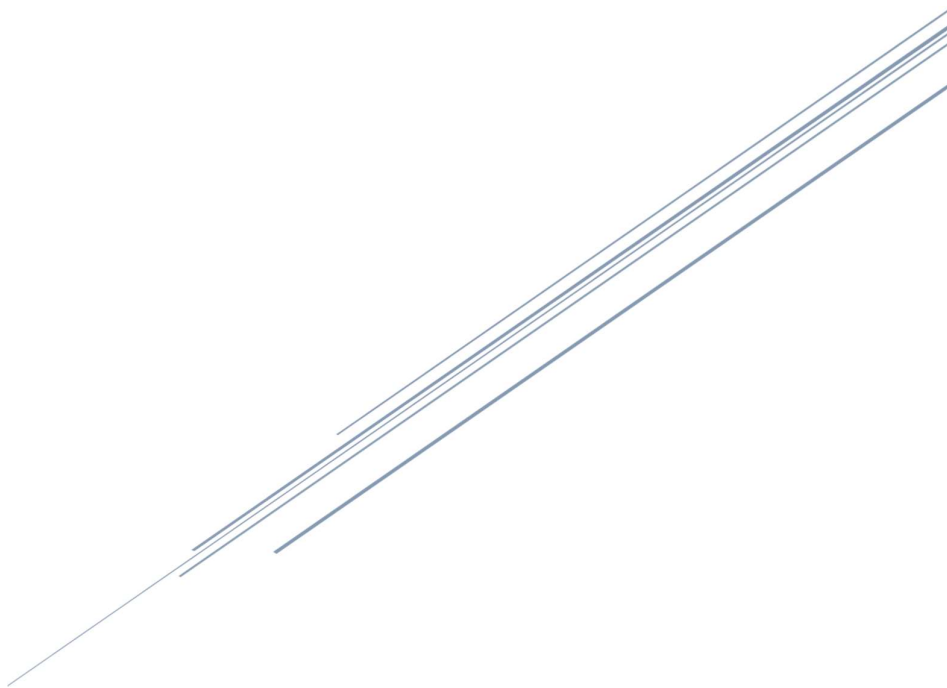


DISSERTATION – PROPOSAL

LCBB600

**Influencer marketing's impact on generation Z's
purchasing decisions – An analyses of the travel turism
industry**



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Influencer marketing's impact on generation Z's purchasing decisions – An analyses of the travel turism industry

Introduction

We live in a time of change, both in terms of people's perceptions and their consumption habits. We are participants in a digital revolution, which urges us to adapt to new trends. However, we cannot fully consider ourselves up to date with these trends, as changes and developments occur daily, especially in the realm of technology, which allows us access to any information. Generation Z is the primary advocate of digitalisation and the use of devices, being the main enthusiasts of platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

Today, Generation Z is guided more by influencer recommendations than by their own considerations. Thus, advertising plays a very important and decisive role in purchasing decisions, especially online advertising. The online environment has become a field chosen by many companies, including those in the tourism sector, as the first area in which they operate, before eventually choosing to develop in the physical, offline environment. The online environment offers advantages such as facilitating communication between the company and its customers, as well as effectively targeting and segmenting them, socialising among people, and providing unlimited access to information across time and space.

Aim

The dissertation proposal aims to determine the impact of marketing influence on the purchase decisions of generation Z and analysis of the travel tourism industry. As a result of the research, emerging countries will be able to adapt techniques preferred by Generation Z to develop travel tourism.

The research focuses on the impact of influencer marketing on Generation Z's purchasing decisions within the travel tourism industry. This investigation aims to contribute to the development of tourism in lesser-known and less-visited developing countries in Europe, which offer scenic landscapes, rich historical and cultural heritage, and traditions appealing to the younger Generation Z audience.

After completing this research, tourism agents will know how to attract young people to discover the culture of different regions, how to effectively promote tourist attractions in a way that appeals to them, how to take advantage of current opportunities, and how to boost tourism in both developing and under-visited countries such as Romania and the Republic of Moldova, as well as in wealthy countries that, according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), are not frequently visited, such as Liechtenstein.

