

EXPLORING THE JOURNEY OF CLICKS TO CHECK-INS-A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF DIGITAL CREATORS IN DRIVING TOURIST FOOTFALLS TO A DESTINATION

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Abstract

In the era of digitization, digital media influencers play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and influencing preferences. The study focused on the role of digital creators or influencers in attracting tourists to destinations. The study aimed to analyze the intricate relation between the social media influencers and tourism industry and analyze the journey from virtual engagement (clicks) of followers of content creators leading to real visits (check-ins) to a particular destination.

The study aimed to delve into the changing landscape of the tourism industry due to the modern-day real influencers that affect the travellers' choices, with their content and reviews and affect the tourist footfall to a particular destination

The study, through the empirical evidence and theoretical insights, aimed to explore the power of reviews, recommendations, and pictures of destinations uploaded by content creators in destination branding.

Methodology: *For the purpose of data collection, 107 respondents are surveyed. One sample t test is used for studying the influence of digital creators in driving tourist footfalls to a destination.*

Findings: *The study has concluded that digital content engagement has led to an increase in footfalls to tourists' destinations and can be used by related authorities as one of the marketing strategies for destination brandings.*

The study highlights its usefulness for National Tourist Organizations and other travel authorities of state and centre to enhance tourism using the digital media platforms.

Keywords: *Tourism industry, Digital content creators /influencers, virtual engagement, real visits, destination branding*

INTRODUCTION

In an age dominated by digital media, the role of content creators has emerged as a significant force in shaping consumer behaviour and preferences across various domains. Particularly in the realm of tourism, where destinations compete for attention in a crowded marketplace, the influence of digital creators cannot be understated. This research paper delves into the intricate relationship between digital creators and tourist footfalls, examining how their content creation activities drive visitors to specific destinations.

The advent of social media platforms and user-generated content has revolutionized the way individuals perceive, plan, and experience travel. Digital creators, encompassing influencers, vloggers, bloggers, and social media personalities, wield immense power in shaping the narratives surrounding travel destinations. Through captivating visuals, engaging narratives, and first-hand experiences, they have the ability to inspire and influence millions of potential travellers worldwide.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to explore the multifaceted role of digital creators in driving tourist footfalls to destinations. By analysing various dimensions such as content creation strategies, audience engagement tactics, and the impact on destination marketing efforts, this research seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which digital creators contribute to the growth of tourism.

Furthermore, this paper will investigate the effectiveness of different types of digital content in attracting tourists, ranging from visually stunning Instagram posts to immersive travel vlogs on YouTube. It will also examine the role of collaboration between destinations and digital creators, assessing the benefits and challenges associated with influencer partnerships and sponsored content.

Moreover, in the context of the evolving digital landscape, this study will explore emerging trends and technologies that are reshaping the dynamics of destination marketing. From the rise of virtual reality

experiences to the integration of user-generated content in official tourism campaigns, there exists a plethora of innovative approaches that destinations are employing to leverage the power of digital creators. By shedding light on these crucial aspects, this research endeavours to provide valuable insights for destination marketers, tourism boards, and industry stakeholders seeking to harness the potential of digital creators in attracting tourists. Ultimately, understanding the nuances of this relationship is imperative for devising effective strategies that capitalize on the ever-expanding digital ecosystem and drive sustainable growth in tourism footfalls.

RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

To analyse the influence of digital content on driving footfalls to tourists' destinations and find out whether content creation on digital media platforms can be used as a marketing strategy for destination branding.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- [1] To analyse the effect of digital content creators in influencing tourism of a particular destination.
- [2] To study the relationship between digital content engagement and actual tourist footfalls to a particular destination
- [3] To study the role of digital creators in destination branding.
- [4] To study the impact of content on digital platforms like blogs, reels, videos, posts in influencing vacation destination choices of respondents.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **Łaskiewicz, Anna. (2023).** in their paper titled- "**THE USE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING IN MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF PLACES.**" *Scientific Papers of Silesian University of Technology. Organization & Management/Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Slaskiej. Seria Organizacji i Zarzadzanie* analysed the role of content created and shared on social media by tourism destination stakeholders and concluded that the content should be skilfully integrated into destination promotion strategies.
2. **Femenia-Serra, Francisco, Ulrike Gretzel. (2020)** in their paper titled- "**Influencer marketing for tourism destinations: Lessons from a mature destination.**" *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism* expands the scarce knowledge on influencer marketing in the travel and tourism domain thus giving us valuable insights for destination managers.
3. **Kantamaa and Eveliina (2020)** in their paper titled "**Communicating destination brands through social media influencers: implementing influencer marketing for destinations.**" concluded the tangible and intangible elements identified with the destination brand can authentically be communicated through social media influencers based on their personal experiences and interpretations and thus can be used as an attractive element to drive tourist footfalls to a destination.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study, qualitative and quantitative approaches are used. Primary data is collected by floating a questionnaire to the respondents. The sample size is 107 residents of Mumbai Metropolitan region. Sampling method adopted for the study is simple random sampling.

