

From Views to Potential Behaviours: The Role of Travel Vlogs and Digital Nudging in Croatian Coastal Tourism

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This study investigates how travel vloggers potentially influence tourist behaviour through digital nudging, focusing on four Croatian coastal cities: Dubrovnik, Split, Zadar, and Šibenik. Using qualitative thematic analysis of a purposive sample of English-language YouTube travel vlogs, the research addresses three questions: (1) the types of problems vloggers encounter at the destination, (2) the advice they offer and how it may function as digital nudging, and (3) their motivations for content creation. Findings show that vloggers frequently report issues such as overcrowding, noise, and high prices, often framing these as experiential warnings. Their advice, ranging from strategies to avoid crowds to promoting cultural awareness, could function as informal behavioural guidance. Identified nudging techniques include simplification, framing, priming, loss aversion, and the messenger effect. Vloggers are motivated by audience growth and channel promotion, financial incentives, and informative intent. The study contributes to the growing field of digital nudging by highlighting the potential role of vloggers as informal behavioural influencers in tourism. It bridges behavioural science, tourism studies, and digital media research, showing how peer-generated content on digital platforms could subtly shape tourist behaviour. Practically, the findings suggest that collaboration with vloggers could offer destination management organizations (DMOs) and tourism professionals a scalable, cost-effective method to promote sustainable and culturally sensitive travel behaviours. By embedding incentives in authentic, understandable content, destinations may indirectly address challenges such as overtourism and environmental degradation.

Keywords: digital nudging, tourism, social media vlogs, tourist behaviour

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Introduction

In recent years, travel vlogs have become an important source of information and inspiration for potential tourists. The popularity of travel vlogs is largely due to their presentation of real-life experiences and personal stories in video format, which provides greater value compared to traditional text-

based blogs (Griffith & Papacharissi, 2010). Unlike traditional guidebooks or even static websites, vlogs provide dynamic narratives that blend entertainment, personal experience, and practical advice. Consequently, travel vlogs have become widely popular across all generations on platforms like YouTube (Henderson, 2018).

Research indicates that travel vlogs positively influence viewers' intention to travel by providing detailed information about destinations and facilitating informed decision-making (Lodha & Philip, 2019; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Studying the art and practice of travel vlogging also offers valuable insights into tourist behaviour, communication patterns, and destination management (He et al., 2021).

Vloggers influence decision-making through cognitive, emotional, and epistemic factors (Abad & Borbon, 2021), while shaping the online perception of destinations through content, visual images and responses of the watchers (Peralta, 2019). Therefore, travel vlogs have emerged as a highly influential form of user-generated content, offering immersive, visually rich, and often personalized representations of destinations.

YouTube travel vloggers are often perceived as trustworthy, attractive, and knowledgeable, which further strengthens their impact on viewers' travel-related behaviours (Mittal & Kaur, 2020). As a result, it can be concluded that travel vloggers are not just content creators, but also credible sources of information with the power to shape the perceptions, behaviours, and decision-making processes of potential tourists.

Research Gap

Although prior studies have established the influence of vlogs on tourist behaviour, the role of digital nudging within travel vlogs remains underexplored, particularly in the context of tourism. Furthermore, recent research highlights that social media can help alleviate overtourism and undertourism by encouraging visits to lesser-known areas (Šormaz & Ruoss, 2023). In this context, digital nudging embedded in vlogger content emerges as a potentially powerful mechanism: by subtly directing attention toward alternative times, places, or behaviours, vloggers potentially contribute to mitigating overtourism while enhancing tourist experiences.

This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how subtle persuasive techniques (such as recommendations) are used and can potentially function as digital nudges in travel vlog content. By focusing on travel vlogs related to Croatian coastal cities, the

research provides a contextualized analysis that combines digital media studies with behavioural insights from the nudging framework.

Through thematic content analysis, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how travel vlogs can serve not only as a form of digital storytelling, but also as possible behavioural influence tools. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform tourism marketing strategy makers and promote more responsible travel behaviour.

Research context: Croatian coastal cities (Dubrovnik, Zadar, Split, Šibenik)

This study focuses on four prominent Croatian coastal cities – Dubrovnik, Split, Zadar and Šibenik – which are very popular tourist destinations, especially among international visitors. The cities offer a blend of historic architecture, UNESCO-listed sites, coastal landscapes and vibrant cultural life, making them particularly attractive to both casual and experienced travellers. Ćorluka et al. (2018) highlight that Croatia faces a pronounced degree of tourism seasonality, with tourist activity remaining heavily concentrated in peak periods year after year. The OECD (2025) further notes that rising visitor numbers drive up living costs and reduce housing availability, partly through the influence of the platform economy, while simultaneously putting pressure on public services such as transport and road infrastructure, resulting in overcrowding and disruptions to residents' daily lives. Within this context, the impact of travel vlogs could be examined not only as an informational tool but also as a potential tool for behavioural intervention.

