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Research Article

Media Influences Determination of Tourist Destinations: Tourism Imaginaries Generated by Social Media Advertising

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Abstract
Technological developments have changed social aspects and influenced communication and marketing patterns in society. Social media has emerged as a bridge to the communication gaps that arise due to technology, especially in tourism marketing. Previously, tourism marketing was carried out through traditional methods such as print media, radio, and television advertisements. Social media offers a more efficient, modern, and accurate data-based method for analyzing consumer needs. Based on a survey of 16 informants aged 18-22 years, it was found that 80% of respondents preferred social media, such as Instagram and TikTok, as a source of tourism information compared to traditional media. This research also shows that non-commercial advertising, such as content shared by social media users, is more trustworthy because it presents more objective and detailed information about tourist destinations. Influencers, as part of the social media phenomenon, also play a big role in directing public interest in tourist destinations, although there is a risk of distrust regarding their credibility. Therefore, tourism managers need to work with highly integrity influencers to ensure the information's quality and authenticity. Additionally, comments and reviews from social media users are also an additional source of information that helps people make more informed travel decisions. This phenomenon also shows changes in modern tourism marketing, where community involvement through social media creates a space for interaction that enriches the tourist experience and increases public trust.

Keywords: Tourism; advertising; social media; influencer, technology

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is becoming a trend and is very popular among people of all ages. In this era of globalization, traveling has become easier to access, and people can enjoy natural beauty, explore cultures, or simply spend their time during the trip. This activity has become part of the modern lifestyle. Tourism activities are not only limited to holiday purposes but include various activities focusing on health, education, and adventure. Tourism is the activity of humans traveling from their place of residence (only temporarily staying) to the place they want to visit to relax, have fun, release stress, do business (about regional culture, regional art, etc.), and buy souvenirs (Isabella, 2010).

In Indonesia, tourism development is experiencing rapid progress in line with the increasing attractiveness of this country as a global tourist destination rich in diversity of natures, cultures, and traditions. Natural beauty drives high state income from the tourism sector, thus making the government continue to intensify tourism development in Indonesia. The tourism sector is the second largest in Indonesia, and it generates foreign exchange. By earning around USD 13.5 million in foreign exchange, the tourism sector has become a mainstay for Indonesia (Harefa. M, 2020). In order to realize common goals in the tourism sector, the Indonesian government also carries out various marketing strategies to attract tourists, especially foreign tourists, to visit Indonesia. One of the strategies recently intensified by the Indonesian government is to have "10 New Balis" as the main destinations in Indonesia that tourists are recommended to visit. In addition to the development program in the 10 New Balis, the Indonesian government is again promoting the

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tourism sector with a theme entitled health and hygiene tourism. This marketing concept for tourism destinations is a concept that hopes for sustainability in the tourism sector, both for the tourist destination, the environment, and the local community.

Tourism marketing communications is an important strategy to promote and introduce the advantages of a tourist location to a wider market, with the aim of attracting the interest of both domestic and international tourists. According to Johana, Setiadarma, and Wijaya (2020), marketing communications is a means by which companies try to inform, persuade, and increase consumers directly or indirectly about their products and brands. Marketing communications present the "voice" of the company and its brand and are a means by which companies can create dialogue and build relationships with consumers. Marketing communications can utilize various channels, from traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers to digital platforms such as social media, websites, and mobile applications. The messages conveyed usually include the unique values of the destination, unique experiences that can be obtained, and facilities that support tourist comfort. Using the right approach, tourism marketing communications can build a positive image, increase brand awareness, and ultimately encourage tourists' decisions to choose their travel destination.

Digital technology development has changed how people obtain information, including in the tourism sector. Digital media, especially through advertisements spread on online platforms, plays an important role in shaping people's perceptions and expectations of tourist destinations. With increasingly easy access to information through social media, websites, and digital-based applications, the decision to visit a tourist destination is often influenced by promotions published online. Before tourists decide on a tourist destination, they will usually look for information related to the destination through people who have visited it. However, this habit has changed drastically when social media has become people's daily consumption. Information on social media is able to provide non-commercial information and is more complex because it can be equipped with various images and videos (Yanti et al., 2024).

