

## YouTube as a Tool for Promotion in Tourism

**Dominika Zegarowicz, Maciej Stawicki**

Warsaw University of Life Sciences

Faculty of Economic Sciences

**Abstract:** The paper shows video content in YouTube as a new tool for promotion in tourism. It defines the main terms as marketing, promotion, user generated content, YouTuber, influencer etc. The aims of the research were to present, characterize and compare the popularity of selected YouTube channels with tourist content from Poland and other countries. Also an exemplary action using YouTube, conducted by the Polish Tourism Organization, was described and its effects were assessed. The analysis of empirical studies confirmed that respondents know tourist channels (mainly Polish), but their popularity is much lower than the popularity of top YouTubers. YouTube rather rarely is used to search for tourist content and general entertainment, lifestyle, fashion or gaming are more popular topics. Respondents use the site to search for tourist content, but less than a half of respondents follow YouTubers' recommendations. A small role is also played by YouTube in the process of the selection of destinations by users who rarely rely on materials available on the site when choosing the place of their future travels. That said, the continuous increase in website and the analysis of research results confirmed that YouTube may be an important tool for tourism promotion and the popularization of travelling.

**Keywords:** YouTube, video content, influencer, tourism, promotion, user generated content

### Introduction

In recent times, the Internet has become an inherent tool accompanying humanity. It enables communication, serves as a tool for data exchange, allows easy access to a number of services, such as banking and shopping. It is a source of information (although not always trustworthy) as well as entertainment. Along with the development of the Internet, new and different types of websites were formed. One of them is user-generated content

(UGC), which applies to different types of content, e.g. blog entries, podcasts, wiki entries and videos with the flagship of YouTube, which has in the last years transformed from user-generated content into a professionally generated content (PGC) video site (Kim, 2012). Although UGC video popularity can be temporary and is rather unpredictable (Cha et al., 2007), more and more often video-creators are using the Internet as a source of income by advertising brands, companies or places.

Having noticed the increasing number of travel-related content on YouTube, the authors of this article have decided to examine the use and role of this website in the promotion of tourism, which is the main aim of the paper. The specific objectives were: to present short characteristics of the analyzed website, present selected YouTube channels involved in the promotion of tourism and travel from Poland and abroad, and to assess and compare their popularity. Also, the exemplary action of using YouTube as conducted by the Polish Tourism Organization was described and its effects were assessed. Another important objective was to get to know and evaluate the knowledge of selected channels; and to assess the role of YouTube in the selection of tourist destinations by its users.

## **Methodology and theoretical background**

In order to analyze the role of YouTube as a new tool for promotion in tourism, many sources of information were used. The analysis included Polish and foreign literature on new trends in marketing and many online sources due to the relatively new and dynamically changing nature of the analyzed phenomenon and the limited resources of traditional literature. The authors used also their own knowledge, observations and insights. Desk research was carried out to investigate the current popularity of Polish and foreign YouTube channels. To identify the knowledge of certain YouTube channels and the role of the website in tourism promotion, questionnaire surveys using the online survey technique were used. The research tool was a questionnaire which contained 14 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The results of the survey answered by 122 people were elaborated and presented using charts and tables.

## Promotion and its tools

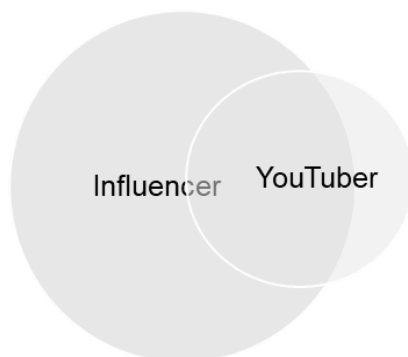
In order to define the term promotion, we should first define marketing and refer to the term marketing mix. Marketing can be defined as a problem of bringing scarce goods to the market (Kotler, 1972). It is also defined as an activity, a set of institutions, and a processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have a value for customers, clients, partners, and society (AMA, 2013). The instruments influencing the market, i.e. the marketing mix consist - depending on the concept - of four or seven elements - 4P, 7P (van Waterschoot, van den Bulte, 1992; Szromnik 2008). The basic set of activities includes product, price formation, place and marketing communication, or promotion. In territorial marketing, however, the use of the above concept has some limitations, hence new or modified marketing mix concepts can be found in the latest literature. The effective acquisition of, for example, investments forced the extension of the above four elements by another three, i.e. by appropriately trained personnel (people), service procedures (process) and physical evidence (Szromnik, 2016). In another approach, 4P has been modified to include the client's viewpoint to the 4C concept, which refers to customer value, convenience and the cost of acquisition and communication.