Research Aim and Objectives

The main aim of this research is to identify the presence of digital nudges in travel vlog content and to discuss their potential influence on tourist behaviour, providing an exploratory foundation for future empirical studies.

The study also seeks to understand how vloggers represent tourist experiences regarding problems they encounter in the destination, offer advice, and engage with their audiences across various motivations. Accordingly, this study addresses these specific objectives:

- To identify recurring problems in tourist experiences as portrayed in travel vlogs.
- To get insight into the recommendations vloggers offer to their audiences regarding behaviour or practical advice.
- To examine the presence and function of digital nudges within travel vlogs.
- To investigate the vloggers' motivations for creating content related to Croatian coastal cities.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: How do travel vloggers portray the problems they encounter in their travel experiences in Dubrovnik, Split, Zadar, and Šibenik?
- RQ2: What types of advice do vloggers give to tourists, and how may these function as digital nudges?
- RQ3: What motivations drive vloggers to produce travel content in these cities?

Relevance of Studying Digital Nudges in Tourism

Digital nudges, defined as the use of user-interface design elements to guide behaviour in digital choice environments (Maedche, 2017), are increasingly studied in behavioural science. Yet, their application in tourism remains limited, particularly in informal settings such as travel vlogs. Choice architecture emphasizes that how options are presented can shape decisions (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), and the choice architect is responsible for organizing the context in which people make decisions (Thaler et al., 2013).

Persuasion in communication studies generally refers to intentional efforts to influence attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours while preserving choice (Stiff & Mongeau, 2016; Hamm & Dunbar, 2006; Perloff, 1993; Bettinghaus & Cody, 1987). Travel vlogs can be situated within this tradition, as they provide narratives, recommendations, and personal experiences aimed at shaping audience perceptions of destinations. Nudging, however, differs in that it subtly modifies the decision-making environment so that certain behav-

iours become easier, more salient, or more attractive without eliminating other options (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). In this sense, nudges can be understood as a specific form of influence embedded in the structuring of choices rather than in overt argumentation.

While traditional digital nudging research typically focuses on formal choice architectures embedded in interfaces, this study adopts a broader interpretation. In travel vlogs, the choice environment is shaped through narrative framing, repeated recommendations, and illustrative examples rather than menus or defaults. For instance, simplification, usually applied in interface design, occurs when vloggers suggest bundle passes or carrying cash to streamline travel planning. Such advice reduces cognitive effort, supports local infrastructure, and could encourage sustainable or culturally sensitive behaviour. In this sense, vloggers act as informal choice architects (shaping the informational context), and persuasive content operates analogously by guiding attention, highlighting trade-offs, and subtly normalizing certain behaviours. This perspective underscores that the boundaries between persuasion, marketing, and nudging are porous, and positions travel vlogs as an underexplored setting where these mechanisms intersect. Understanding these digital nudges offers valuable insight into how digital media can potentially contribute to more responsible tourism practices, especially in destinations experiencing high tourism pressure.

Criticism of Nudging

Despite its popularity, nudging has faced substantial criticism. Ethically, it is often seen as paternalistic or manipulative, particularly when users remain unaware of the interventions shaping their choices (Ewert, 2020; Hansen & Jespersen, 2013). Critics argue that it undermines autonomy (Blumenthal-Barby, 2013) by exploiting cognitive biases and heuristics (Grill, 2013; Reiss, 2013; Bovens, 2009). Questions of effectiveness and scope also remain: Loewenstein and Chatter (2017) caution that nudging is not necessarily the most effective policy tool, while Hansen (2016) points to its blurred conceptual boundaries with manipulation. These debates are even more salient in digital environments, where information systems deliberate-

ly designed to influence behaviour raise heightened concerns about transparency and ethics (Oz, 1992).

Literature Review

Digital Media and Tourism Behaviour

Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok have emerged as essential channels for accessing in-depth information about tourist destinations (Javed et al., 2020), influencing their travel-related decisions (de Amorim et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2022; Islam, 2021; Magano & Cunha, 2020). Through curated destination images and informative travel content, these platforms significantly shape travel behaviours (Khan et al., 2022).

YouTube, the world's largest video-sharing platform, combines entertainment, information, and social connection (Khan, 2017) and enables users to actively seek and manage video content (Cheng et al., 2020; Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2017). Travel vlogs, produced by influencers, travellers, or Destination Marketing Organizations, combine narration and visuals to deliver vivid and authentic portrayals of travel experiences (Xu et al., 2021), and help audiences gain a clearer sense of the destination (Xu et al., 2021; Peralta, 2019). People depend on them to gather information about travel destinations and other tourism and travel-related aspects (Volo, 2010; Buhalis & Law, 2008).