The marketing form that is often used by modern society is social media. Social media often contains advertisements that promote some places of tourism. Apart from being used to promote tourist attractions, social media is also used by many people who are the target market of tourism. This advertisement aims to attract people's interest in visiting a tourist destination. Social media marketing aims to introduce tourism to the community and show the facilities people may enjoy during their visit. Tourism is a growing sector, and the role of social media in tourism promotion has become increasingly significant in recent years. In this case, it is important to understand and explore how social media can effectively promote tourism destinations, especially at the village or local level (Yanti et al., 2024).

Through social media, which has become an essential part of daily life for many users, tourists often form vivid images of potential destinations they wish to visit. The information shared through social media platforms, especially in advertisements and promotional content, plays a significant role in shaping these perceptions. When users encounter posts, videos, or advertisements showcasing a particular destination, they are not only exposed to the visual appeal of the location. However, they are also influenced by the narratives and experiences shared by others. This content stimulates their imagination, allowing them to envision the atmosphere, attractions, and activities they might engage in during their visit. As a result, social media advertising becomes a powerful tool in guiding the decision-making process, as it helps potential tourists visualize themselves in those destinations, often leading to a strong desire to experience them firsthand. Imaginaries influence collective behavior as underlying interpretive maps and transmit meaning more or less smoothly and in concert with personal imaginings and the global culture industries that circulate images of others, natures, cultures, artifacts, histories, adventures, and the like. The significance of tourism imaginaries and

their role in the transformations of tourist experience, the local lives of those "toured," and the political and economic effects and configurations of such operations interest most of those working on such things (Little, 2014).

The emergence of globalization provides a new perspective on consuming information, especially in tourism. Globalization is important in technological progress, as everyone can easily access or create information (Nahak, 2019). This can be seen from the use of social media to exchange news and provide information. One of them is telling about tourism experiences. Using social media, users now have an active role in refuting or rejecting inappropriate information for broadcast commercial content. This is also a driving force for changes in existing marketing types because people's freedom to upload content on social media provides new opportunities to advertise the tourism they visit. However, they are not part of the production team. This is believed to be a type of non-commercial advertising that only contains education so that the public has information about the tourist destination they will visit as material for learning, consideration, and anticipation.

Non-commercial reviewers exist because of the widespread fraud in the name of commercial advertisers who are collaborating with tourist agents, causing losses and decreasing public trust (Media Indonesia, 2023). This also provides a new challenge for the tourism sector, which needs to have attractive advertising that suits what they have. So, the tour will avoid negative comments that do not match one's experience. Even though there are commercial advertisements that have been prepared, the public can criticize all the information they receive. So, commercial advertising has begun to be replaced by reviewers or tourist visitors. This makes the author very curious about public information sources when choosing tourist attractions. This article aims to examine how media, especially advertisements in digital media, influence the process of determining tourist destinations, as well as how travel expectations are built through visual narratives and messages conveyed in these advertisements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Use for Tourist Promotion

Social media has emerged as a powerful channel for tourism businesses to connect with their target audience. It also plays an important role as an information source for travelers and potential tourists. Social Media emerged as a major component as it facilitates the interaction between customers and the tourism domain (Lama, 2024). Social media is a medium for sharing information that users can more easily participate in, creating idea spaces, social networks, forums, and virtual worlds. With social media, which has a wide range everywhere, the community began to change their usual promotion to a more modern one, namely by using Instagram. One of the promotional activities often used by Instagram users today is tourism promotion (Julianti, Hamidah, & Muslimin, 2024). Despite its immense potential, the full utilization of Instagram as a marketing tool in the tourism sector remains untapped, presenting opportunities for further exploration (Suryana et al., 2024).

It is clear that the communication process over social media platforms is very rapid, and the spread of information and news is faster than any other internet channel. These platforms removed the need to interact physically to understand the actual situation at the destination or the area they wish to travel to. Nowadays, it's possible to use electronic word-of-mouth references through social media platforms (Gebreel & Shuayb, 2022). However, Gebreel and Shuayb (2022) stated that reaching the visual impact of the destination on social media platforms is very possible. This makes the process of decision-making more flexible and easier and allows users to make the right decisions regarding the best travel offer for the area or the destination they wish to visit.