Objectives

Objectives that this research aims to achieve:

- To investigate marketing strategies, particularly through influencer marketing platforms in developing countries such as Romania;
- To determine the opportunities and challenges in identifying influencers willing to promote destinations like Romania to their young audiences;
- To analyse the impact of influencer marketing strategies on Generation Z.

Research Questions

Based on the digitalization of marketing and influencer marketing, the following questions arise:

- Why are emerging countries not visited, and what is the current marketing issue?
- What opportunities and challenges do we face in promoting tourism in countries like Romania through influencer marketing for Generation Z?
- What impact does promoting this type of tourism have on Generation Z?

Literature review

Influencer marketing and consumer behavior and Tik Tok and Instagram influencer travel tourism tool

Consumer Behavior

According to Solomon (2012, p.173), consumer behaviour represents the criterion by which individuals choose and purchase goods or services to satisfy their own needs and desires, with marketers taking into account the theories and realities of this behaviour.

Similarly, Kotler (1969, pp. 17-18) compares consumer behaviour to an „input-output” information system, where the inputs received are represented by components of the economic environment, such as price, utility, economic situation, and quality. The outputs, determined by the human psyche, are represented by the choice of product type, the place of purchase, and the frequency of purchase. The link between inputs and outputs, and the factor influencing the final choice, is made through so-called „channels” that include advertisements, past experiences, and personal observation. The human psyche, which makes the final decision, is compared here to a „black box,” signifying opacity, as it cannot be easily observed, making it difficult to anticipate the „outputs.”

Influencer Marketing

Generation Z approaches consumption differently than older generations, giving rise to influencer marketing through well-known social media channels like TikTok and Instagram. These platforms offer rich, simple, short, colorful, and entertaining content through short videos and images, which enhances influencer marketing by minimizing the need for text. Additionally, it fosters a human connection between the client—Generation Z—and the influencer, who acts as the brand's promoter (Themer et al., 2020).

To define influencer marketing, it is essential to define „content creators,” who contribute to increasing trust in products and services. They are „celebrities” or „micro-celebrities” who have built communities. People within these communities perceive influencers as real personalities, much more „accessible than conventional celebrities,” thus gaining their trust because they identify with and share—or try to share—the same values. Influencer marketing is a widespread phenomenon that continues to grow, and consumer behaviour among Generation Z indicates that influencers are becoming one of the most important and indispensable marketing channels (José M. Álvarez-Monzonillo, 2020, p.14).

Research Objectives of Influencer Marketing's Impact on Generation Z's Purchasing Decisions - An Analysis of the Travel Tourism Industry

For several years now, the most important channel for tourism marketing has been digital marketing through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. These platforms showcase destination images, organize contests through post-sharing, and offer customers free vacations, thus creating opportunities for tourism growth (Eran Ketter & Eli Avraham, 2021).

According to a study conducted by Racasan et al. (2022), a country like Romania has much to offer, including the concept of the „holiday village,” yet the country still experiences low tourism rates (according to UNWTO). This is largely because it is not well-promoted, particularly through influencer marketing platforms. Internationally, influencers do not commonly promote destinations like Romania on TikTok and/or Instagram.

If we promote emerging countries like Romania to Generation Z through their preferred communication channels, we can create more opportunities for tourism and young people. These opportunities include discovering new and interesting destinations, experiencing diversity, reducing overcrowding at popular tourist spots, lowering travel costs, enhancing the image and economy of these countries, and discovering new cultures. As Fiona N'Drower (2021, p.238) aptly stated, „Tourism Is a Good Thing, it Brings Money to the Village and Community.”

The challenges lie in finding influencers willing to promote destinations like Romania to their young audience. Most influencers (celebrities, public figures) prefer exotic or popular destinations for their followers, leaving other types of destinations to travel-focused influencers who exclusively promote tourist spots. This leads to another issue: influencers' fear of not engaging their audience with such suggestions, prompting them to choose safer, more impactful options (B. Korte and A.K. Sennefelder, 2022).

