

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON SUSTAINABLE DIVE TOURISM

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Abstract—Sustainable dive tourism has become an essential tool for balancing economic development, marine protection, and responsible travel. Meanwhile, social media marketing has proved to be one of the most influential factors in the tourism industry. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and travel blogs have significantly influenced the decisions of travellers in terms of their destinations, activities, and behaviours in those places. This white paper investigates the role of social media marketing in sustainable dive tourism. It covers the advantages of using social media in sustainable dive tourism, such as the promotion of eco-friendly dive operators, marine protection, and responsible travel. It also covers the disadvantages, which include overtourism, environmental degradation, greenwashing, and harmful behaviours towards marine life. The paper concludes that social media marketing can support sustainable dive tourism, but can also contribute to environmental degradation if the marketing of dive operators focuses on popularity instead of sustainability.

Index Terms—Marketing; Sustainability; Conservation Tourism; Dive Tourism; Environmental Degradation; Greenwashing.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dive tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of marine tourism. Many people from all over the world dive in various locations to see coral reefs, shipwrecks, underwater caves, and marine life. Some of the most common dive locations include tropical islands, coastal areas, and marine protected areas. Today, social media is an integral component of the dive tourism industry. For instance, a viral video of a beautiful dive site, such as a coral reef, an encounter with a sea turtle, or an underwater resort, can encourage thousands of people to dive in the same place.

Meanwhile, the marine environment is facing serious threats due to various factors, including coral bleaching, climate change, pollution, overfishing, habitat destruction, and uncontrolled tourism. Sustainable dive tourism seeks to address these issues in order to protect the environment, promote environmentally responsible diving, support local communities economically, and ensure long-term protection of dive sites. This presents both opportunities and challenges for sustainable dive tourism marketing.

II. UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABLE DIVE TOURISM

Definition: Sustainable dive tourism means diving tourism that seeks to minimize damage to the environment, maximize the benefits to local communities, and promote the long-term sustainability of dive sites. It entails the protection of coral reefs, support for local communities, adherence to guidelines for interacting with wildlife, reduction of pollution, and educating divers about sustainable dive tourism. The aim is to ensure that dive sites are maintained in their best condition for future generations.

Key Principles: The key principles of sustainable dive tourism include environmental sustainability, social and cultural sustainability, economic support for local communities, long-term sustainability of dive sites, and responsible behaviour of tourists. Examples of sustainable dive tourism practices include the use of reef-safe

sunscreen, avoiding interactions with coral reefs, using eco-friendly dive operators, participation in reef cleanups, and support for marine protected areas.

III. THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN DIVE TOURISM

Why Social Media Matters: The use of social media in tourism marketing has revolutionized the way tourists choose their next destination. Instead of using brochures, magazines, or seeking assistance from tour operators, tourists can now use platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and blogs to make their decisions. For dive tourism, social media is an integral component of the industry because diving is an experience that can be easily captured through photos, videos, and vlogs. Common forms of content include coral reefs, whale sharks, sea turtles, manta rays, underwater photography, and luxury dive resorts—each creating an emotional response that encourages travel.

Social Media as a Marketing Tool: Dive operators, liveboard operators, tourism boards, and other businesses in the industry utilize social media for promoting dive packages, advertising certification courses, promoting marine life encounters, developing brand identity, and increasing bookings. Today, most dive businesses rely on social media marketing more than traditional advertising.

IV. POSITIVE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON SUSTAINABLE DIVE TOURISM

A. Promoting Eco-Friendly Dive Operators

Using social media marketing, environmentally friendly dive operators have more opportunities to reach more people. A dive operator could utilize their platform to spread awareness about eco-friendly businesses in the industry through photos of divers cleaning up marine life, educational posts about marine life, videos educating people on responsible diving, and eco-friendly business models. When eco-friendly businesses have more visibility on social media, they become more competitive in the tourism industry.

B. Raising Awareness About Marine Conservation

One of the most significant advantages of using social media is that it is educational. Today, even dive tourism marketing involves educating people about marine life, including topics such as coral reef conservation, pollution in marine life, endangered marine species, climate change, and sustainable tourism. When people follow social media accounts that deal with dive tourism, they become more educated about marine life, which can encourage more responsible behaviour while on vacation.

