

# HOW DO INFLUENCERS REALLY AFFECT THE DESTINATION CHOICE?



The organizers of the recent WTM published a study dedicated to “digital influencers” and the fact that they have little influence on the holiday destination choice of consumers.

Although the study only referred to the UK market, it is nevertheless instructive. Indeed, out of a total of 1,025 holidaymakers surveyed in the UK, **78%, said that the digital influencers play no part in the choice of travel.** A further 8% said that they are certainly following social media influencers, but they do not play an important role in destination choice. Only 3% of respondents said that influencers play an important role in the choice of travel destination.

## **Bigger studies needed**

Certainly, this British snapshot is not yet a definitive objective judgment. It is often said that the whole over-tourism problem is attributed to the fact that many of today’s travelers are inspired by spectacular images and then want to post a picture of the attraction as well.

The result is that well-known places are over-crowded or smaller, previously lesser-known places suddenly boom (such as Vila Honegg) or sometimes get overcrowded quickly – like the mountain inn Aescher in Appenzell. The digital influencers are now part of today’s media and therefore also the marketing and media planning of many travel companies.

However, the image of influencers also suffers. For example, from members of the community, who believe that a few thousand followers give them special rights to claims about travel. This often leads to unsightly disputes. Some hotels or entire travel companies do not want to have anything to do with influencers anymore, whereby of course one should differentiate between reputable and dubious ones.

Another problem is the credibility. Ultimately, the influencers are in many cases just “PR vehicles”, who thus promote a place or an attraction against payment or for free services. And in a way that relies only on the positive power of the image, but too often fades out the negative sides of a journey, possible fueling false expectations.

## **The problem with consumer confidence**

Of course, credibility issues are not just faced with influencers. The study also shows that TripAdvisor, which has been on the market for 18 years and a well-known source of inspiration and information for travelers, still has to deal with “fake reviews”. Still, positive or negative reviews on TripAdvisor are offered for sale by dubious companies. British The Times wrote in September this year that up to a third of TripAdvisor reviews could be fake.

This brings us back to the digital influencers, who can have “fake followers” that is hundreds or even thousands of followers, which are not real. Thus, their posts have no real effect afterwards.

In conclusion, the study should definitely be taken with some reservation, considering it is only from the UK market that has its specifics. But it is clear that many influencers have little to no influence. **On the other hand, however, there are those who have a lot of influence - around 2.6 billion people are on social media, more and more on Instagram, which is establishing itself as the "social leading medium"**. Therefore, it would be short-sighted to see influencers as a mere fad, but dealing with them must be learned.

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