By having influencers promote lesser-known destinations through social media, Generation Z steps out of the digital bubble but, with its help, begins to discover not only new places but also new people and new methods of socializing, which contributes to both physical and mental well-being. According to studies and surveys, Generation Z appears willing to explore new places and invest time and money in travel, which they consider an important aspect of their lives (Amagsila et al., 2022).

The seven functional blocks of social media

Kietzmann et al. (2011) established a framework comprising seven functional blocks of social media: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. In the final research, a Honeycomb model will be developed by providing concrete examples of the characteristics employed by influencers on TikTok and Instagram to attract Generation Z to travel to destinations such as those in Romania.

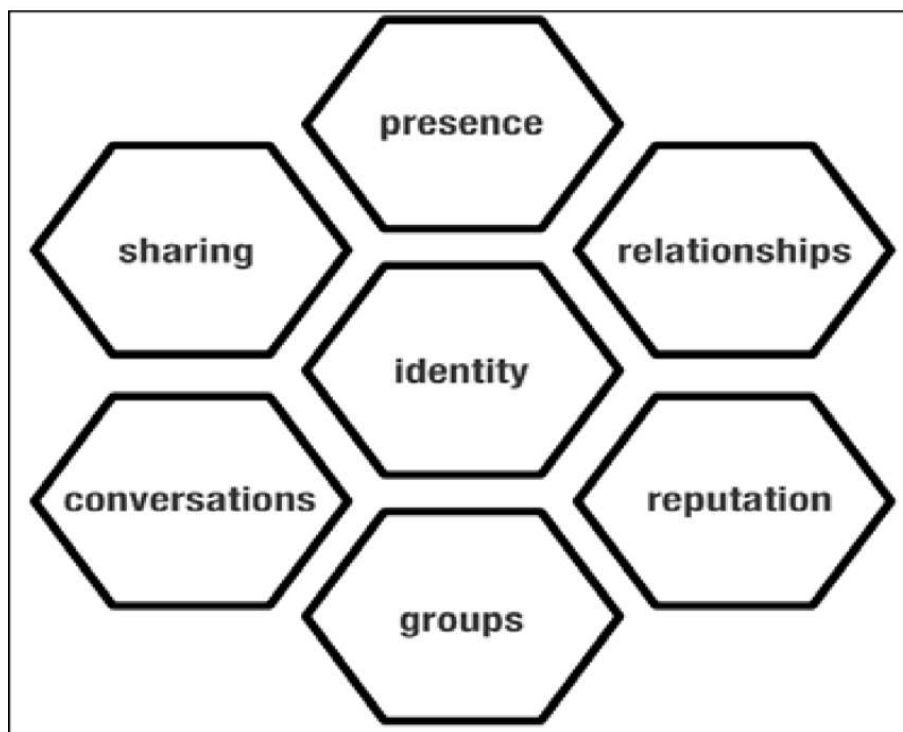


FIGURE 1: Honeycomb Model (Smith., 2007)

Advantages

The model is adapted to social media, explaining how it influences consumer behavior.

One of the essential advantages of the Honeycomb model is its flexibility, as it can be applied across various industries, making it suitable for the travel tourism industry (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Disadvantages

A major disadvantage is that it primarily focuses on describing functions, and the measurement of the impact of these dimensions on the performance outcomes of marketing campaigns, including influencer marketing, is less developed. (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Methodology

Research methodology:

"Research methodology refers to the systematic approach used in a study to collect, analyse, and interpret data. It encompasses the methods, strategies, and tools employed by the researcher to ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 128).

Onion Research Model:

The methodology was structured using the Research Onion model which is a framework that guides researchers through the process of developing a research methodology by addressing layers such as philosophies, approaches, strategies, choices, time horizons and techniques. This model helps ensure a systematic approach to research design (Saunders et al., 2019).