The responses are analysed using a one-sample t-test. Frequency distribution has been studied for responses measured on nominal and ordinal scale and to study the role of digital creators in driving tourist footfalls to a destination.

Secondary data is collected through various research papers, articles and other related sources.

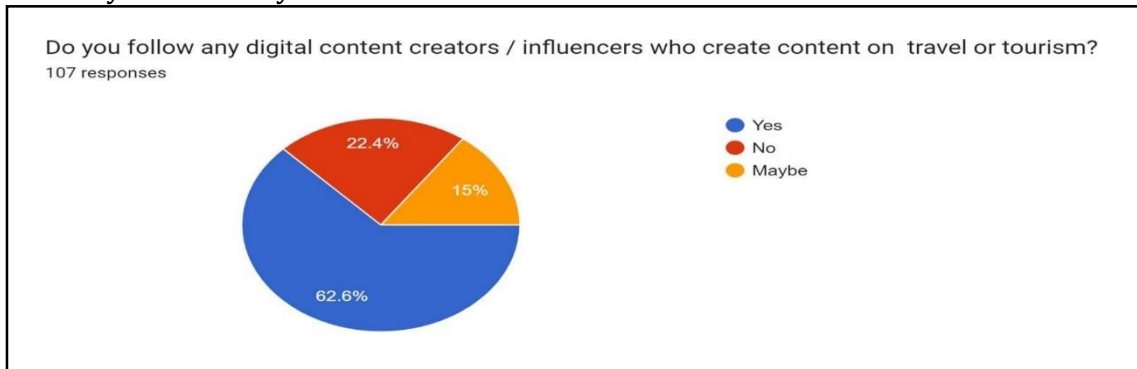
SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is conducted on the respondents residing in the MMR region to find out the impact of positive information rolled out by digital content creators through their posts, photos, vlogs, reviews and recommendations in driving tourist footfalls to a particular destination.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

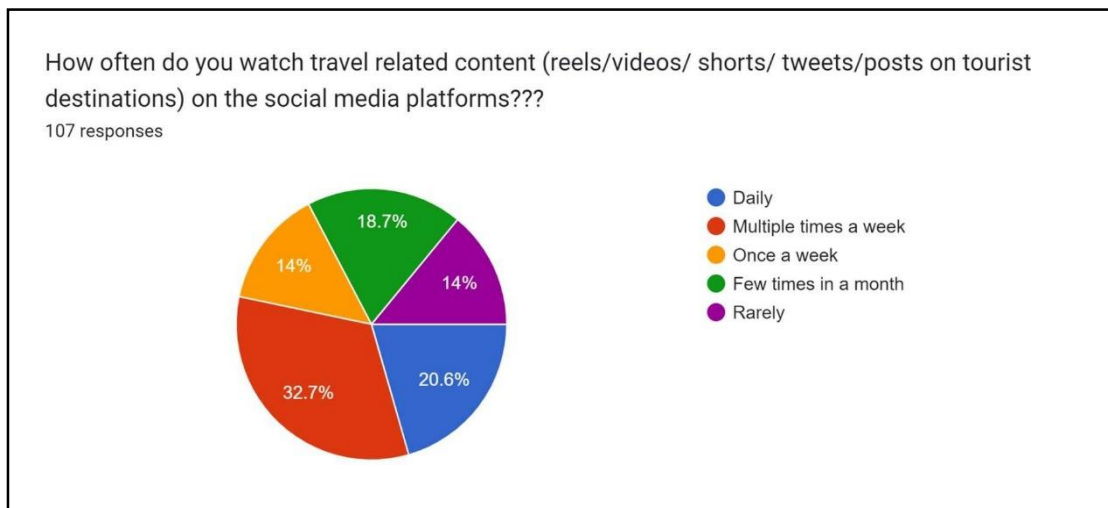
The data is collected from 107 respondents based in the MMR region, due to paucity of time and resources using the simple statistical tools for analysis.