One of the tools used to influence target groups is promotion (Florek, Augustyn, 2011), which is one of the inherent elements of marketing activities and the main component of marketing communication consisting in the transfer of information from the enterprise to the environment (Kaczmarczyk, 2015). Promotional activities include, among others: advertising, sales promotion, personal sales and public relations, Internet tools can be used as a medium of communication. This article investigates YouTube as an increasingly important online promotion tool using the AIDA model - it is an abbreviation of English words: attention, interest, desire to have a given advertised product, action (meaning persuade the buyer to take action). Marketing in YouTube has many opportunities to provide explanations about the products or services using interactive methods, so it is very useful in creating customer desire to purchase products or services (Hassan, 2015).

## Social media and its users

Along with the development of the Internet and social media, new concepts have been created describing these media and people posting their content. The terms YouTuber and influencer are close to each other as some YouTubers become influencers. Both concepts are explained below.

**Figure 1.** Relations between influencers and YouTubers



Source: authors' elaboration

YouTuber is a person who uploads, produces, or appears in videos on the video-sharing website YouTube (Oxford dictionaries, 2019), regardless of purpose. The term influencer is defined as a person who makes content available on the Internet; and at the same time reaching a specific group of recipients and influencing it. Initially, the term influencer was used only for creators providing video (vlogger) but later the definition also included bloggers, who now use different social media (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc). Influencers are now more powerful than ever before, as they gain authority through their authenticity - very often these people share their opinions about the products or services at home or directly at the place of like hotel or tourist attraction. Consumers trust recommendations of friends and family and influencers for their audience are often treated like friends due to long-time relationships. They gain trust through their naturalness, which makes people follow them.

## **Results and discussion**

### **YouTube as a promotion tool**

YouTube was founded by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim in 2005. Initially, it was intended to serve as a place to share movies with friends of the above-mentioned founders. The first movie entitled "Me at the zoo" was published on the website on April 23, 2005 by Jawed Karim (user "jawed"). YouTube very quickly began to be successful and in 2006 it was taken over by Google for 1.65 billion dollars. The following years saw growing popularity of the website which is nowadays viewed by approximately 1.9 billion users monthly (Weiss, 2019).

Every day, people watch billions of hours of content - this time consists of billions of views and more than half of all views on YouTube come from mobile devices. YouTube as one of the main social media has become a tool for promoting people and ideas. It is a very influential medium that is popular among users all over the world. Creating an account on the website is free and the user has the option of: publishing movies, subscribing to creators, gather subscriptions (viewers), evaluate films, writing comments and react to other comments - response and commentary rating. YouTubers have the possibility to use the website for product placement, cooperation with brands; they can also get profits from Google ads displayed in the videos.

### **Tourism promotion in YouTube**

The importance of YouTube is noticed by institutions responsible for promotion of countries. Polish Tourist Organization with the Ministry of Sport and Tourism started in 2018 a joint action #VisitPoland under which seven influential video bloggers from several tourist markets were invited to Poland. Among the invited YouTubers to Poland were: Louis Cole from Great Britain (FunForLouis), Alan Estrada from Mexico (Alanxelmundo), Christian Le Blanc from Canada (Lost LeBlanc), Conner Sullivan, Marko and Alex Ayling from the United States (Vagabrothers), Pau Clavero from Spain (Clavero), Angela An from Japan (InternationallyMe) (Poland.travel, 2019).

The main reason for using YouTube as a promotional tool was the cost per range and variety of viewers around the world who can be reached. What's more, the promotional action never ends, because these videos will live on YouTube all the time, as opposed to ads that have a limited time of issue (National Geographic, 2018). Interestingly, some experts claimed that another

value of this promotion tool is honest, true and convincing message (MSiT, 2019), but results of some studies deny it as less than a half of people trust video bloggers.

18 videos with varying popularity were published by the invited video bloggers until May 2019. Among about 5 million views the most popular was the film *Visitando Auschwitz* (visiting Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp) which was seen more than 1 million times. The popularity of all videos was compared and assessed in table 1. Another important impact of this action are the numerous comments below the videos written by the viewers who were mainly positively impressed by the uploaded materials.