Studies confirm that travel vlogs stimulate visit intentions by providing information (Islam et al., 2024), enhance understanding of tourist preferences (Dai et al., 2022; He et al., 2021), and contribute to tourism development (Chakravarty et al., 2021). Their effectiveness, however, depends on content quality and perceived credibility, which strongly shape viewers' willingness to accept and act upon the information presented (Islam et al., 2024; Jog & Alcasoas, 2023; Silaban et al., 2022; Cheng et al., 2020).

Nudging: Application in Online Environments

Originating in behavioural economics and psychology, nudging refers to subtle interventions that influence decisions without restricting freedom of choice or altering economic incentives (Hansen, 2016; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

The core principle is that these interventions must remain easy and inexpensive to avoid, ensuring that freedom of choice is preserved (Riedlsperger, 2024; Zhao & Cheng, 2024). Spiliakos (2017) highlights that nudging challenges the assumption that humans always make decisions in their best interest and reveals how to 'nudge' individuals to more beneficial outcomes for them and society.

With the increasing digitization of everyday life, the concept has evolved into what is now referred to as digital nudging, defined as guiding user behaviour through design elements in digital choice environments (Schneider et al., 2016). Meske and Potthoff (2017) describe digital nudging as the subtle application of design features, information, and interactive elements to steer user behaviour in digital environments while preserving individuals' freedom of choice. Studies consistently show that nudging (traditional and digital) modifies behaviour in predictable ways (Meske & Potthoff, 2017; Mirsch et al., 2017; Weinmann et al., 2016; Hansen, 2016; Hausman & Welch, 2010; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Digital nudges can take multiple forms, such as simplification, framing, salience, social norms, etc. Among these, social norm nudges illustrate how people are influenced by what others do (Nahmias, 2019), either through the assumption that others are better informed or through the desire to conform (Riedlsperger, 2024). In digital contexts, digital nudging has the potential to reshape what is seen as socially acceptable behaviour (Dhar et al., 2017). For instance, Charry and Tessitore (2021) demonstrated that social media accounts with a large follower base can effectively encourage healthier food choices, with follower count itself acting as a persuasive social cue.

In tourism contexts, these insights suggest that YouTube vloggers may act as powerful digital nudgers. By combining authenticity, relatability, and wide reach, they can not only inspire visits and shape destination perceptions but also could promote socially responsible behaviours, positioning influencers as potentially valuable allies for the promotion of sustainable tourism practices, and the communication of appropriate behavioural norms.

Nudging Typologies and Applications

Nudging has been theorized through multiple frameworks. Thaler and Sunstein (2008) outlined six core principles of choice architecture (incentives, mappings, defaults, feedback, expecting errors, and structuring complex choices), while Beshears and Gino (2015) grouped nudges into three mechanisms: triggering System 1, engaging System 2, or bypassing both. Hansen and Jespersen's (2013) dual-dimensional model adds an ethical layer, distinguishing interventions by transparency and cognitive mode.

Other scholars have refined the typology by identifying more specific categories. For example, Acquisti et al. (2017) highlighted information, defaults, incentives, reversibility, and timing as central dimensions of digital interventions. Bhatt and Seetharaman (2023) synthesized the literature into eleven digital nudging archetypes, including defaults, social reference points, informational provisions, translation and mapping of information, salience through ease and convenience, giving feedback, warnings, and reminders, deceptive visualizations, priming and empathy, leveraging commitment, incentives, and just-in-time prompts. Their review also underlines that nudges rarely operate through a single bias; rather, they involve an interplay of cognitive mechanisms (Bhatt & Seetharaman, 2023; Mirsch et al., 2017).

Valta and Maier (2025) provide a comprehensive framework for categorizing digital nudging. They distinguish five application domains: societal, health, privacy, revenue, and work-related nudges, each reflecting a different sphere where subtle digital cues shape user behaviour. In addition, they identify ten specific techniques commonly used in digital environments: framing, status quo bias, social norms, messenger effects, priming, loss aversion, hyperbolic discounting, anchoring, simplification, and decoupling. This typology is particularly useful because it integrates both the contexts in which nudges operate and the concrete mechanisms through which they function, offering a systematic basis for analysing digital persuasion in practice.

In tourism, nudging research increasingly links to sustainability (Ni et al., 2025; Farshbafiyān Hosseini-n-ezhad et al., 2025, Jayaraj & Chandrakala, 2024; Yachin

et al. 2024; Mauro et. al., 2024; Meske et al., 2024; Olya et al., 2024). Digital nudging has been widely examined in areas such as policymaking (Benartzi et al., 2017), healthcare (King et al., 2013), pro-environmental behaviour (Byerly et al., 2018), administrative law (Alemanno & Spina, 2014), education (Damgaard & Nielsen, 2018; Pugatch & Wilson, 2018; Benhassine et al., 2015), and consumer behaviour (Hoenink et al., 2020; Petit et al., 2018; Marchiori et al., 2017). Yet, direct investigations of digital nudging in the context of travel vlogs remain scarce.