Preliminary Work & Analysis



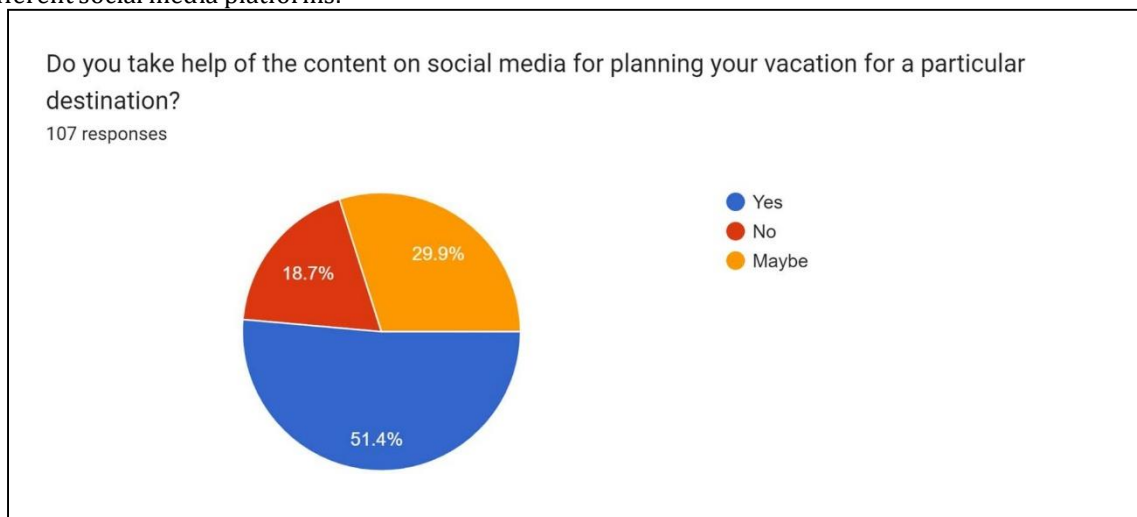
Interpretation: -

The above graphical presentation depicts that most of the respondents belonging to different age groups engage in travel related content on digital media platforms like Instagram, you tube, Whats app, Snapchat, Twitter Facebook.



Interpretation: -

The above graphs represent the frequency of engagement with travel related content of the respondents. It is quite visible that most of the respondents are quite actively engaged in travel related digital content on different social media platforms.

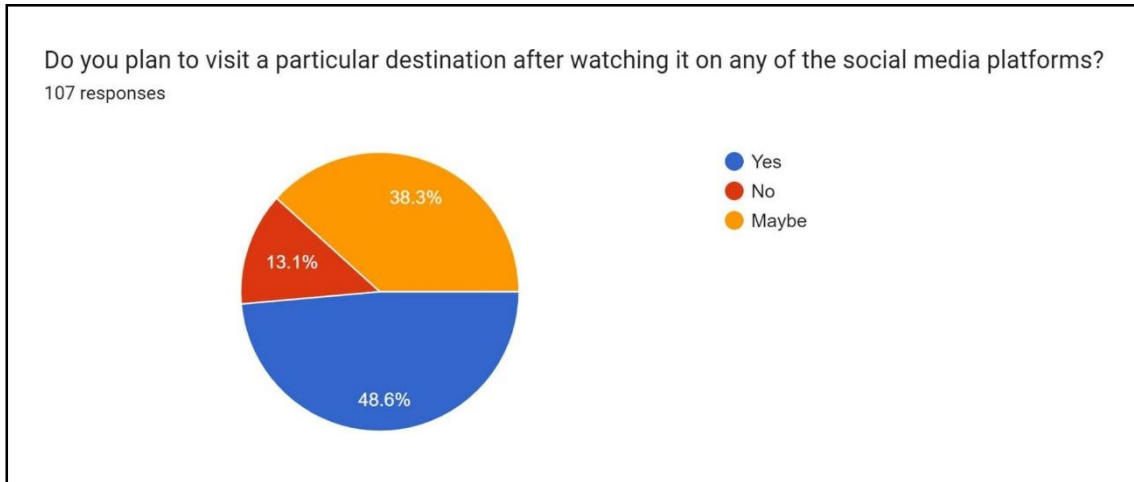


Interpretation: -

The above pie-chart illustrates that most of the respondents refer to the digital content while planning for

