V.	International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Systems	1

3. Results

Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy in which a brand or company works with a high influencer in a particular field or community to promote its products or services. Influencers often have a large number of followers on their social channels, which allows them to influence their fans' purchasing decisions. Brands work with influencers to reach their audience and increase interest in their products.

Influencer marketing can be an effective element in promoting tourist destinations as well, including the promotion of places such as cities, regions or countries. Organisations connected with a given place, brands for which it is an area of socio-economic functioning and business, as well as local and governmental units can use influencer marketing to promote tourist attractions, events and all kinds of activities that can influence the positive image of a given place and encourage tourists to visit it. The most common way to do this is to collaborate with digital creators who have already visited a place.

Tourist destinations additionally benefit from the activity of tourists, visitors and locals who, on their own initiative, share their feelings and insights about the places they visit, inserting photographs with which they want to convey the character or uniqueness of the place presented, and use geo-location tagging or hashtags, making it easy for other social media users to reach the content thus tagged. Instagram is one of the more popular social networks used by users to share their experiences of places they have visited.

Influencer marketing in the communication of places (cities, countries, regions) is an increasingly common promotional strategy in tourism. The articles analysed show different aspects of this phenomenon. A summary of the content analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
The main thematic strands of the publications analysed

Title	Leading issues
#ILoveLondon: An exploration of the declaration of love towards a destination on Instagram	In the article, the authors examine the use of the hashtag #ILoveLondon on Instagram to promote London as a tourist destination. They note that the hashtag was particularly popular with influencers who were highly influential with their followers.
Destination Brand Communication during COVID-19 Pandemic - The Case of Iceland	The article analyses how Iceland promoted its country during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors note that Iceland effectively used influencers to convey positive messages about its country and attract tourists.
Tourism ambassadors as special destination image inducers	The article focuses on the role of tourism ambassadors in shaping the image of tourism destinations. The authors note that tourism ambassadors can be effective promotional tools because they have a strong influence on their audience and are reliable sources of information about a tourist destination.
#Visitspain. Breaking down affective and cognitive attributes in the social media construction of the tourist destination image	The authors examine the impact of the hashtag #Visitspain on the construction of the image of Spain as a tourist destination on social media. They note that this hashtag was particularly popular among influencers and contributed to a positive image of Spain among the audience.
Secrets to design an effective message on Facebook: an application to a tourist destination based on big data analysis	The authors analyse the effectiveness of promotional messages posted on Facebook by tourist destinations. They note that the use of influencers can be an effective promotional strategy, as influencers have a strong influence on their audience and are reliable sources of information about a tourist destination.
Classifying residents' roles as online place-ambassadors	The authors explore the role of residents in promoting tourist destinations in social media spaces. They note that residents can act as ambassadors for a tourist destination and support promotion by sharing their experiences with other social media users.
YouTube usage by Spanish tourist destinations as a tool to communicate their identities and brand	The authors analyse the use of the YouTube platform by Spanish tourist destinations to communicate their identity and brands. They note that influencers and vloggers are effective promotional tools because they have a strong influence on their audience and can contribute to increasing interest in a tourist destination.
Understanding the importance that consumers attach to social media sharing (ISMS): Scale development and validation	The authors explore the importance consumers attach to sharing their experiences on social media. They note that influencers can have a strong impact on consumers' purchasing decisions and can be effective promotional tools for tourism destinations.
The tourism effect of President Trump's participation on Twitter	The authors examine the impact of US President Donald Trump's participation in Twitter communications on tourism in the United States. They note that the president's participation in social media can have both positive and negative effects on tourism depending on the content of the messages and their reception by the audience.

Destination branding is an activity conducted by Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) targeting tourists as well as locals. In addition to DMOs, the image of the destination is created by social media users sharing their experiences and emotions about the places they visit.

4. Discussion

Influencer marketing can be approached in two ways: as access to another communication channel to reach potential target audiences (in this case, influencer followers on social media), or as a form of communication with influencers themselves, the aim of which is to obtain brand ambassadors involved in numerous strategic company activities such as the launch of a new good or service. In the area of tourism, the significance of influencer marketing is partly due to the importance and use of whisper marketing (Litvin et al., 2008). The creators of blogs, in this case travel blogs, who were among the first to gather valuable and issue-focused communities around them, were also an interesting channel to reach potential audiences for destination marketers. Some of the early collaborations of tourism marketers include New Zealand's collaboration with Chinese travel influencer Yao Chen (Tourism New Zealand, 2012), or the Marriott hotel chain's collaboration with vlogger Jack Harries of JacksGap (JacksGap, 2015).

