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TRAVEL BLOGGING AS A MODERN INNOVATIVE TOOL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM AND EXCURSION ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of such a modern tool for promoting a tourism product and the overall development of tourism activities as travel blogging. The article emphasizes the basic concepts and features of travel blogging. The article describes the world and Ukrainian experience of travel blogging development and leading travel bloggers who are becoming key players in digitalization and start-up projects in the field of tourism and hospitality.

Keywords: innovative tool; tourism activities; travel blogging; travel blog; travel blogger; influencer marketing, content.

Тревел-блогінг як сучасний інноваційний інструмент розвитку туристичної та екскурсійної діяльності

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Стаття присвячена аналізу такого сучасного інструменту просування туристичного продукту та загального розвитку туристичної діяльності, як тревел-блогінг. Зроблено наголос основних поняттях і особливостях тревел-блогінгу. Надана характеристика світового і українського досвіду розвитку тревел-блогінгу та провідних тревел-блогерів, які стають ключовими гравцями у діджиталізації та стартап-проектах у сфері туризму і гостинності.

Ключові слова: інноваційний інструмент; туристична діяльність; тревел-блогінг; тревел-блог; тревел-блогер; інфлюенс-маркетинг; контент.

Problem statement. Competition between tourism stakeholders around the world - travel agencies, tour operators, accommodation facilities, tour agencies, guides, transport carriers, catering, entertainment, etc. - is currently extremely high. Many factors influence which country, which destinations a tourist chooses and which tourist products they prefer. Most of them lie today in the media and information space, where the phenomenon of travel blogging, or posting online travel publications, has recently become widespread.

Today, travel blogging is seen as a separate area of the international information space, characterized by globalization, the expansion of intercultural contacts, and the rapid development of the tourism and media industries. In the rapidly changing digital reality, travel blogging is gaining popularity. YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook not only provide information about countries and peoples of the world, but also have the power to change people's views on them. Therefore, this way of promoting its tourist destinations and facilities is extremely important for realizing the recreational and tourist potential of a particular country.

This necessitates an analysis of the formation and development of the travel blogging market in individual countries and regions with a strategic task of its practical use in modern conditions. The results of such studies can be used by tourism experts, media researchers,

marketers, geographers, travel and hospitality industry specialists; state, public organizations, local governments in the process of performing their tasks of strategic development of tourism activities, realization of the country's recreational and tourist potential, improvement of the quality of tourist services and improvement of the country's tourist image.

Analysis of recent research and publications. A significant contribution to the development of the research problem was made by domestic and foreign scholars, including I. Antonenko, S. Bilous, O. Beidyk, L. Bozhko, S. Hnatyshyn, M. Hudyma, A. Zarichniak, O. Kolotukha, T. Kryvitska, M. Malska, H. Mykhailichenko, N. Novosad, M. Stepanenko, T. Tkachenko, M. Boecher, O. Gradwell, K. Jenkins, Del Chiappa, S. Taylor, etc.

Formulation of the article's goals. The main purpose of this study is to analyse the global and national travel blogging as a means of realizing the recreational and tourist potential and one of the prerequisites for the dynamic development of the country's tourism activities, promotion of its tourism products and destinations.

Presentation of the main material. Travel blogging is a post or record of a tourist (blogger) that reflects his or her planned, current or past trip. Travel blogs are a kind of virtual travel diaries. They consist of posts created on the basis of a common theme, for example, a certain geographical destination, country, territory or tour. In these posts, the blogger, who is actually a tourist himself, informs viewers and subscribers about his impressions, adventures and experiences during the trip. The author of the blog determines its subject matter, content, style, structure, frequency of updates, etc.

Travel blogs make life easier for travel service users in many ways: they help to learn more about a particular place and what it can offer tourists; evaluate alternatives and avoid undesirable places; provide information about what to see and do in a destination; help to make decisions about certain destinations, better imagine what it will be like, give confidence in the choice; reduce the risk and uncertainty associated with travel planning and increase the efficiency of its planning.