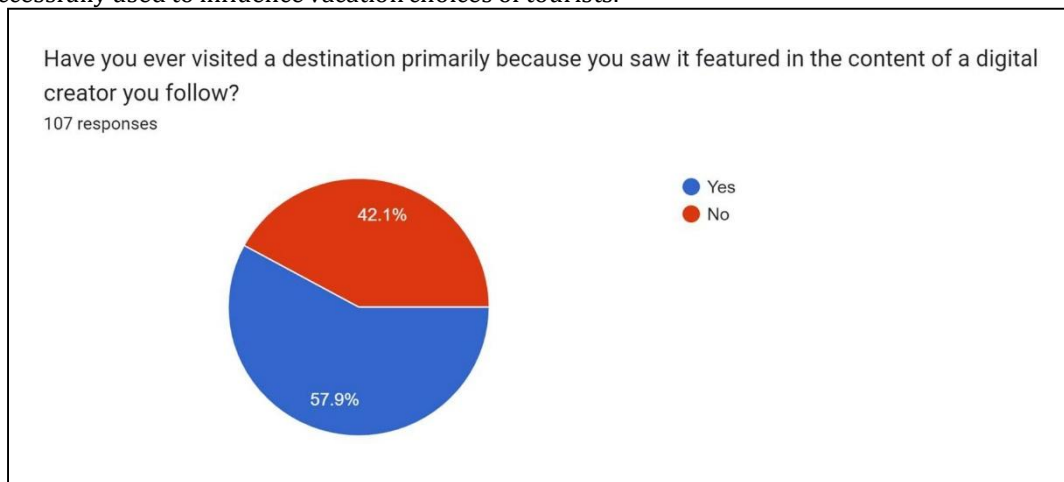
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their vacation. So, it is evident that tourism boards, tourists’ organisations can use social media to promote a particular destination



Interpretation: -

The above graphical representation illustrates that most of the respondents may plan to visit a particular destination because they have seen it on one of the social media platforms. so it means that digital content may be successfully used to influence vacation choices of tourists.



Interpretation: -

The above pie chart illustrates that respondents choose to visit a particular tourist place, shared by their favourite digital content creator or influencer they follow on social media platforms. Thus, the information sharing, pictures, posts, vlogs, posted by content creators play a pivotal role in shaping an image of a particular destination and may lead to increased footfalls of tourists to the same.

Data Analysis & Interpretation: -

One Sample t-test Objective: To identify whether the digital content of creators influences (positive or negative influence) tourists to visit a particular destination.

Hypothesis: -

H0: - There is no significant relationship between digital content engagement and increase in footfalls to tourists’ destinations.

H1: - There is a significant relationship between digital content engagement and increase in footfalls to tourists’ destinations.

| One Sample T-Test | | |
|--|---------|-----------|
| Parameters | p value | Result |
| Will you forward or share the posts of travel content creators to your | <.001 | Reject H0 |

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| | | |
|--|-------|-----------|
| references for planning a vacation? | | |
| Will you visit a particular destination, visited by your favourite influencer? | <.001 | Reject HO |
| If the answer to the above question is yes, did your actual experience align with the portrayal given by the content creator? | <.001 | Reject HO |
| What influences you more when you watch/ engage in travel and tourism content? Rate in order of importance 1- Least Important 5-Most Important [photos] | <.001 | Reject HO |
| What influences you more when you watch/ engage in travel and tourism content? Rate in order of importance 1- Least Important 5-Most Important [Videos] | <.001 | Reject HO |
| What influences you more when you watch/ engage in travel and tourism content? Rate in order of importance 1- Least Important 5-Most Important [Reviews] | <.001 | Reject HO |
| What influences you more when you watch/ engage in travel and tourism content? Rate in order of importance 1- Least Important 5-Most Important [Polls] | <.001 | Reject HO |
| What influences you more when you watch/ engage in travel and tourism content? Rate in order of importance 1- Least Important 5-Most Important [Blogs] | <.001 | Reject HO |

It is observed from the above table that the p value of all the factors is less than 0.025 thus rejecting the null hypothesis leading to acceptance of the alternative hypothesis which concludes that there is a significant relationship between digital content engagement and increase in footfalls to tourists' destinations.