The articles analysed use different research methods depending on the objectives and research questions the authors set themselves. Some articles used quantitative methods such as a survey or data analysis, while others used qualitative methods such as content analysis or interviews with people involved in the promotion of tourist destinations. A detailed summary is presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Research methods used and results of the research conducted

Article title	Date of publication	Research method	Result
#ILoveLondon: An exploration of the declaration of love towards a destination on Instagram	2021	Content analysis	The authors identified the main topics covered in posts on Instagram with the hashtag #ILoveLondon and noted that the most common themes were information about tourist attractions in London, photos of visitors and comments about positive experiences of visiting the city.
Destination Brand Communication during COVID-19 Pandemic - The Case of Iceland	2021	Qualitative study	The authors noted that Iceland focused on promoting safety during the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted its unique tourist attractions and natural assets. The use of influencers to promote the country was also observed in messages posted on social media.

Cont. table 4.

Tourism ambassadors as special destination image inducers	2020	Content analysis	The study showed that tourism ambassadors can have a positive impact on the image of a tourist destination among tourists, especially if they are involved in promoting the destination and are seen as authentic and credible.
#Visitspain. Breaking down affective and cognitive attributes in the social media construction of the tourist destination image	2020	Content analysis	The authors noted that posts with the hashtag #Visitspain most often featured information about tourist attractions in Spain, photos of visitors and comments about positive experiences of visiting the country.
Secrets to design an effective message on Facebook: an application to a tourist destination based on big data analysis	2020	Data analysis, regression analysis	The authors created a model to assess the effectiveness of promotional messages posted on Facebook by tourist destinations. The model takes into account factors such as the type of content, audience engagement and the use of influencers.
Classifying residents' roles as online place-ambassadors	2020	Qualitative study	The authors identified the main roles that residents of a tourist destination can play as ambassadors of that destination online. Each of these roles is characterised by a different level of engagement and way of sharing information about the tourist destination with others.
YouTube usage by Spanish tourist destinations as a tool to communicate their identities and brands	2020	Quantitative and content analysis	The authors noted that Spanish tourist destinations often use YouTube to promote their tourist attractions and the country's assets. The videos uploaded to YouTube usually feature information about tourist attractions, photos and videos of visitors.
Understanding the importance that consumers attach to social media sharing (ISMS): Scale development and validation	2020	Content analysis	The study found that for most consumers, sharing their experiences on social media is important and motivates them to choose tourist destinations that are promoted by others. The authors created a scale to assess the extent to which consumers attach importance to sharing their experiences with others on social media.
The tourism effect of President Trump's participation on Twitter	2020	Content analysis	The authors noted that the US President's Twitter posts on tourism were often criticised by the audience and could have a negative impact on the image of tourist destinations in the US.

5. Limitations

The literature review conducted has its limitations. Firstly, two bibliographic databases were used. These are considered to be the databases that cover the majority of scientific publications; however, it is worth including additional sources that may contribute to identifying more publications addressing the issue under review in the future.

Secondly, the review only included scientifically peer-reviewed articles published in scientific journals. It can be assumed that this subject matter is also addressed in compact publications or conference proceedings. In addition, the search results were limited to the English language, which certainly affects the number of results and thus the number of publications included in the analysis.

6. Summary

An analysis of the articles leads to the conclusion that, in most cases, the topic of influencer marketing in connection with the promotion and marketing communication of tourist destinations and places has not yet been an issue of interest to researchers. Although the articles analysed referred to the phenomenon and potential of influencer marketing, these references were not the main focus of the research. Content created and shared by internet users has a very broad dimension and application - from spontaneously created content to thoughtful opinions and evaluations, both positive and negative (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). They also have a significant impact on the audience, although this is also dependent on the intention of the message creator. The reception and effectiveness of the message are also dependent on the sender of the message and, in this case, content created and shared by residents of the tourism destinations in question is perceived as more trustworthy (Uchinaka et al., 2019). Equally important is the role of tourists as influential opinion makers in the online and social media space and managers involved in promoting the chosen destinations (Huertas et al., 2017). A strong influence, both positive and negative in nature, can also be exerted by recognisable individuals, such as politicians (Nicolau et al., 2020). The communication tools and formats used also influence the effects. Video formats generate significantly better audience engagement results than others such as text, images or even apps or interactive games (Villamediana-Pedrosa et al., 2019). In light of previous research and practitioners' experiences, the role of content created and shared on social media by tourism destination stakeholders is clearly evident. This content should be skilfully integrated into destination promotion strategies.

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