

YOUTUBE TRAVEL VLOGS AS A TOURISM MARKETING INSTRUMENT: A FOCUSED ANALYSIS ON HOMESTAYS IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a rapidly expanding industry that serves as a primary source of income for many countries. This growth has catalyzed the proliferation of small enterprises, particularly those linked to tourism. Among them, homestays have become increasingly popular. The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority defines homestays as community-based tourism programs initiated to distribute tourism benefits to a fair cross-section of society by preparing houses/accommodation units with various themes that highlight Sri Lankan authenticity. These units, located across various destinations within Sri Lanka, meet quality standards suitable for accommodating tourists and facilitate interactions between the local community and tourists, offering them the opportunity to experience the Sri Lankan way of life.” The advent of YouTube, one of the most widely used platforms globally, presents a unique opportunity for homestay owners to extensively promote their businesses. This study explored the potential of using YouTube travel vlogs as a tourism marketing tool for homestays in Sri Lanka, focusing on the challenges and opportunities involved. Employing a qualitative research methodology grounded in a phenomenological research approach, this study targeted homestay operators in Ella and Mirissa. A sample size of 15 interviews with homestay operators from these regions was conducted to gather in-depth insights. This research aims to understand how YouTube travel vlogs can effectively popularize small business schemes, such as homestays, among travelers. By analyzing the experiences of homestay operators and their interactions with vloggers, this study identified the best practices and strategies for leveraging YouTube as a marketing platform. In addition, it addresses the challenges faced by homestay operators, such as content control, digital literacy, and competition, and proposes solutions to overcome these obstacles. These findings offer valuable insights for homestay owners, marketers, and policymakers to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of homestays, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

Keywords: Homestays in Sri Lanka, homestay promotions, social media for tourism, Sri Lanka tourism, travel vlogs as a marketing tool