Based on research conducted by Satiti in 2022 entitled "*Peran Influencer Dalam Meningkatkan Kunjungan Pada Obyek Wisata Pemandian Air Panas Gucci Tegal Jawa Tengah*," this research

produced data that influencers succeeded in increasing the number of tourist visits to hot springs in Tegal, Central Java. In this case, influencers have problems with access and infrastructure. This is a better evaluation for improving facilities at the Gucci hot springs tourist attraction in Tegal, Central Java. So, influencers also play a very important role in developing tourism. Other research also proves how influencers greatly increase the number of tourists in the Bulukumba district. The research entitled "*Pengembangan Influencer Dalam Meningkatkan Kualitas Sumber Daya Manusia Dinas Pariwisata Di Kabupaten Bulukumba*" describes how the Bulukumba Regency tourism office appreciates the influencers who have worked together to develop tourist areas in the district. There was a significant increase in tourists visiting from 2016, as many as 178,580 people, to 2021, reaching 394,873 people.

Imaginaries of the Tourism

Imaginaries are important to all participants in tourism, be they tourists, people visited by tourists, tourism promoters, governments, NGOs, or others (Hammond, 2016). Anthropology's recent efforts to engage tourism imaginaries as a useful concept have shown a powerful predilection for recognizing their socially created representational qualities and their deployment in cultural meaning-making (Little, 2014). In the case of international tourism to developing countries, the analysis of imaginaries offers a powerful deconstruction device of ideological, political, and sociocultural stereotypes and cliches. At the same time, it stresses that imaginations are unspoken schemas of interpretation rather than explicit ideologies. While they are alienating when they take on an institutionalized) life of their own (e.g., in religion or politics); in the end, the agents who imagine are individuals, not societies (Salazar, 2010).

Tracking things and events as conjunctures of force, as assemblages made lively through tourist imaginaries (tropicalizations, images of paradise) that incite seductive feelings of dreamworld relaxation and the effects of the good life to see what effects they have, what more they can do, and where they might lead if left unattended (Little, 2014). Their lasting place in tourists' imagination is partly due to the common belief that they still live in harmony with nature. In reality, the same protected areas that draw tourists were often created by removing the people from their lands (Salazar, 2009).

Social Functionalism

It is hoped that this research will be useful for increasing visitors in the tourism sector because the research results can be used as evaluation material in carrying out tourism marketing, which can increase the intensity of visitors traveling. The theory used in this research is Talcott Parsons's Functionalism theory (1972), which states that humans are a unit in a social system. This can be interpreted that each community has an important role related to other communities in influencing the behavior of receiving tourism marketing information. Apart from that, the theory used, namely Reception from Stuart Hall (2009), explains how society actively receives information in the media. The public not only becomes recipients but also comments, criticizes, and even recycles posts with different themes. In this research, the author tries to prove whether these two theories are relevant to the state of society in receiving travel information or vice versa. This theory will be the author's reference or basis for researching people's behavior in receiving information about tourism destinations.

METHODS

This research activity was carried out in two main stages; the first stage took place from November to December 2024, where researchers carried out initial observations for around two months and carried out in-depth interviews with a number of informants. In the second stage, which

was carried out for about a month the following month, researchers collected data by filling in forms to create a list of digital platforms used by informants to view tourism-related advertisements. Data collection was carried out using two main methods: first, using the digital platform Google Forms, and second, using in-depth interviews. The Google Form contains questions regarding the types of tourism advertisements the informant has seen, while the in-depth interviews aim to dig deeper into the informant's experiences in using digital platforms to search for tourism information. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the results to describe the research findings. Apart from that, researchers also conducted a literature study regarding social media content containing tourism advertisements, with the aim of analyzing reviews and comments from tourists who have used this content as a reference for their travels. These reviews and comments are useful for understanding how tourists imagine a tourist destination, both before and after visiting that place.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Social Media in Improving the Tourism Sector

Technological developments change social aspects to be limited, thus creating a gap between people in conveying information. This also has an impact on marketing and consumption patterns in society, which social media itself can bridge. Marketing itself is a series of processes that consist of delivering and communicating value to customers. If social change occurs, the pattern of people getting information about tourism will also change. Technology that makes long-distance communication easier was discovered in the 1970s, but the speed of technology that influenced social media was only discovered in the 1900s (Christy, 2023). Previously, the marketing process used traditional methods: distributing pamphlets, magazines, radio and television advertisements, and newspapers (Chandra, 2023). Finally, the emergence of social media created a new, more modern method with more efficient and practical benefits, such as having accurate data to analyze consumer needs. According to research conducted by Watajdid et al. (2021) entitled "Systematic *Literature Review: Peran Media Sosial Terhadap Perkembangan Digital Marketing*," shows that social media gives the impression of an attractive publication because it makes the identity of a tourist attraction visualized well and expressively. So, it has an even greater influence compared to traditional marketing.