The growing popularity of travel blogs is evidenced by the fact that National Geographic Travel (a specialized travel blog sector) has an audience of almost 30 million in the US. Digital travel content is expected to grow unevenly over the years. According to a study by Price Waterhouse Coopers, 40% of European tourists make decisions based on information available on the Internet. Experts also estimate that more than 80% of the population aged 20-45 use the Internet when organizing a trip.

A blog is defined as 'a website whose main content is entries, articles or other forms of data that are regularly added; blogs are usually public and involve third-party readers who

may engage in public debate with the author (in blog comments or on their websites); blogs may be personal, group (corporate, club, etc.) or public (open) in terms of authorship, and thematic or general in terms of content' [7].

In the broadest sense, a blog is a website or a section of a website that contains multimedia and textual records arranged in reverse chronological order and is open for viewing and commenting. In a narrow sense, a blog is a website or a section of a website that contains dated entries by one participant (host).

A travel blog is a type of online communication and one of the areas of travel journalism in the format of a virtual diary. It is a personalized structure that, in addition to geographical, cultural and political information, is based on the author's (travel blogger's) personal impressions and travel experience.

A travel blog can be defined as a website, website section, or social media page that contains posts or entries of various formats related to a planned, current, or past trip. A travel blog is usually understood as a personal page of an author (or authors) who share their travel experiences in the form of posts (blog entries) on a relevant topic.

The emergence of travel blogs is linked to the popularity of travel notes on social media. At the dawn of its development as an online genre, travel stories were purely entertaining. Their purpose was to share travel experiences. With the development and popularity of social media, such groups can participate in commercial projects and today it has become a professional activity in the tourism sector. Relatively low costs, as well as a large amount of information and easy access to it, have turned travel blogs into important communication and marketing platforms for both the supply of and demand for tourism services.

The main functions of travel blogs include the following:

1. Informational - providing detailed information about a certain place, ways of spending time there, description of geographical, cultural and architectural sights.
2. Preventive and advisory - information about possible dangers, recommendations on how to minimize possible risks, advice on planning and making a trip, leisure activities.
3. Marketing - travel bloggers can significantly influence the choice of travel products and services.
4. Orientation - promoting the choice of travel destination and making sure it is correct, visualizing the future trip, minimizing uncertainty.
5. Motivational - motivating viewers to travel.

6. Cultural and educational - travel bloggers are able to influence the creation of the image of certain nations and cultures in the minds of other peoples.

The following types of travel blogs can be distinguished, each of which has its own niche:

- blogs dedicated to a particular region of the world (South Asia, North America, etc.);
- blogs dedicated to different ways of travelling (plane, ship, railway, bicycle, etc.)
- thematic blogs devoted to various aspects of travel, different types of tourism: extreme, sports, ecological, religious, gastronomic, etc;
- by the number of participants: individual 'solo-trip', family, group, travelling with friends, with animals, etc.

A travel blogger can be defined as an Internet user who is engaged in reflecting his or her travels, introducing the audience to his or her travels, his or her experience, his or her perception of tourist destinations.

The main features of a travel blogger include the following:

- independent travel planning and independent content creation;
- turning their own travel experiences into valuable content that attracts an audience;
- does not necessarily have a special education (tourism, geography), but is well versed in travel planning and everything related to it;
- simultaneously performs the work of a cameraman, journalist, photographer;
- blogs primarily for their own enjoyment and lifestyle, and only then for earnings.

Today, travel blogs are a kind of commercial platform. Since travel bloggers are opinion leaders, i.e. they influence travel decisions, marketers promote goods and services, usually related to tourism. Travel blogging is also becoming increasingly popular due to its ability to monetize.