Destination Image, Vloggers Credibility and Nudging

Destination image, understood as travellers' perceptions of a place that shape their travel plans (Jalilvand et al., 2012), remains a central concept in tourism research. In today's competitive market, building a distinctive and trustworthy image is crucial for attracting visitors (Huete-Alcocer & Hernandez-Rojas, 2022). With the rise of digital media, this process increasingly unfolds online, where user-generated content (UGC) such as vlogs is often perceived as more reliable than traditional promotional materials (Iordanova & Stainton, 2019; Akehurst, 2009; Agarwal et al., 2008; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Johnson & Kayne, 2003).

Research shows that vlogs shape destination image by influencing perceptions and stimulating travel intentions through audience engagement (Laurance et al., 2023). Their visually appealing content, engaging storytelling, and positive narratives foster stronger emotional connections and more favourable evaluations of destinations (Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2023; Zuo et al., 2023). Emotional attachment and social attractiveness factors conveyed in vlog content often weigh more heavily in decision making than purely rational information (Chen & Yang, 2023).

The effectiveness of vlogs, however, is closely tied to source credibility. Vloggers act as independent third-party communicators shaping users' online attitudes and perceptions of destinations (Freberg et al., 2011), whose credibility is based on sincerity, professionalism, and attractiveness (Eisend, 2006). Prior studies confirm that credible speakers are more likely to be trusted (Xiao et al., 2018; Wheelless et al., 2011;

Hovland & Weiss, 1951), with source credibility identified as the strongest driver of audience engagement (Cheng et al., 2020). Furthermore, fandom-based identification can enhance this effect (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

The existing literature points to potential interdependencies between destination image, source credibility, and nudging. This study interprets them as forming a mutually reinforcing triad that has the potential to guide tourist decision-making, whereby nudging attempts in vlog content may be more effective when supported by a positive destination image and a trustworthy communicator – an assumption that warrants further empirical investigation.

Overtourism

Overtourism is increasingly recognized not only as an issue of tourist quantity but also as one deeply tied to the quality and type of tourism and how it is managed. The World Tourism Organization (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) et al., 2018) defines overtourism as a phenomenon where tourism exerts an excessive negative impact on locals' perceived quality of life or the quality of tourists' experiences. However, as Lindberg et al. (1997) emphasized, it is not just the number of tourists that matters: factors like visitor behaviour, length of stay, and the kind of tourism practiced play an equally significant role.

To expand on this, Koens et al. (2018) describe overtourism through concrete manifestations: overcrowded public spaces and disrespectful tourist behaviour (e.g. noise, disruptive 'beer bikes'), but there is also the transformation of urban amenities to cater to tourists rather than locals. These changes include the 'touristification' of shops and services, strain on housing due to platforms like Airbnb, reduced purchasing power for locals, and visible environmental degradation – from pollution to overburdened waste and water systems (Benner, 2020; González-Pérez, 2020; Panayiotopoulos & Pisano, 2019; Koens et al., 2018; Martín Martín et al., 2018; Milano, 2018; Seraphin et al., 2018; Freytag & Glatter, 2017; Gebhardt, 2017).

Particularly problematic are the cultural frictions it causes; residents report that tourism disrupts shared cultural values and leads to unpleasant social interac-

tions (Genç & Duman, 2019). Complaints from locals about Airbnb-related disturbances, such as excessive noise (mainly because of tourists' drunken behaviour) and perceived declines in neighbourhood safety, are also increasingly common (Gurran & Phibbs, 2017). Additionally, aesthetic deterioration due to overdevelopment, like the relentless construction of hotels and restaurants (especially in coastal areas), further erodes the visual and ecological integrity of destinations (Genç & Duman, 2019). These developments significantly reduce local quality of life, highlighting the urgent need to balance sustainable tourism with resident well-being.

Research Methodology

Research Approach

This study employed thematic analysis to explore the issues emerging in tourist destinations, as highlighted in YouTube vlog videos by travel vloggers. In addition, the study examined the specific factors vloggers emphasize to their audiences when discussing these destinations.

Data Collection

To collect textual data, YouTube videos were identified using the search terms 'vlog' in combination with selected city names (e.g. 'vlog Dubrovnik', 'vlog Zadar', 'vlog Šibenik', 'vlog Split'). Purposive sampling was used to select the videos. The inclusion criteria for video selection were as follows: the video must be publicly available on YouTube; presented in English; published between April 16, 2024, and April 16, 2025; categorized as a video (not a live stream or shorts); have over 15,000 views; include spoken dialogue or narration; and primarily focus on the city itself, rather than on unrelated meanings of the city name (e.g. the term 'split' may refer to a non-geographical concept in English). A total of 22 videos met the inclusion criteria; however, one video was excluded due to duplication, resulting in a final sample of 21 videos for analysis. Although the final number of videos was determined by the inclusion criteria, it is important to note that during the coding and thematization process, the final videos did not yield new themes but rather reinforced those already identified (e.g. repeated references to

Table 1 Number of Reference Points, Interpretative Codes and Themes Identified

Elements	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3	Total
Reference points	94	21	35	150
Interpretative codes	10	6	4	
Themes	6	3	3	

overcrowding). This suggests that thematic saturation was reached, confirming the adequacy of the sample size for the exploratory aims of this study.