Based on the survey results conducted with 16 informants, Figure 1 shows that the role of social media has become the main source of tourism information. A total of 80% of informants agreed that social media is used as a source of information when they want to travel. The reason for using social media is because the visual content is more expressive than on television. On the other hand, the development of technology makes everything more practical. By using a cell phone, they can access a lot of information, which is why social media replaces television or other traditional marketing. Of the several social media platforms used by the public, Instagram and TikTok are the social media most often used by informants to view tourism advertisements. From the survey data conducted, Instagram users accounted for 45%, TikTok 48%, YouTube 3%, and television 4% of the total informants who filled in the survey data.

The way people receive information from an advertisement, comment on their experience, and then upload it to social media becomes additional information for other people who seek tourist information, which is a form of how the function of each society works in the digital platform. Talcott Parson's theory of functionalism states that humans are a unit in a social system. This can be interpreted as meaning that each community has an important role in others. The concept of disseminating tourism information can be interpreted from how people take part in sharing accurate information in the form of comment columns. This can be interpreted as meaning that people on the internet build their own social space, which has an impact on their social function, such as sharing

tourism information. According to Retnasary et al. (2019), tourism managers must also have their own social media team. This needs to be done in order to provide success in increasing visitors to a tourist attraction. Structured and organized social media posts provide interest to the public regarding the uploaded posts. In the post, the tourism account must be persuasive and informative.

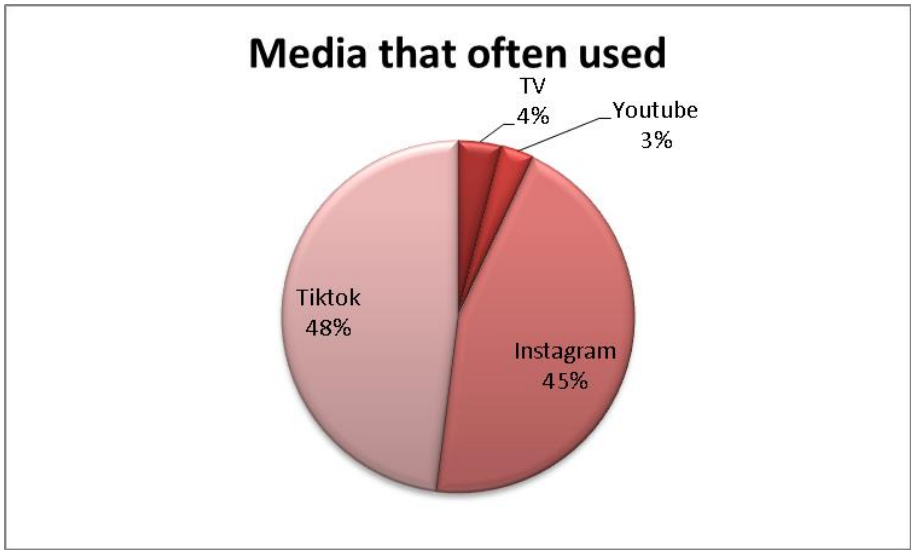


Figure 1. Survey results of digital media often used to watch tourism advertisements
Source: Researchers' documents, 2025

Commercial and Non-Commercial Tourism Advertising

As part of the operational factors of tourism, advertising has a special role in visualizing the identity of tourism with creative marketing concepts. According to Kotler and Amstrong (2010), marketing is a social and managerial process that enables individuals to obtain what they need and want by creating and reciprocating a product. In other words, marketing plays an important role in fulfilling people's expectations and determining the type of tourism they visit. In interviews conducted with several informants, each of them had different views about the types of advertising they consumed and believed. From the total of the informants who answered the questions, 80% stated that they were more impressed by non-commercial advertising, which gives a slightly more natural and specific impression. Even though it is more secure from a visual and artistic perspective, commercial advertising is considered too hyperbolic and does not explain the shortcomings of the facilities or anything else.