**Table 1.** The effects of #VisitPoland action by the end of May 2019

YouTuber's name	Number of videos	Number of views (in thousands)
Alanxelmundo	10	1100 ( <i>Visitando Auschwitz</i> ) + 1820 other 9 videos
Conner Sullivan	2	660
FunForLouis	2	590
Clavero	2	427
Lost LeBlanc	1	197
InternationallyMe	1	181
Vagabrothers		No videos found (as of 28 May 2019)
Total	18	5000

Source: authors' calculation based on <https://www.poland.travel/en/visitpoland> (25 May 2019)

Another use of YouTube is the promotion of tourist products for children and youth. In and around the year 2015, some travel agencies started offering new products: camps teaching aspiring YouTubers how to create channels, video content or promote videos and holidays with YouTubers. Some camps hosted by young YouTubers were also offered in the United States and some European countries (Springwise, 2016). In this way YouTube players can also earn money during their free time spent among their fans, and travel agencies have the opportunity to highlight their offer and attract customers by offering camps where participants can meet with the creators of video content. YouTubers thus became a new tool for promotion of youth

camps. Some examples (printscreens) from Polish travel agencies in spring 2019 were presented below.

**Figure 2.** YouTubers advertising summer youth camps, 2019



“Meet them live!”



“Spend holidays with YouTubers”

Source: <https://viacamp.pl/blog/oboz-y-z-youtuberami-sprawdz-kto-odwiedzi-naszycy-uczestnikow-w-tym-roku1803201805000>; <http://stars4fans.pl/index.html>

Popularizing travel and the promotion of places or tourist products is the main way of using YouTube in tourist marketing. We can also observe development of tourist content on vlogs, and placing tourist content in relations from everyday life. The popularity of tourism-related content in YouTube is not as high as content related to gaming, lifestyle, fashion or entertainment. The channels with the highest number of subscriptions in the World (except YouTube's Sports, Gaming, Music channels) – T-Series has over 100 million and second - PewDiePie 96 million. To compare, the most popular channels with tourism content have 5-11 million subscribers (9 times less) and around 1-2 billion views, which was presented in Tab. 2.

**Table 2.** Selected YouTube channels with tourism content in the World

No	Name	Views (thous)	Subscribers (thous.)
1	CaseyNeistat	2 586 388	11 277
2	devinsupertramp	1 238 230	5 439
3	Mark Wiens	799 277	4 324
4	FunForLouis	309 162	2 020
5	alanxelmundo	279 393	2 038
6	Jack Harries	171 115	3 958
7	Mr Ben Brown	133 777	711
8	Sailing La Vagabonde	113 254	662
9	Lost LeBlanc	99 955	1 102
10	DamonAndJo	89 886	1 187
11	High On Life	63 970	618
12	vagabrothers	58 862	884
13	Clavero	36 607	626
14	internationally ME	20 181	233
15	RayaWasHere	11 863	191

Source: authors' study, as of 22.05.2019

Selected YouTube channels with tourism content in Poland, not only the most popular are shown in Tab. 3 below.

The two leading tourism influencers have more than 800 thousand subscribers each, but the content on their channels is not only related to travel – they present also video on entertainment or beauty. As a comparison of the popularity of tourism content to other YouTube videos, the most popular Polish YouTubers are Blowek with 4,1 million subscribers and Stuu (3,9 million). As it can be clearly seen, tourist content in Poland is also much less popular than general entertainment, gaming, lifestyle, etc. - the ratio of subscribers totals 1:4,6, so the relative popularity of tourist content in Poland is higher than among the world-known YouTubers. On the other hand, some of the top YouTubers are expanding their content to tourist issues – examples can be: Friz, Versow or reZigiusz.