The videos were transcribed, and the resulting transcripts (in Microsoft Word format) were imported into QDA Miner Lite software for coding and analysis. In cases where the video content covered multiple cities, only the segments relevant to the cities included in the analysis were transcribed and analysed. The primary objective of using this software was to identify word frequencies and patterns related to perceived problems in the destinations, as described by the vloggers. Thematic analysis (TA) was used to systematically identify, organize, and interpret key themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA was selected as it allows for a detailed and nuanced understanding of a phenomenon and is well-suited for analysing data derived from diverse sources, including literature, interviews, focus groups, and social media content (Berbekova et al., 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this study, thematic analysis was conducted separately for each of the three research questions in order to maintain clarity and analytical focus. A total of 150 reference points were identified across all three questions. Reference points refer to individual segments of vlog transcripts that were relevant to the research questions. These reference points were then grouped into interpretative codes for each research question, which represent recurring meanings across similar references and provide a deeper understanding of the data in context. Finally, these interpretative codes were organized into overarching themes that captured broader patterns of meaning relevant to each research objective. For instance, the following open codes: 'Mass tourists there. Literally as soon as we got close to the Old Town, [...] it was just full of different tour groups'; 'So this place is tourist over-

load as expected. I actually read somewhere that for every resident there's 36 tourists there, it's supposed to be one of the most touristy places in the world'; and 'There are tonnes of people here' were grouped into an interpretative code referring to tourist density, which was then assigned to the broader theme of Overcrowding. In total, the analysis resulted in 6 themes for RQ1, 3 themes for RQ2, and 3 themes for RQ3. The number of reference points, interpretative codes and themes identified per research question is shown in Table 1.

This structured, question-specific approach to coding and thematization ensured that the data analysis remained closely aligned with the aims of the study. It also provided a detailed and nuanced understanding of participants' experiences as they relate to each research objective.

To enhance methodological transparency and minimize researcher bias, several reflexive practices were employed throughout the analysis. First, the themes were revisited multiple times, regrouped, and renamed where necessary to ensure that they accurately represented the underlying data and that no relevant aspects were overlooked. Second, the coding process was periodically paused and resumed in order to allow for fresh consideration of the material, a practice that supported intra-coder reliability. Although intercoder reliability was not applied, the analysis was informed and cross-checked against established frameworks in the literature on digital nudging, thereby strengthening the validity of the interpretations. Finally, reflexive notes were kept during the analysis to record emerging thoughts, potential biases, and alternative explanations, which were then revisited during the thematization process.

Results

To contextualize potential perspective bias, data were collected on 15 channels producing 21 analysed videos. Subscriber counts ranged from 5.8K to 590K (median 101K), with most channels in the mid-range (50K–200K) but an average (≈ 221 K) skewed by a few large accounts. Videos averaged 117K views (median 62K), showing substantial visibility even for smaller channels. Most creators were from Anglophone countries (US, Canada, UK), offering predominantly international perspectives on Croatian destinations, with some representation from regions such as the UAE, India, and South Africa. Content was mainly produced by mixed-gender couples, shaping the narrative style, while sponsorships were inconsistently disclosed. With the exception of two, all creators were travel-focused vloggers, reinforcing their credibility within the tourism domain.

The findings derived from the analysis provide insight into three key areas: the problems encountered in the destination from the perspective of the vloggers, the recommendations they offer regarding behaviour or practical advice for visitors, and the underlying motivations for publishing the videos.

RQ1 – Problems Encountered in the Destination

Climate and Weather Conditions

The collected narratives repeatedly emphasize discomfort related to high temperatures, with expressions such as ‘boiling hot July Croatian sun’, ‘almost 40 degrees’, and ‘an absolute scorcher’ highlighting the physical strain caused by the intense heat.

Vloggers often found sightseeing and physical activities to be exhausting or even inadvisable due to the lack of shade and extreme temperatures: ‘there’s zero shade on the whole walk’, and ‘the walls that you’re walking on are boiling hot’. Many suggested time-based visiting strategies, such as visiting ‘early in the morning or right before sunset’ to avoid midday temperatures.

Interestingly, while most comments referred to oppressive heat, a note of unexpected coldness was also recorded (‘I did not expect that the weather would be this cold’).