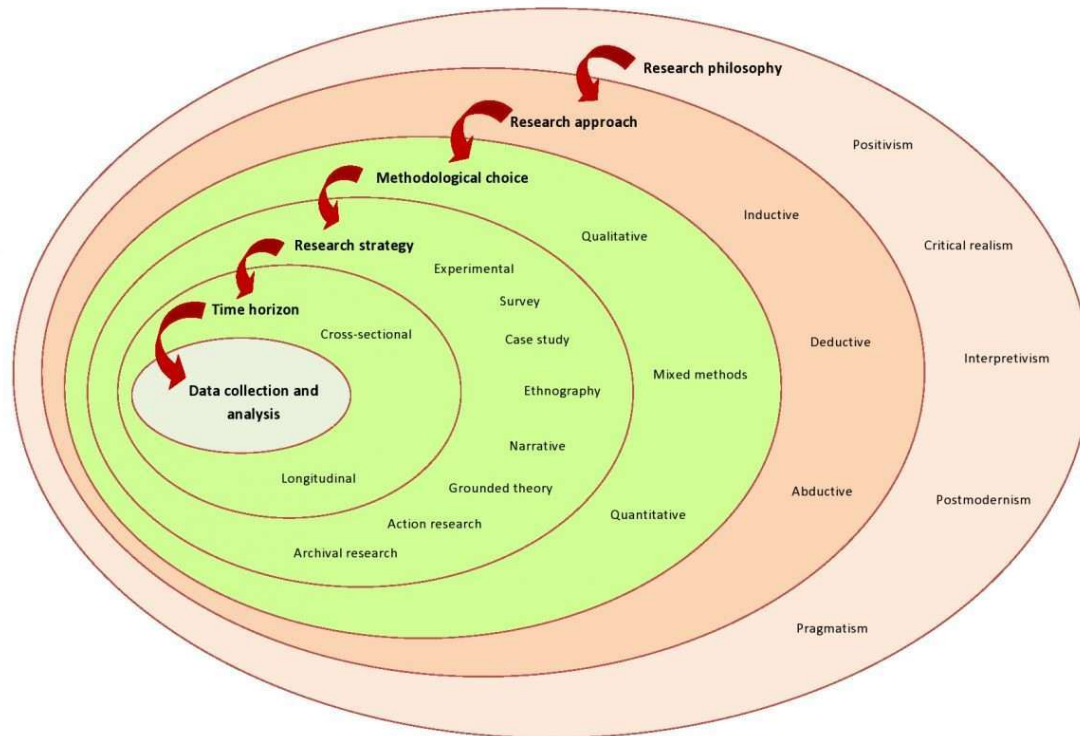


FIGURE 2: The research onion (Saunders et al., 2019)

Philosophy: Positivism

A positivist research philosophy was selected, as the study requires quantifiable data amenable to statistical analysis. The research, focusing on the impact of influencer marketing on Generation Z's purchasing decisions within the travel and tourism industry, relies on objective, empirically analyzed results (Balyali et al., 2023).

Research approach: Deductive

A deductive approach has been adopted, beginning with the examination of existing literature and theories related to the influence of influencer marketing on consumer behavior. Subsequently, comprehensive strategies will be developed to test the theory in a specific context, particularly that of Generation Z (Balyali et al., 2023).

Research Strategies: Survey Strategy

Additionally, data collection is organized according to a pre-established structure, allowing for the understanding of certain current aspects of the phenomenon under investigation or for making recommendations for future marketing actions.

The utilization of a survey strategy is crucial for determining consumer preferences within Generation Z regarding travel tourism through influencer marketing.

Type of investigation

Primary research

In the research, primary data are collected directly from individuals, and academic studies are utilized to achieve the stated objectives. Additionally, the data collected and examined are analyzed so that they can be applied in the travel and tourism industry. Techniques are used to collect data through the use of online surveys.

Secondary research

Is important for research and secondary research, because secondary data are also utilized to design comprehensive research, critically evaluate the data, and implement strategies for the development of travel tourism. Additionally, the literature review complements the collected data.