**Table 3.** Selected YouTube channels with tourism content in Poland

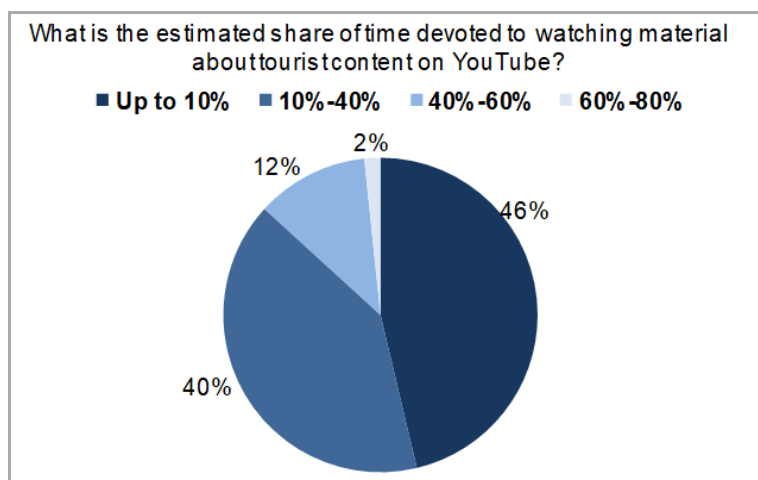
No	Name	Views (thous)	Subscribers (thous.)	Dynamics of subscribers (May 2018=100)
1	Krzysztof Gonciarz	202 570	868	117
2	littlemoonster96	106 656	841	105
3	Przez Świat Na Fajcie	47 628	328	110
4	Autostopem Na Koniec Świata	35 423	171	
5	Tube Raiders	19 660	371	98
6	Fifty na Pol	12 794	225	
7	Globstory	15 061	177	166
8	Podróże Busem Przez Świat	9 994	95,6	
9	Jessa	7 260	72,5	110
10	Lovetotravel pl	2 353	3,8	
11	Polandtravel (channel of Polish Tourism Organisation)	1 383	2,5	
12	WPN - przyroda, turystyka, wydarzenia (Wigry National Park)	1 825	2,5	
13	TPNVideo (Tatry National Park)	1 226	3	
14	Szlak Orlich Gniazd	330	0,64	

Source: authors' study, as of 22.05.2019

### Results of the survey

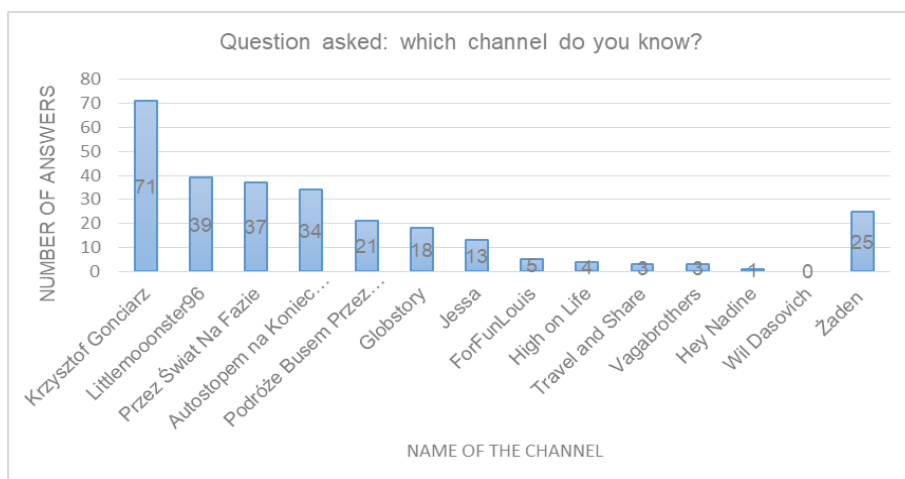
Among 122 surveyed people 60% were women and 40% men. Most of them were aged 19-26 (75%) or 27-40 (21%), no one older than 60 took part in the survey. Out of 122 respondents, only one denied the knowledge of YouTube website, 81% confirmed having an account. 93 respondents (76.86%) answered that they visit the site daily and 16 (13.22%) said they visit the portal 2-3 times a week. 80% of respondents watch videos related to travel on YouTube, but as Fig 3 shows, the share of time devoted to watching tourist content is usually rather small – by 46% of respondents it is below 10% and by the next 40% between 10 and 40%.

**Figure 3.** Time devoted to tourist content watched on YouTube



Source: own study

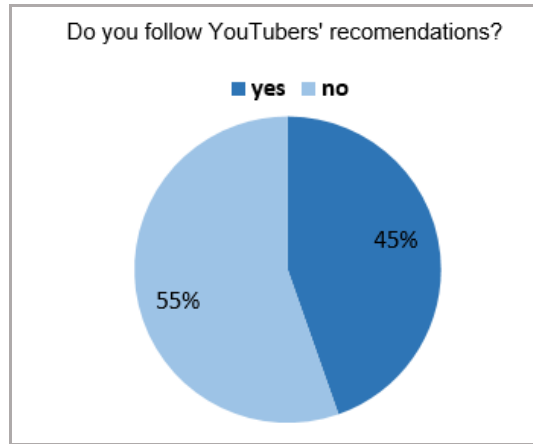
**Figure 4.** Knowledge of selected YouTube channels



Source: own study

Respondents declared that they know tourist YouTubers (mainly Polish), and their popularity is proportional to the general popularity of their channels. Interestingly, despite the knowledge of channels, their popularity does not translate into their impact on the audience – less than a half (45%) of respondents follow YouTubers' recommendations.

