

Communication Strategies of Nano Influencers to Promote Tourism Decision-Making

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Abstract

This study uses qualitative research methodologies to analyse the communication patterns of nano-influencers in relation to travel decision-making. Data was collected through comprehensive interviews with travel nano-influencers and content analysis of travel-related material from social media. The research found that nano-influencers use a blend of credibility, narrative, and persuasion to influence their followers' decisions. Essential elements are (1) proficiency, shown by the provision of precise and comprehensive travel information, (2) trustworthiness, shown by sharing of authentic experiences, and (3) appeal, characterised by a personable attitude and interesting presentation. Furthermore, narrative that is rational and accessible to audiences greatly inspires them. The tourism industry may use these study results to build marketing communication and public relations initiatives using nano-influencers.

Keywords: communication strategies, nano-influencers, influencing travel choices

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Introduction

The role of influencers in shaping consumer behaviour has grown significantly in the digital age. Nano-influencers, defined as individuals with a social media following typically between 1,000 and 10,000, have emerged as powerful communicators due to their high engagement rates and perceived authenticity. This study explores how nano-influencers use communication strategies to influence travel decision-making among their followers. The research highlights the mechanisms of trust, storytelling, and visual communication that make nano-influencers effective agents in tourism promotion. These communication patterns not only reflect personal branding strategies but also the shifting landscape of tourism marketing in an era increasingly influenced by user-generated content and peer recommendation. The significance of nano-influencers lies in their ability to offer a perceived genuine and relatable voice, making them ideal partners in a tourism economy that values authenticity.

Additionally, nano-influencers represent a middle ground between everyday users and celebrities. Their reach, while limited compared to macro-influencers, is offset by a higher level of audience intimacy. This phenomenon plays an important role in the credibility and reception of the messages they share, particularly in decision-heavy domains such as travel. As such, this study aims to examine their communication techniques in greater depth to understand how they guide, inspire, and influence travel decisions.

Literature Review

Influencer marketing has become a vital tool in the tourism industry. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of authenticity and engagement in influencer effectiveness (Abidin, 2016; Freberg et al., 2011). Nano-influencers, despite their smaller audiences, tend to build stronger relationships with followers compared to mega- or macro-influencers (Kay et al., 2020). Their content is often perceived as more relatable and less commercial, which enhances credibility. The literature also notes the growing trend of user-generated content (UGC) shaping travel behaviour (Cox et al., 2009). In addition, the theory of parasocial interaction is frequently cited in influencer research, where audiences develop one-sided yet emotionally involved relationships with media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This dynamic is particularly prominent among nano-influencers whose follower base allows for closer, more frequent interaction.

Moreover, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) provides a valuable lens through which to analyse persuasion in influencer communication. According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), influencers using both central and peripheral routes of persuasion—such as detailed travel advice versus emotional storytelling—can effectively appeal to different audience motivations. This dual strategy is especially salient in the tourism context, where both rational planning and emotional inspiration drive decisions.

In addition, trustworthiness and social proof play essential roles in enhancing perceived authenticity. Studies show that followers often seek validation from influencers who mirror their own values and travel aspirations (Casaló et al., 2018). This reinforces the idea that nano-influencers are more than just content creators—they are trust brokers who navigate the delicate balance between inspiration and information.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design comprising two methods: semi-structured interviews and content analysis. Five travel nano-influencers, each with 1,000 to 10,000 followers, were selected through purposive sampling. In-depth interviews explored their strategies for content creation and audience engagement. Additionally, social media posts from Instagram and TikTok were analysed to identify recurring communication patterns. Data were thematically coded to extract dominant themes and strategies.

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions regarding influencer motivations, content planning, perceived audience impact, and collaboration with tourism brands. Participants were selected based on their recent consistent engagement in travel-related posting and willingness to participate in the study. The content analysis focused on a 6-month period of social media activity, during which posts were examined for engagement rates, tone, narrative structure, and use of visual elements.

In analysing the data, NVivo software was used to code and categorize responses into thematic clusters. Codes were iteratively refined as more patterns emerged across interviews. For content analysis, a coding sheet was developed to assess post type (image, video, reel), narrative format (informative, inspirational, promotional), and engagement style (polls, comments, calls to action).

Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis revealed three major communication strategies:

1. **Proficiency:** Influencers provided detailed travel guides, cost breakdowns, and logistical tips, which established them as knowledgeable sources. Posts often included day-by-day itineraries, map screenshots, transportation links, and budgeting tips. These were frequently praised by followers in the comments, reinforcing the influencers' status as reliable planners. The integration of planning tools such as Google Maps, Airbnb reviews, and localized weather data further enhanced informational credibility.
2. **Trustworthiness:** Sharing genuine personal experiences, including challenges and candid moments, helped build trust with audiences. Several influencers recounted moments when plans failed or when they had to adjust their itineraries due to unexpected events. This transparency increased engagement and relatability. For instance, one influencer discussed missing a connecting bus and being forced to explore an unplanned destination—a post that received overwhelmingly positive responses for its honesty.
3. **Appeal:** Engaging presentation styles—through humor, emotion, or storytelling—enhanced relatability and impact. Influencers employed visual aesthetics such as curated color schemes, use of background music, captions with local dialects or slang, and behind-the-scenes moments. The narratives were often presented in a first-person voice, simulating a conversation with a friend. Some also included emotional appeals, such as stories about reconnecting with family or overcoming personal fears while traveling alone.

Further analysis showed that influencers regularly engaged in audience interaction through polls, Q&A sessions, and personalized responses. These interactions created a feedback loop where influencers adapted future content based on follower interests. Hashtag use also

emerged as a strategy to connect posts to broader travel trends or seasonal promotions (e.g., #solotravel, #hiddenplaces2025).

Additionally, nano-influencers demonstrated a keen sense of timing. Content was often released strategically around holidays, long weekends, or during travel expo periods. This temporal alignment increased relevance and maximized visibility. Some influencers partnered with local tourism boards to promote lesser-known attractions, using storytelling to reframe perceptions and add novelty to common destinations.

Moreover, the influence of nano-influencers extends beyond their follower base. Several participants noted that tourism businesses—especially small, local operators—reached out for informal collaborations, such as providing free meals or accommodations in exchange for mention. These partnerships were rarely formalized but contributed to destination visibility among niche markets. Influencers reported that their endorsements often led to noticeable spikes in reservations or follower inquiries about featured places.

Conclusion

Nano-influencers play a significant role in shaping tourism decisions by leveraging communication strategies rooted in trust, authenticity, and relatability. Their proficiency in presenting travel content, combined with genuine narratives and emotional connection, makes them effective in promoting destinations and travel experiences. Tourism marketers and public relations professionals can harness these insights to collaborate with nano-influencers in creating compelling campaigns.

This study contributes to the broader understanding of digital tourism marketing by focusing on a relatively underexplored category of influencers. The findings highlight how nano-influencers serve as hybrid communicators—both peers and promoters—who blend strategic content creation with authentic storytelling. For tourism organizations, this means rethinking influencer collaborations not only in terms of reach but also in terms of resonance.

Furthermore, the data suggest that nano-influencers offer a sustainable and adaptable model for destination marketing. Their flexibility, cultural alignment with niche audiences, and consistent engagement practices make them invaluable assets in long-term branding strategies. As tourism becomes increasingly experiential and digitally mediated, nano-influencers are poised to play a central role in influencing not only where people go, but how they travel and what they value.

Limitations and Future Research

This research is limited by its small sample size and the scope of platforms studied. Future studies may expand to include a wider array of nano-influencers across different cultures and regions. Quantitative approaches could complement qualitative insights to measure the actual conversion rates or behavioral impacts resulting from influencer content. Additionally, comparative studies between nano-, micro-, and macro-influencers may yield further understanding of influence dynamics across scales.

Future research could also explore ethical considerations, such as transparency in sponsorship and the potential mental health impact of constant audience engagement on nano-influencers.

The long-term career sustainability of these individuals and their evolving roles within tourism ecosystems also present rich avenues for inquiry.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author used generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT) in a limited capacity to support grammar checking, paragraph refinement, and formatting suggestions. All ideas, interpretations, and analyses were developed independently by the author.

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