Techniques and procedures: Choices

Qualitative Research

The qualitative research method is based on “one improves practice by systematically oscillating between taking action in the field of practice, and inquiring into it” (Tripp, 2005).

Quantitative Research

Quantitative research involves the systematic investigation of phenomena by gathering quantifiable data and using statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques to analyze it. This approach allows researchers to identify patterns, test hypotheses and make predictions based on numerical data, providing a way to measure and quantify relationships among variables (Bryman, 2016).

Mono method : *Quantitative Research*

A quantitative research study was selected due to its advantages, such as the ability to generalize data to the entire target population (Creswell, 1994).

TIME HORIZONS : CROSS-SECTIONAL

The Time horizon for the study is cross-sectional. The research examines Generation Z's behaviour in relation to influencer marketing and its impact on their purchasing decisions within the travel and tourism industry. As such, the study collects and analyzes the current states and trends relevant to this topic.

Data Collection and Analysis

Research sampling is the process of selecting a subset of individuals from a larger population to participate in a study, ensuring that the sample accurately represents the broader group. This method allows researchers to draw the conclusions about the entire population based on the characteristics and behaviours within the sample (Bryman, 2016).

Sampling Size

The sample size consists of 50 individuals, a subset of the Generation Z population, specifically those aged 18-26. The unit of analysis is the respondent participating in the research.

Sampling Type

The research population consists of individuals classified within Generation Z (1997-2010), from both rural and urban areas across Europe, who use the internet and have had at least one encounter with some form of influencer marketing.

Sampling Method

Convenience sampling, a type of non probability sampling, involves selecting participants based on their accessibility and proximity to the researcher. This method is often utilized due its practicality and ease, particularly when time or resources are limited, although it may not accurately represents the broader population (Etikan et al., 2016).

Data Colection Method

Through the filter questions at the beginning of the questionnaire, relevant participants for the research will be selected.

The data collection method was the analysis of primary data obtained from a online survey conducted with 50 targeted individuals (ages 18-26). A questionnaire was used as the research instrument for this survey

The questionnaire consists of 8-10 closed-ended questions, organized according to the „funnel” principle, where general questions are placed at the beginning of the survey, gradually leading to the specific questions that constitute the main focus of the research. The questionnaire (Microsoft Forms questionnaire) is expected to take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete.

Analysis of Data

The collected data will be distributed into tables and graphs, analyzed, and calculated using Microsoft Excel. The questionnaire utilized both metric and non-metric scales and was conducted online, as it allows for faster research, lower costs, and is more convenient for respondents, who can complete it at home without the assistance of someone involved in the research. The survey will be conducted in the upcoming period, primarily distributed online, especially through social media. The research is based on a quantitative analysis utilizing statistical methods, including (ANOVA), measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode), and measures of variability (standard deviation).

Research Ethics

The research is conducted with a strong emphasis on confidentiality: respondents' data are personal and will be used strictly for the purposes described in the study. All responses will remain anonymous. Each participant will be informed about the nature of the research, the purpose of data usage, and will give their consent voluntarily. Participants will respond to the questions without any form of coercion or undue pressure.

Time Proospects of the research (Gantt Chart)

The time prospects for this dissertation are illustrated through a Gantt chart , a project management tool that visualizes the timeline of reserch activities. This chart is essential in organizing tasks chronologically,ensuring that each stage of the research process, such as data collection, analysis , and writing, is allocated sufficient time for completion. As highlighted by Kerzner (2017), Gantt charts are invaluable in reserch planning as they allow for the monitoring of progress and help in maintaining adherence to deadlines,therby minimizing the likelihood of project overruns.

TASK		WEEK									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	INTRODUCTION										
2	LITERATURE REVIWE										
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY										
4	CREATING THE QUESTIONNAIRE										
5	COLLECTION OF DATA										
6	ANALYSIS OF DATA										
7	DISCUSSION/DATA INTERPRETATION										
8	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS										
9	DISCUSSION WITH SUPERVISOR										

FIGURE 3: Personal Gantt Chart (personal research, 2024)

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