Travel blogging can be seen as a special type of influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is defined as a method of promotion that helps to attract new customers through the company's interaction with opinion leaders (including bloggers) who have a loyal audience. In social media, an influencer is usually a user who has a large and loyal audience. In the travel industry, this approach involves travel companies cooperating with well-known personalities, including popular bloggers. Efficiency is largely ensured by the use of online platforms and social media. Studies show that bloggers' advertising is 65% more trusted than traditional sources of promotion. The recommendations and advice provided by travel bloggers have a significant impact on the choice of travel and travel services. Travel bloggers also take part in

sales promotion activities, for example, by providing promotional codes for their subscribers, holding contests, etc.

The initiator of cooperation with travel bloggers can be not only a commercial organization, but also a local government agency or a non-governmental organization interested in developing the local economy, promoting cultural, cultural heritage protection and tourism development. Marketing using travel blogs can help achieve these goals.

The most popular platforms for travel bloggers to publish on are YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. Social networks serve as platforms for the development of start-ups, attracting subscribers and building a loyal audience.

Many Western travel bloggers create and maintain their own websites in addition to their social media accounts. Such sites usually contain information about the destinations visited by the blogger (sometimes even in the form of an interactive map), they host video content in series or by headings, provide travel tips and life hacks, and may have a separate section about the blogger with his or her personal information and contacts.

Bloggers often choose a specific direction and focus on a specific audience. For example, they talk about budget travel, or gastronomic travel, or little-known countries or tourist routes. For example, the world's most popular food blogger Mark Vines (10.8 million subscribers and more than 1.4 thousand videos on YouTube) travels in search of the most delicious and interesting food, introduces dishes of different nations, and provides a kind of gastronomic guide [14].

Nasir Yassin (pseudonym Nas Daily) is the most popular travel blogger in the world with 13.8 million subscribers on YouTube. His channel features 1.4 thousand videos from around the world. His slogan is 'to bring people together', and he sees his mission as showing the most incredible places and people on planet Earth [16].

The second most popular YouTuber (11.2 million) is Turkish YouTuber and traveller Ridvan, the author of the Karadenizli maceracı channel (another name is Black sea adventurer). His channel features more than 200 videos on survival in the wild, setting up a camp, cooking in the field, camping, and fishing [13].

The fourth most subscribed channel on YouTube (9.22 million) is the Canadian media brand Yes Theory, founded by four friends, Thomas Bragg, Ammar Kandil, Matt Dugger, and Darin Emre. As they wrote in the description of their channel: 'We believe that life's best moments and deepest connections exist outside of your comfort zone.' Their content has been praised as a fresh and authentic way to experience foreign cultures [18].

Drew Binsky (4.71 million subscribers and more than 1.1 thousand videos) has travelled to 197 countries. He explores the diversity of the world, the culture and peculiarities of different peoples and places. In the description of his channel, he writes: 'I tell stories about inspiring people, hidden cultures, and wild adventures in remote places' and encourages you to contact him with any questions about travel [11].

Geography Now is an American YouTube channel that covers videos about all the countries of the world in alphabetical order according to the UN list. It was founded by Paul Barbato (who is the host), but now an entire international team is working on it. The site primarily pursues educational and worldview goals. The channel has 826 videos, was founded in 2014 and currently has 3.38 million subscribers [12].

In 2006, the La Set campaign 'Start a Blog' was launched in Ukraine, with the main goal of developing and popularizing the Ukrainian-language blogosphere. Since then, the number of blogs and bloggers has been growing. New blog formats were introduced, the audience of bloggers began to grow, and new blogging platforms began to appear.