Comfort

The theme of comfort emerged primarily in relation to the physical environment on the beach. Vloggers described the discomfort associated with the rocky and pebbly nature of Croatian beaches (‘this is like giant pebbles that hurt’).

Although such discomforts are often presented with a touch of humour or tolerance, they nevertheless suggest that the natural environment – while beautiful – does not always meet typical tourist expectations of beach comfort.

Cost and Value for Money

A recurring theme in vloggers’ experiences is the perception of high prices, often presented as surprisingly high and/or excessive, especially Dubrovnik, which was mentioned the most, compared to other Croatian cities or nearby Balkan destinations. Many vloggers described the city as ‘extremely expensive’, ‘not one of the most affordable cities in the region’, and even ‘the most expensive city I visited in Croatia’.

Key areas where costs were considered high include attractions (e.g. €35 per person to walk the city walls), kayak rentals and cable cars, food and drinks, and accommodation, particularly within or near the Old Town.

Despite this, some vloggers still justified the higher prices by referencing the uniqueness of the experience, stating it was ‘100% worth it’ or that ‘you can’t really do anything about it because it’s a must-do’. Others advised visiting in the off-season to avoid peak prices and crowds.

One vlogger mentioned the risk of scams and buying from shady places. In the vlog, the vlogger mentions the high costs of services which are believed to have led them to seek out more affordable alternatives, resulting in them falling victim to fraud. This illustrates how the perception of high prices can push visitors towards unofficial ticket channels, increasing their exposure to fraud, further reinforcing the narrative of poor value for money or the vulnerability of tourists in a high-cost environment.

Infrastructure Challenges and Accessibility

Visitors frequently encounter challenges related to infrastructure and accessibility, particularly when arriving by car or travelling with luggage. One of the most commonly reported issues is limited parking availability, especially during the peak summer season, when lots near the Old Town become quickly saturated and parking prices are high. As one vlogger noted, 'parking can be an issue... they fill up quickly and are not cheap'.

These difficulties are compounded by the fact that Old Towns are not open to traffic, which creates certain accessibility challenges. Travellers often have to carry luggage across cobblestone pavements and up numerous steps, which can be physically demanding, especially for older visitors, families, or people with disabilities:

Given there are no cars within the city walls, if you're travelling with luggage, it can be exhausting hauling your baggage up and down steps and across cobblestone streets.

These conditions certainly highlight the need for better logistical planning, and potentially additional services, such as assistance with luggage and clearer information about alternative parking and accessibility solutions.

Overcrowding

A dominant theme that emerges from the vloggers' experiences is the problem of overcrowding, especially during the peak summer months. Tourists consistently describe (in particular) Dubrovnik and other Croatian destinations such as Split as 'extremely busy', 'full to the brim', and 'tourist overload'.

Crowding is especially intense in the Old Town, popular attractions, beaches and port areas, particularly when cruise ships dock, bringing thousands of tourists at once. Others adjusted their travel schedules to avoid the busiest times – opting for early mornings or late evenings – although many found that 'everyone had the same idea'. However, it is noticeable that overtourism significantly affects the enjoyment of the experience, leading some to advise limiting visits to

short stays ('48 hours are enough') or considering travelling out of season.

Additionally, the issue of noise, particularly at night, has been attributed to the presence of large numbers of tourists engaging in nightlife activities. This indicates that noise is not perceived as an isolated problem, but rather as a consequence of overtourism and inadequate regulation of tourist behaviour in residential or historical areas.

Service Availability

Vloggers' feedback indicates that service availability can be inconsistent, particularly during high season. While the cities are well-equipped with a variety of tourist-oriented services, travellers report issues with limited accessibility, unexpected closures, or insufficient capacity.

For example, one vlogger noted, 'we expected there to be seating and a spot to have lunch, but they closed the lunch area, so we got two small beers for five euros each.'

*RQ2 – Recommendation and Advice**Avoiding Crowds and Managing Seasonality*

Vloggers frequently emphasized the importance of avoiding peak season when visiting subjected cities. One vlogger noted, 'Try to avoid going in peak season like us, as it is a beautiful city and we would highly recommend a visit.' Many advised travelling in late spring or early fall, when the weather is still pleasant, but crowds are less: 'The best time to visit Dubrovnik is late spring or early fall... the weather is mild, and the crowds are much smaller than during the peak summer season.'

Timing is also key – a number of vloggers recommended visiting the city's popular attractions early in the morning or late in the afternoon to avoid the heat and crowds: 'You definitely want to walk the walls by 10am at the latest because after that thousands of people come off the cruise ships... and it will be absolutely packed.' Another stated, 'Entering the walls about an hour before close is a great way to experience fewer crowds and walk the walls without Dubrovnik's oppressive heat.'

Additionally, travelling off-season is considered more cost-effective:

Check the prices according to the time of the year. So, the cable car out of season is only 14 euros return. So, half the blooming price.