One Sample t-test Statistics: -

To identify the role of digital content creators and the influence of the content created by them in driving footfalls to destination.

| One Sample t-Test Parameters | Mean |
|---|------|
| Frequency of the posts of travel content creators forwarded or shared by the respondents to their references for planning a vacation | 3.63 |
| Actual visit to a particular destination by the respondents, visited by their favourite influencer. | 3.33 |
| Actual experience of respondents towards a particular destination recommended by digital content creators matches with portrayal done by digital creator. | 3.25 |
| Influence on the respondents of the photos posted by digital content creators. | 3.23 |
| Influence on the respondents of the videos posted by digital content creators. | 3.54 |
| Influence on the respondents of the reviews posted by digital content creators. | 3.47 |
| Influence on the respondents of the polls created by digital content creators. | 3.52 |
| Influence on the respondents of the Blogs/ Vlogs posted by digital content creators. | 3.36 |

One Sample t Test Analysis: -

The above table depicts the mean value of all the parameters considered for the study. It can be seen that the value of mean for all the parameters is above 3, which depicts that there is a positive influence of the digital content creators on the respondents, and they are successful in influencing vacation destination choices of the respondents through their content.

Some relevant cases: -

Visit California - "California Dream Eater":

- Objective: The aim was to spotlight California's diverse culinary scene with the goal of enticing tourists.
- Strategy: Visit California collaborated with a renowned food critic who embarked on a journey across the state, documenting his culinary experiences through various social media platforms.
- Result: This initiative yielded a 7% uptick in tourism expenditure, underscoring the effectiveness of leveraging influencer content to showcase the distinctive aspects of a destination.

Hawaii Tourism Authority - "Let Hawaii Happen":

- Objective: The primary objective was to bolster tourism revenue for Hawaii by showcasing authentic travel experiences.
- Strategy: The Hawaii Tourism Authority partnered with several influencers to share their personal adventures and encounters in Hawaii, highlighting its natural beauty and cultural richness.
- Result: This endeavour resulted in a remarkable 24% surge in tourism revenue, indicating the potency of utilizing influencers to portray the genuine essence of a destination.

Dubai Tourism:

- Objective: The goal was to position Dubai as a premier luxury travel destination and attract affluent tourists.
- Strategy: Dubai Tourism collaborated with influencers to showcase the city's opulent accommodations, shopping districts, and attractions.
- Result: This strategic collaboration led to a notable 14% increase in tourism revenue, underscoring the effectiveness of influencer-driven content in positioning a destination as a coveted luxury travel hub.

FINDINGS

In all 107 respondents belonging to different age groups were surveyed, the following are the findings of the study:

- All the respondents use different digital platforms like Instagram, What's app, Facebook, Twitter, etc. But most of the respondents use YouTube and Instagram multiple times in a day.
- Most of the respondents followed travel related content creators and engage in the content shared by them on different digital media platforms.
- Most of the respondents used the travel content as a source of information for planning their vacation.
- Most of the respondents prefer to visit a particular destination recommended by multiple digital content creators.
- Thus, content creators can be used extensively for promoting or marketing a particular destination.

SOCIAL RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Tourism plays a crucial role in many local economies, providing employment opportunities and driving economic growth. Understanding how digital creators influence tourist footfalls can help destination communities harness the potential of digital marketing to attract visitors, thereby boosting local businesses and livelihoods. Digital creators have the power to showcase the unique cultural heritage and attractions of a destination to a global audience. By studying their role, we can ensure that cultural authenticity is preserved and celebrated while promoting sustainable tourism practices. Overall, studying the role of digital creators in driving tourist footfalls to a destination is socially relevant as it intersects with various aspects of community well-being, cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and economic development. It can inform strategies for inclusive and responsible tourism practices that benefit both destination communities and visitors alike.

CONCLUSION

Digital creators have the potential to influence travel behavior and promote responsible tourism practices. By understanding their role in driving tourist footfalls, we can encourage collaborations that prioritize sustainable tourism along with responsible tourism. From the above study we can conclude that digital creators play a pivotal role in shaping tourism industry. The power of digital platforms can be used in harnessing the potential of a particular tourist place. Thus, we can use the content creators in sharing information about different unexplored tourist places and the same can be used as one of the strategies in destination branding which can be ultimately used as an avenue for the Centre and state and for the local also for the said destination to generate revenue.

FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- [1] The study is based only in MMR so the same study can be carried out on the respondents of other regions.
- [2] The negative side of digital content like half information, misleading reviews by content creators are not

being considered, so the results may vary in that case.

- [3] The study only considers the usual/general content (reels, posts, vlogs), created by content creators, leaving the scope of further study to find out the impact of the content curated specifically for a particular destination branding.

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