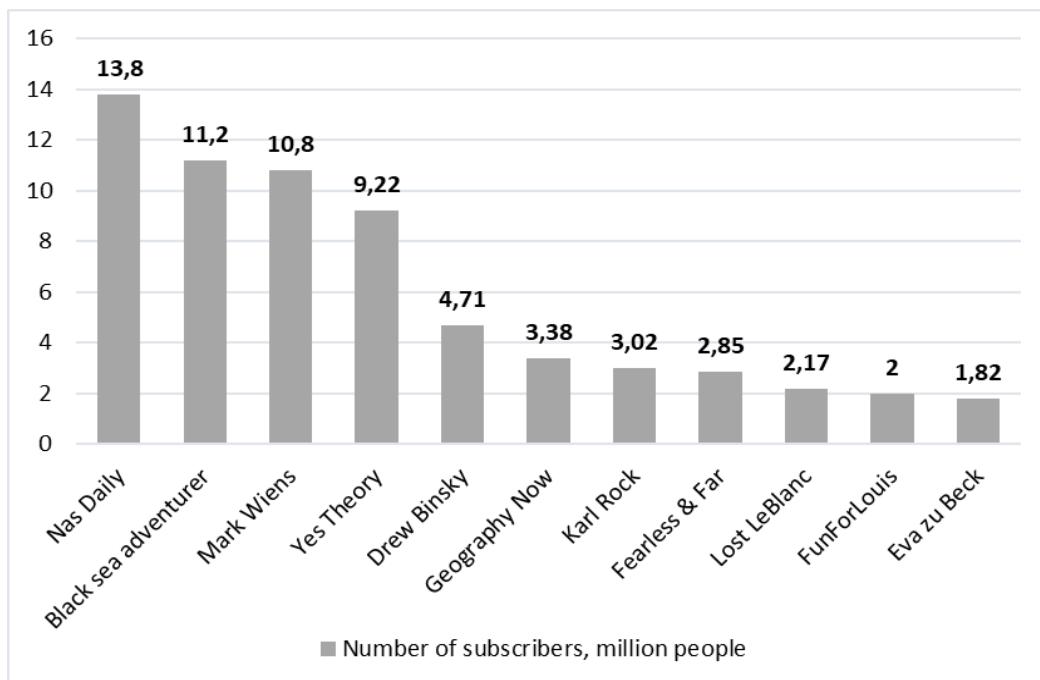


Fig. 1. Top 10 foreign travel blogs by the number of subscribers on YouTube, as of November 2024

As for travel, interest in the topic of travel has increased rapidly since the launch of the World Inside Out programme on 1+1 TV channel, the first episode of which was broadcast on 11 December 2010. The programme was created and hosted by Dmitry Komarov, a well-

known Ukrainian journalist and traveller. The project has become popular, and as of the end of 2023, a total of 14 seasons of the program have been broadcast, with episodes lasting 45-70 minutes. To attract an even larger audience, a YouTube channel was created in 2010, which as of November 2024 has 4.07 million subscribers and 699 videos. After the full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian-language channel ‘The World Inside Out’ was created, which currently has 643 thousand subscribers and contains 648 videos [6]. Dmytro Komarov usually shows little-explored places of a particular country and focuses on revealing the ‘reverse side’ of the country or area and exploring them as deeply as possible. During filming, Dmitriy takes part in various risky projects and affairs, and participates in local rituals.

Anton Ptushkin's YouTube channel has 5.48 million subscribers, making him one of the most famous travel bloggers in the world [1]. All of his videos are produced to a very high standard. In his blog, Anton aims to show all the beauty of the planet, to introduce different countries of the world and their peculiarities, including exotic countries and little-known or remote places. In his videos, Anton Ptushkin also sets research tasks, for example, to understand why the city of Melbourne has been voted the best place to live on Earth for 7 years in a row. Forbes magazine included Anton Ptushkin in the top 5 domestic influencers.

After the full-scale invasion, he decided to suspend his main channel with millions of subscribers and switched to an English-language channel (‘Anton somewhere’, 521 thousand subscribers), also creating a new Ukrainian-language channel (178 thousand subscribers) [10].

The ‘Thickets’ project with 454 thousand subscribers on YouTube was launched in 2018. The friends from Khmelnytskyi decided to explore ‘Ukraine without cosmetics’, ‘the Ukrainian backstage that everyone else usually avoids, is ashamed of, or simply doesn't notice’ [9]. They show remote and little-known corners of Ukraine, dying villages, and the people who live in them. In 2023, Thickets launched the War project to show the life of the frontline and de-mining areas.