> "Visually, commercial advertising is cool but exaggerated. Meanwhile, non-commercial ones explain in more detail what they lack, such as operational hours limits, applicable promos, or facilities that can be enjoyed according to your budget. Later, I can reconsider these shortcomings. Is it worth it or not" (in-depth interview with Aqila on January 15th, 2025).

According to EPS Production (2024), commercial advertising itself is directed towards a specific goal, namely profit. Usually, tourism owners will work together with house production to create attractive advertisements to introduce their identity to the public so that the content tends to be more persuasive. Meanwhile, non-commercial advertising contains education or information of a non-profit nature, where the content contains facts, both advantages, and disadvantages so that people can avoid losses. The informants realize that the content of non-commercial advertisements is a post from other social media users that contains personal experiences when they visit a place; although some of them get paid, some influencers have quite high integrity by mentioning the shortcomings of tourism as material evaluation of their content. This matter creates a new

phenomenon in marketing tourism, so the tourism manager found ways to promote and evaluate the shortcomings of their tourism in order to attract more visitors.

One of the crucial features of social media is in the comments column. Comments themselves are a feature provided by social media developers to allow users to criticize or provide responses to content uploaded on social media. Comments are also the main foundation in successfully building an identity because even though the content contains positive and good things, the public's response in the comments column can destroy the reputation that has been built. Comments can also be a source of additional information that can convince the public to determine tourism destinations. These comments usually contain subjective reviews because they come from personal experience when visiting tourist attractions. The more comments that are in line with the content, the more it will increase people's confidence in choosing that tourist attraction.

> "Because the application is able to contain quite complete information but for a short duration (1-5 minutes). In the comments column, there is generally additional information from people who have been to that place, so the review given is quite convincing as to whether the place is worth visiting or not" (in-depth interview with Keisha on January 15th, 2025).

Based on Stuart Hall's theory entitled reception, people have the ability to process information by not only receiving messages but also commenting, criticizing, and recycling posts. This happens in how non-commercial advertising runs; the public is also present as a marketing component even though they have no role in it. Freedom of expression on social media allows tourism visitors to upload or share their experiences regarding their trip to a destination. In this way, other people will be influenced by posts that other people upload.

With technology, spreading news has become easier regardless of its credibility. This has raised public concerns regarding unreliable sources of information, which could cause losses to the public when traveling. One example of a credible marketing case occurred in Australia, where a Trivago agent was fined around IDR 450 billion (detiknews.com, 2022). In the Trivago case, the travel tour agent drastically reduced prices in the application, where the prices were not in line with hotel and consumer agreements. In the end, consumers lost Rp 300 billion until there was a prosecution from the hotel for Rp 450 billion. This case proves how commercial advertising often commits fraudulent acts that harm consumers; this is difficult to avoid due to the trust that is built as commercial advertising looks more professional. Cases of fraud or discrepancies in information regarding commercial advertisements from travel tours or tour owners directly result in a decreased sense of public trust.

This results in people not being satisfied with commercial advertising alone, so they need additional sources that are more realistic and reliable. Until vlogs or uploads on social media appeared, they became a source of confidence for people in choosing tourism. This is because, in these uploads, people usually tend to be honest about the shortcomings of tourism owners and the tourism industry. Thus, people more often use non-commercial advertising as the main information for making decisions about their plans in choosing tourism and their needs.

> "Non-commercial advertisements usually state the real conditions of a tourist spot, so I know what's lacking and what's more if I finally decide to travel there. Apart from that, there are quite a lot of non-commercial advertisements that provide objective and subjective views. So, I can see from two sides at once regarding this tourist spot" (in-depth interview with Safa on January 15th, 2025).

The Role of Influencers in the Tourism Industry

Social media plays an important role in bridging existing social changes in technological developments. Social media also forms its own structure, such that people with many followers will be more heard when uploading content. Influencers in social media Instagram are users who have quite a lot of followers and likes; from these followers, brands will usually propose collaborations to advertise their products so that they are more widely known to the public (Asmawaty, 2022). Influencers encourage imagination and expectations of tourism activities. Based on the book written by Noel B. Salazar and Nelson H. H. Graburn entitled "Tourism Imaginaries: Anthropological Approaches" explains how every tourist activity has affective intensities or emotional impacts that cannot be generalized. Each influencer has a subjective opinion about their travel experience, which encourages the imagination of their audience so that potential tourists have similar expectations. This phenomenon creates ecological, social, and cultural changes because tourism development projects are based on tourists' expectations. Influencers have a significant influence in encouraging people's interest in buying or consuming something. This can also be used to encourage people's interest in one tourist.