Even October was mentioned as an ideal time:

Good for us and not too many travellers right now. So, I think October can be a really good time to travel.

Finally, some vloggers highlighted 'secret' local tips, such as 'semi-hidden swim spots just outside the walls' as alternatives to crowded main beaches.

Cultural Awareness and Behavioural Expectations

Many vloggers emphasize the importance of respecting local customs, traditions, and public rules when visiting culturally rich destinations like Dubrovnik or Split. These reminders often come in the form of practical advice in their travel vlogs and can be seen as subtle digital nudges that will shape the behaviour of tourists (who will be watching the vlog) without directly imposing rules.

For instance, one vlogger explains:

They're very strict here with rules like don't wear bikinis. You must always be wearing a t-shirt... and you can't drink in public. There are apparently like 500-euro fines if you do any of those things wrong.

Another adds:

One thing you can't do is sit down anywhere in Split and eat food on the floor... maybe walking and eating is okay.

Additionally, several vloggers encourage environmentally conscious behaviour:

Make sure to minimize the impact on the city's ecosystems. Dispose of trash properly, avoid littering, and follow designated trails when exploring outdoor areas.

Practical Travel Tips

The majority of the vloggers' comments and practical tips specifically focus on Dubrovnik, as it was often described as one of the most expensive cities they had

visited. Many vloggers shared practical tips to maximize value for money and convenience when travelling to Dubrovnik. The most common recommendation was a Dubrovnik pass, which offers excellent value for money, avoiding long ticket queues, and has unlimited access to public transportation (which is especially useful for drivers who find driving in European cities challenging):

One huge tip, though, is to buy the Dubrovnik Pass online which costs the same 35 euros per person but includes way more like public transportation and a lot of other museums and attractions...

Buying this pass online also allows you to skip the long lines at the ticket office so you can go right in without waiting.

Exploring any European city in a rental car is not a good idea. So, it always makes sense that you get yourself these city cards, with which you can save a lot of money.

Another practical piece of advice was related to payment methods: 'Make sure that you carry some cash with you as they do not accept cards.'

This highlights the importance of being prepared for limited card acceptance in certain areas.

RQ3 – Motivation for Vlogging

Audience Growth and Channel Promotion

One of the most prominent motivations for creating travel vlogs is to promote vloggers' own channels and build a long-term audience. Throughout the dataset, there is a repetitive pattern of calls to action such as 'don't forget to subscribe', 'like this video', and 'check out our other videos'. These phrases are often positioned at the beginning and end of the video or strategically embedded before content transitions.

If you're interested in following along as we travel to 50 countries around the world then hit subscribe...

Please give this video a like, subscribe to my channel and make sure to check out my many other travel videos...

Be sure to check out our 'Top things to do in Dubrovnik' video...

So hit that like button and we'll walk you through the top things you need to do and see when you visit Dubrovnik...

We'll be releasing a complete food tour... so be sure to subscribe so you don't miss that.

The consistent repetition of these promotional elements highlights that a core motivation for many travel vloggers is not only to share information or experiences, but to grow their channel's visibility, influence, and monetization potential.

Commercial and Financial Incentives

In addition to building an audience and engagement, many vloggers clearly demonstrate a financial motivation behind their travel content. This is most evident through sponsorships and brand partnerships, which are explicitly stated in the videos:

Quick pause as we say thanks to the sponsor of today's video, Get Your Guide.

We're going to talk about the sponsor of this video, Olafly, which is an e-sim provider throughout the world.

That's why I'm so excited to introduce the sponsor of this video, Airlo.

These mid-video or pre-content shout-outs follow a typical influencer marketing format, where a short promotional segment is inserted either before entering a main attraction or during a scene transition. The use of phrases like 'we're excited to introduce' or 'today's partner' often comes with discount codes or affiliate links, suggesting a dual motivation: to inform and to make money.

Informative Intent

In addition to financial benefits, a significant number of vloggers demonstrate a clear intention to educate and inform their viewers. This motivation is often explicitly stated, in the form of promises of helpful tips and local insights aimed at helping viewers plan their own trips:

Stay tuned for some special travel tips to help you make the most of your visit.

Stick around to the end for some special travel tips that will help you make the most of your visit.

Dubrovnik, the world's most famous walled city. In this travel guide, we'll cover money-saving tips, how to beat the crowds, and how to experience Dubrovnik like a local.

How to reach the best viewpoints, insider tips on how to beat the crowds, how to sit on the original iron throne, and so much more.

These statements position the vlogger not only as a promoter, but also as an informal guide. Through this approach, vloggers build trust and authority within their community, which contributes to long-term follower loyalty. In addition, this informative component of the content often overlaps with digital 'nudges' – vloggers guide viewers towards better behaviours (e.g. avoiding crowds, cultural respect, sustainability), thus transforming the informative purpose into a tool for guiding tourists' behaviour.