Ukraïner is the most popular media project about Ukraine, its culture, history and people. The project was launched in 2016. The project team has travelled to thousands of Ukrainian towns and villages, exploring local traditions, holidays, peculiarities, authentic crafts, folklore, architecture, etc. The channel has over a thousand videos. There are separate sections: ‘Roof’ - about the peculiarities of architecture in different regions, “Wines of Ukraine”, “Brave Cities”, “National Communities”, “Ukraine from the Sky”, etc. [17]. In 2020, Ukrainer won the first Ukrainian YouTube award, the Palianytsia Awards, in the YouTube Channel of the Year category.

The activities of Ukrainian travel bloggers are gradually becoming an important factor in promoting tourism in Ukraine. Even under martial law, travel blogs play an important role, as they maintain interest in our country among foreign audiences, promote Ukrainian culture, natural and historical heritage, and showcase the main tourist destinations. During the war, some bloggers specializing in travel content began to show the life of Ukrainians in the new conditions, the problems of the frontline and liberated territories, tourism-related issues, etc.

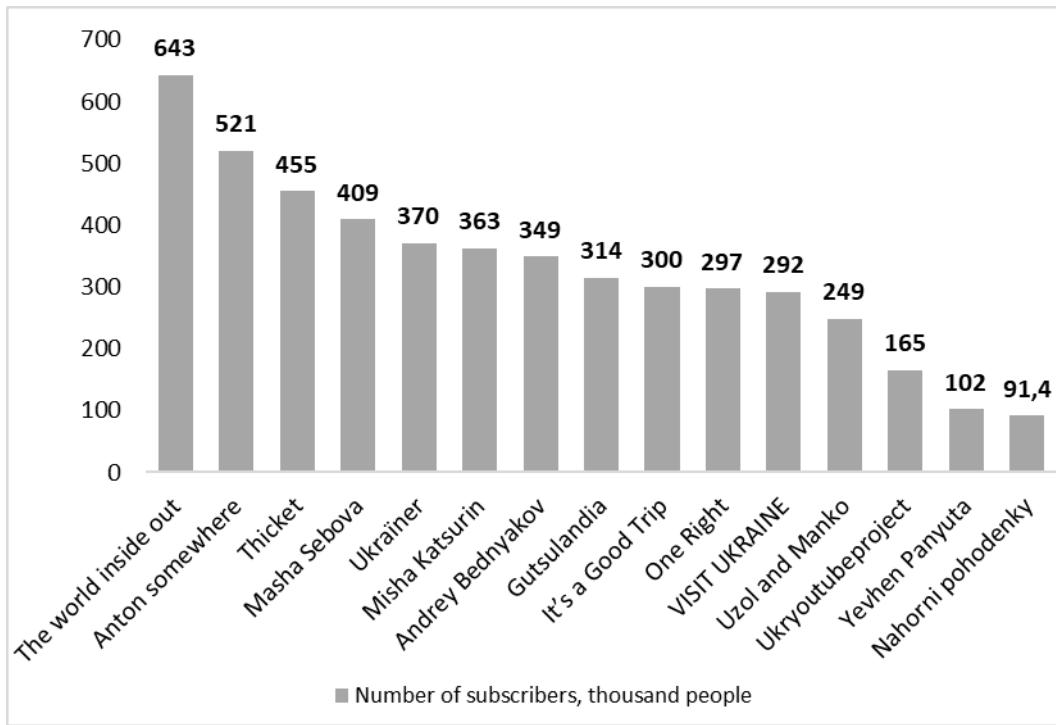


Fig. 2. Top 15 Ukrainian travel blogs by the number of subscribers on YouTube, as of November 2024

The leader in terms of subscribers is Dmitry Komarov's channel World Inside Out. Anton Ptushkin's English-language channel Anton Somewhere is in second place with 521,000 subscribers. The third place went to Khashchi with 455 thousand subscribers, the fourth place went to Masha Sebova's channel, and the fifth place went to Ukrainer.