This phenomenon illustrates how influencers who do not have an official label in a business can actually have a significant impact. By uploading content, you can attract people's tastes or interest in visiting a place. One of the travel influencers who is popular with Indonesian people is Marshall Sastra. As an adrenaline lover, he often shares his experiences traveling around mountains, beaches, and other extreme areas (Slice, 2024). His large number of followers means he is invited to collaborate or work with tourism owners or the tourism industry, such as hotels and tourist places in the Jogja area. Thus, this changes marketing production, which was initially only carried out by the tourism team and is now being taken over by influencers with many followers. Apart from that, Influencers also play a role in evaluating tourism in a more modern form. This is done to keep up with current developments that are in the interest of the public. However, it is necessary to monitor cultural fading so that tourism continues to develop with the times but does not lose its cultural value. Thus, many local governments are collaborating with influencers to increase tourism visitors without reducing the oriental value of local culture.

Influencers also do not have reliable credibility when disseminating information. In some cases, influencers often fool the public to satisfy their brands or partners. It creates controversy on social media, requiring people to be critical in choosing influencers with good integrity. Influencers who have high integrity can be found in accounts that only work with big brands because of the high validity of a product. In the case of tourism, we can also do the same thing by looking at how influencers review tourist attractions in detail. This aims to ensure that the influencer is not only capitalist but also has educational content. Apart from that, fraud also often occurs outside the control of the tourism industry owner or, in other words, is carried out by outside parties. This can be illustrated by the rise of brokers as third parties in the tourism business who can provide prices below market. One of the cases of brokers that occurred was brokers from travel buses who had claimed many victims. President Director of PT SAN Putra Sejahtera (PO SAN) Kurnia Lesani Adnan stated that he would respond to this case quite seriously due to the large number of passengers who were harmed (Rahayu & Setiawan. 2024).

This fraud is carried out by spreading the numbers of brokers or fraudsters into Google reviews, which is quite convincing for many people. This case has been handled by the authorities to protect the good name of the bus company (Kencana, 2024). With the rise in fraud cases, influencers can become agents to prove the credibility of a business, especially in the tourism industry, so that people can avoid fraud and other losses. Reviewing it directly and showing the condition of the business they are promoting will make people believe in the integrity of the business. However, many businesses

or tourist attractions still have sufficient budgets to collaborate with influencers. However, some novice influencers will offer a barter system in mutual agreement. So, tourism owners do not need to spend a large budget to start opening tourism. In this way, people can get to know the tourist attractions and then visit them, thereby increasing their income, which can be used to collaborate with big influencers for promotions with a wider reach abroad. This is a strategy that can be used by business owners who are just starting out so they can still increase income even though costs are limited.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the rapid development of technology, particularly through social media platforms, has significantly transformed how information about tourism is disseminated and consumed. Social media has bridged the gap created by technological limitations, enabling more accessible and efficient communication of tourism information to a wide audience. The shift from traditional marketing methods to digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube has redefined the tourism marketing landscape, allowing businesses to connect with potential tourists through more visual, engaging, and personalized content.

The research reveals that social media, particularly non-commercial advertising through user-generated content, plays a key role in shaping tourists' perceptions and decision-making processes. Users find non-commercial posts, often from influencers or other travelers, to be more authentic and reliable than commercial advertisements, often perceived as exaggerated. This trust in user-generated content underscores the power of social media in influencing tourism choices. Furthermore, influencers have emerged as pivotal figures in the tourism industry, driving destination awareness and interest through their personal experiences and large followings. However, the credibility of influencers is paramount, and consumers are increasingly cautious about the authenticity of the information they encounter online.

Apart from that, Influencers significantly influence people's interest in buying or consuming something. This is also related to affective intensities, which encourage people's imagination through the emotional impact of the tourism experience itself. So, the influencer marketing method encourages social, ecological, and cultural changes in Indonesia. People will tend to be active on social media instead of interacting in real life to get information. In addition, the tourism sector will force ecological and cultural changes to meet people's imagination and expectations, which will encourage social, cultural, and environmental exploitation.

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All author declares having an equal contribution. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

The data is available by request to the author.

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