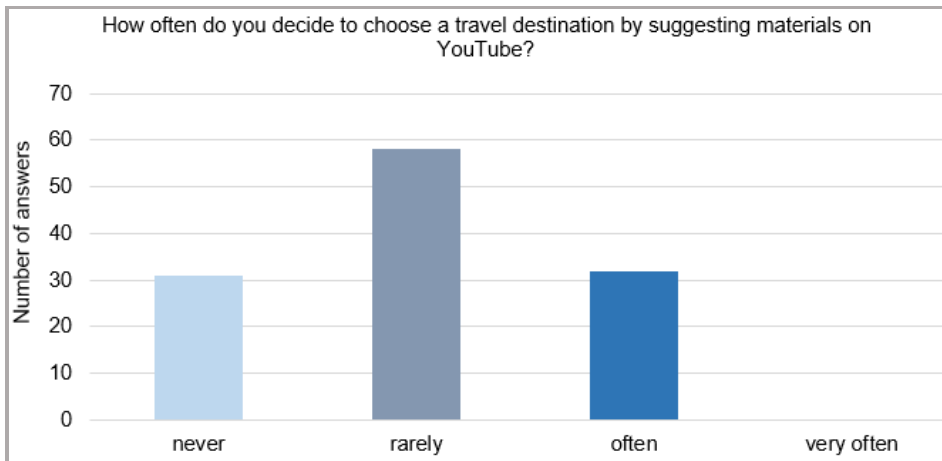
**Figure 5.** The impact of YouTube on the viewers



Source: own study

Also the role of YouTube in the selection of destinations turned out to be not really important. A significant proportion of respondents said that they never (26%) or very rarely (48%) refer to the materials available on the website when choosing a place of the future travels (see Fig. 6). On the other hand, 26% of those surveyed declare that they are often influenced by YouTubers when choosing travel destinations.

**Figure 6.** The impact of YouTube by choosing travel destination



Source: own study

Comparing these results to other studies it is clear that the results are mostly similar. Wave X” survey conducted by UM Agency in 2018 (UM, 2018) showed that less than half (42%) of the respondents trust bloggers’ and vlogers’ reviews on products and services. Furthermore, only 47% of consumers are influenced by opinions of internet creators. In this study, 45% of respondents followed YouTubers’ recommendations. On the other hand, study on a group of 8 by Lepisto and Vahajylkka (2017) showed a much higher influence of YouTubers on buying behavior of their audience, the higher the higher was the trust in YouTuber.

## Conclusions

YouTube, as one of the most popular websites and mobile apps is gaining more and more importance as a tool for promotion. It is often used by influencers to advertise products and promote tourist destinations. Tourist influencers are not as popular as channels with gaming, lifestyle, comedy etc.; generally, YouTubers with a wider scope of videos have more subscribers. In any case, channels with tourist content have many viewers, and the number of subscribers of the top-known channels equals 1-5 million in the World and 100-400 thousand in Poland.

The analysis of empirical studies confirmed that respondents know tourist channels (mainly Polish), but their popularity is much lower than the popularity of top YouTubers. YouTube is rarely used to search for tourist content only; and general entertainment, lifestyle, fashion or gaming are the most popular topics. The continuous increase in the website’s popularity and an analysis of research results confirmed that YouTube is an important tool for internet marketing and may play an important future role in tourism promotion and the popularization of travelling. Respondents use the site to search for tourist content, but more than a half of respondents do not follow YouTubers’ recommendations. Of lesser importance is the role of YouTube in the selection of destinations by users – a significant proportion of respondents said that never or very rarely suggest by materials available on the site when choosing the place of the future travels.

As generally the popularity of video content is growing and most attractive services are said to be: Netflix (28%), YouTube (27%) and Spotify (27%) (UM, 2018), the future of YouTube as a tool for promotion, not only of tourist products, seems to be one of infinite possibility.