C. Encouraging Responsible Tourist Behaviour

Social media influencers and operators can promote sustainable dive tourism practices including good buoyancy skills, responsible interactions with wildlife, correct usage of equipment, no-touch diving, and reduction of waste generated during tours. Short videos are the most effective way to communicate these practices because they are easy to consume and share.

D. Supporting Local Communities

Social media marketing can be used to promote locally owned dive businesses, attracting tourists and benefiting local communities through increased income for locals, job creation, reduction of dependence on international companies, and development of community-based tourism. When tourists dive with local operators, the money stays in the country, directly supporting sustainable economic development.

E. Encouraging Citizen Science

Most dive operators and organizations encourage divers to share pictures and information gathered during dives, helping researchers track marine animal species, reef health, animal migration, and environmental

changes. The social media platform thus serves not only as a marketing tool but also as a means of providing valuable data to the scientific community.

V. NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON DIVE TOURISM

A. Overtourism and Environmental Pressure

One of the most common negative impacts of social media marketing is overtourism. Sites become popular because they are promoted on social media platforms, and the resulting overtourism pressure causes damage to coral reefs by new and inexperienced tourists, increases the number of vessels visiting sites, pollutes the sites, and disrupts the natural behaviour of animals. The dive sites and reefs are fragile ecosystems that cannot sustain the numbers that overtourism attracts.

B. Harmful Wildlife Interactions

Some social media content focuses on interactions with marine life such as touching, riding, or chasing animals—including riding on sea turtles, touching sharks, standing on coral reefs, and feeding fish for photographs. When this type of content becomes trendy, other divers may start to emulate it, harming marine life, damaging coral reefs, promoting unsafe interactions, and creating false impressions about appropriate diver behaviour.

C. Greenwashing

Some tourism businesses use environmentally friendly language in their social media marketing without implementing any actual changes in their operations. This practice, known as greenwashing, includes making false promises of eco-friendly operations, using sustainability hashtags deceptively, and making misleading claims of sustainable operations. This confuses tourists about which operations are genuinely sustainable.

D. Unrealistic Expectations

The use of social media can create unrealistic expectations among tourists, including expectations of perfect diving conditions, encounters with rare species, uncrowded dive sites, and luxurious experiences at lower prices. When these expectations are not met, tourists may seek out interactions with wildlife or engage in other harmful behaviours in an attempt to fulfil those expectations.

VI. THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS IN SUSTAINABLE DIVE TOURISM

A. Positive Influence

Influencers can contribute positively to sustainable dive tourism by sharing messages promoting conservation, highlighting sustainable operators, encouraging ethical behaviour, and collecting funds for marine conservation. For example, an influencer can inform thousands of followers why it is not advisable to touch coral, creating a meaningful ripple effect across a wide audience.

B. Negative Influence

Influencers may also contribute negatively to sustainable dive tourism by staging wildlife encounters, attracting excessive tourist numbers to sites, disregarding safety rules, and encouraging luxury travel without regard for environmental impact. Due to their large following, negative examples may spread rapidly among audiences who follow their example.

C. Ethical Influence in Dive Tourism

To promote sustainable dive tourism responsibly, influencers should comply with all guidelines, reveal their sponsors, avoid misleading their audience, encourage sustainable tourism, and use their platform to inform rather than only entertain.

VII. CONCLUSION

Social media marketing has greatly impacted the way people experience and understand dive tourism. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook inspire tourists to visit dive tourism destinations, learn how to dive, and read about ocean-related stories. These platforms have also helped eco-friendly dive tourism operators and organizations increase their outreach.

Social media can be a useful tool for sustainable dive tourism, inspiring tourists to practice sustainable diving, increasing their knowledge of coral reefs and marine life, and persuading them to support eco-friendly operators. Social media can also help build local communities by helping small, local dive tourism operators attract tourists and increase awareness of their conservation activities.

However, social media can also be a source of problems for sustainable dive tourism, increasing the number of tourists visiting popular dive destinations and causing damage to coral reefs and marine life. Social media may also facilitate greenwashing, with operators using environmental conservation language as a promotional strategy without genuine commitment. For sustainable dive tourism to be successful, social media must be used in a responsible and ethical manner. Dive tourism operators, tourists, and conservation organizations should all play a role in ensuring that the beauty of the ocean is promoted without harming it.

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