

When Influencers become Vampires: A Content Analysis and Eye-tracking Examination of Sponsored Travel Influencer Content on Instagram

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Abstract:

In travel and destination marketing, collaborating with influencers has become increasingly prevalent. However, little is known about the strategies travel influencers apply. This study presents the results of a content analysis of 74 sponsored travel influencer posts on Instagram and a preregistered experimental eye-tracking study (N=115). While the content analysis revealed a dominant self-centric visual approach, the eye-tracking study demonstrated a strong vampire effect. Influencers featuring prominently in pictures attracted 62% of visual attention, without resulting in more visual attention in total, or more positive attitudes. The vampire effect impacted the recall of the sponsoring tour operator, tagged in the caption. Participants in the no-influencer condition looked twice as long at the tagged sponsor in the caption, resulting in 38% higher chance of recall. Hence, results underscore a critical challenge faced by the tourism industry collaborating with influencers: the potential overshadowing of key marketing messages by the influencer's self-centric approach.

Keywords: influencer marketing, social media marketing, visual strategies, eye-tracking, travel marketing, vampire effect