Today, the Ukrainian segment of the global travel blogging market is defined by the active patriotic stance of bloggers and their support for the fight against Russian aggression.

The content of the studied YouTube channels can be divided into two groups:

1. Channels devoted to travel both in Ukraine and abroad, showing both Ukrainian tourist destinations and other countries and their destinations - World Inside Out, Masha Sebova, Andriy Bednyakov, It's a Good Trip: Bikes, Adventures and Food, One Right, Uzol and Manko, Yevhen Panyuta, Nagorni Pohodenky.

2. Channels that focused exclusively on domestic Ukrainian tourist destinations and their introduction to both Ukrainian and foreign audiences - Khashchy, Ukraïner, Hutsulendiya, Visit Ukraine, UkrYutubProject.

Travel bloggers are involved in the process of constructing virtual images of tourist destinations. And the more potential tourists like this image, the sooner they will make a decision about travelling and, accordingly, purchasing travel products and services. On a blog, each user can post their own content and express their impressions of the trip. At the same time, the content created by bloggers is beginning to compete with the official content of travel companies or the media, and is often better received by viewers. This fact is another proof of the growing influence of individualization in tourism, as consumers are more interested in the experience of one person rather than offers that are the same and standard for everyone.

Another advantage of travel blogs is the fact that the blogger, in addition to his or her impressions, provides a lot of information about various aspects of travel that may be interesting and useful to others. As a rule, a travel blog includes complete information about a trip, starting with its planning and advice on what to take with you, to the final impressions and tips that arise after the trip. In this sense, the main goal of travel blogging is to provide useful information for those people who want to visit a particular country, i.e. information that will help make this trip easy and enjoyable.

Conclusions. Travel blogging performs important functions in tourism and society as a whole. In our opinion, the impact of travel blogging on the successful realization of the recreational and tourism potential of countries and regions is quite significant. In the process of creating and demonstrating their content, travel bloggers promote the destinations of their travels, their natural, historical and cultural attractions, local cuisine, mentality and traditions of the population. The thematic areas of travel blogs cover both travel to specific countries and regions of the world and more narrowly defined gastronomic, budget, extreme and other types of travel.

Nowadays, travel bloggers are not only a source of various information for travelers, but also an effective means of promoting tourism products and services, increasing the popularity of hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and enhancing the attractiveness of tourist destinations.

A popular travel blogger can be seen as an influencer who has a loyal and trusting audience and is able to generate additional demand for the goods and services he or she has used and advertises, as well as influence the choice of specific travel and leisure destinations.

The Ukrainian-language travel segment of the YouTube media platform is developing dynamically. After the full-scale invasion, most Ukrainian travel bloggers focused on creating Ukrainian-language content and videos about Ukraine. According to the study, this is the kind of content that is in demand among Ukrainian society today. In terms of views, the most popular Ukrainian-language YouTube channels are Visit Ukraine, It's a Good Trip: Bikes, Adventures and Food, Hutsulandia, Khashchi, Ukraïner, and Masha Sebova. In terms of the number of subscribers, the leaders are World Inside Out, Anton somewhere, Khashchi, Masha Sebova, Ukraïner, Misha Katsurin.

Leading Ukrainian travel bloggers can also be classified as opinion leaders - influencers. Ukrainian travel blogging is important in promoting Ukrainian tourist destinations and tourist services, getting to know Ukraine better for both foreigners and Ukrainians, and organizing leisure activities for foreign tourists and local residents. An analysis of travel content on the YouTube platform has shown that the most relevant topics at the moment are travels to different territories of Ukraine, including the de-occupied and frontline areas. Ukrainian travel channels are actively developing and presenting high-quality content, contributing to the development of a new Ukrainian media culture. Cooperation with travel bloggers can be extremely effective for the development of the Ukrainian tourism sector in peacetime. Travel blogging can significantly contribute to the development of various types of tourism, including cultural and educational, gastronomic, health, ecological, urban, new innovative types of tourism, etc.

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