

INFLUENCERS' CONTAGION EFFECTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Saleh Shuqair

NOVA Information Management School

Rita Alves

NOVA IMS

Diego Costa Pinto

NOVA Information Management School

Anna Mattila

School of Hospitality Management, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

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Abstract

Evidence indicates that consumers have a higher tendency to purchase or pay more for items that have been in touch with or "socially contaminated" by celebrities or attractive people. The current research investigates the important, but not yet examined, social contagion effect of influencers in the tourism context. Four studies (1 field observation and 3 controlled experiments) demonstrate that social media influencers' authenticity (high vs. low) leads to greater positive outcomes and that social contagion underlies these effects. Further, we extend the social contagion literature beyond its current focus on objects to experiences. By drawing on the experiential (vs. material) purchases literature, we demonstrate that experiential posts (e.g., travel experiences) are more influential in driving behavioral intentions compared to material posts (e.g., products).

Keywords: *Authenticity; social contagion; social media influencers*

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