Discussion

Problems Encountered in the Destination

According to existing literature, overtourism has adverse effects not only on the well-being of local residents but also on the quality of tourists' experiences (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) et al., 2018). Common concerns include noise, overcrowding (Koens et al., 2018), disruption of cultural values, and environmental degradation (Genç & Duman, 2019). The findings of this study confirm and contextualize these impacts within Croatian coastal destinations, as travel vloggers frequently report on excessive crowds, noise, and logistical difficulties such as limited parking and congested streets.

Vloggers also highlight significant seasonal price fluctuations, noting that prices in peak season can be up to twice as high compared to the off-season. This observation reflects not only a diminished experience for tourists but also a tangible economic impact on the local population, particularly in terms of purchasing power. While some discomforts mentioned in the vlogs (such as extreme heat or pebble beaches) are not directly linked to overtourism, vloggers still provide guidance on how to mitigate these issues. For instance,

they recommend visiting sites during early morning or evening hours, or travelling in the shoulder season, suggesting a role in shaping tourist behaviour.

Recommendation and Advice

In addition to showcasing their personal travel experiences, vloggers frequently provide practical recommendations (RQ2), such as the optimal times to visit specific locations in order to avoid extreme heat or large crowds. These suggestions are typically presented in the form of peer-to-peer advice and are shared through personal experiences, which enhances the persuasive power of the message due to its relatable and informal tone. While this supports existing literature on the influence of digital content in shaping tourist decisions, it also adds contextual depth by illustrating how vlogs could serve as informal, behaviour-guiding tools specifically tailored to the Croatian coastal destinations.

Moreover, many vloggers advocate for time-sensitive visits or off-season travel, implicitly suggesting behaviour change through informal digital nudging techniques. These findings extend the overtourism discourse by demonstrating how vloggers could act as intermediaries between tourist expectations and their on-site experiences, helping viewers navigate or avoid negative aspects of overcrowded destinations through adaptive strategies. This points to the potential for designing nudge strategies through travel content creators. By presenting responsible behaviour as practical and socially expected, vloggers can support destination management efforts while potentially encouraging travellers to adopt more responsible practices in the destination.

Vloggers frequently embed subtle digital nudges within their narratives, employing techniques such as framing (e.g. 'it's worth the price'), social norm cues (e.g. 'everyone comes early'), and anchoring (e.g. '€35 is a lot, but...'). These cues may shape viewers' perceptions of cost, comfort, and strategies for managing crowds, thereby potentially influencing how audiences interpret and evaluate travel choices. In this way, vloggers can be seen as guiding audience decision-making environments without overt or coercive persuasion. This study contributes to the literature by

empirically identifying and analysing these informal, embedded nudges within travel vlogs – an emerging but underexplored form of digital influence in the tourism context.

Digital Nudges in Vlogger Content: Potential Influence on Tourist Behaviour through Advice

This study provides empirical insight into how travel vlogs function as potential digital nudging tools within the context of Croatian coastal tourism; the analysed vlogs include behavioural cues that may consistently encourage more responsible and contextually informed tourist behaviour. Within the analysed vlog content, the study revealed the presence of several types of digital nudges: simplification, framing, priming, loss aversion, and the messenger effect.

In the analysed vlogs, vloggers regularly suggested visits outside of peak hours, strategic planning, and the avoidance of congested areas. These recommendations can be interpreted as temporal nudges, particularly priming and simplification techniques, which have the potential to influence tourist decision-making in ways that could reduce discomfort for visitors while contributing to a more balanced distribution of flows at the destination.

In addition to practical guidance, vloggers embed cultural and behavioural nudges into their narratives. By sharing local rules (e.g. dress codes, public drinking restrictions) and encouraging environmentally conscious behaviours (e.g. proper waste disposal), they may help reinforce social norms through relatable storytelling. These soft prompts could foster compliance without feeling overly directed or controlled, in line with normative nudging principles.

Further examples include simplification and framing nudges, such as suggesting tourists buy the Dubrovnik Pass or carry cash for easier transactions. These cues not only simplify planning but also potentially support the destination's infrastructure by encouraging pre-paid services and reducing congestion at popular attractions.

Another relevant dimension is the messenger effect. Vloggers themselves could act as persuasive messengers due to their perceived credibility, authenticity, and experience. Viewers tend to adopt recommen-

dations from trusted sources – statements like ‘make sure you carry cash’ convey informal authority, and may increase the acceptance of suggested practices.

Additionally, vloggers employ loss aversion nudges, highlighting potential fines (e.g. €500 fines for drinking in public or walking shirtless) or missed opportunities due to poor planning (‘absolutely packed after 10am’). These examples demonstrate how vloggers can potentially steer behaviour by emphasizing the costs of undesirable actions, a key mechanism in behavioural economics.

Theoretically, these findings align with Meske and Potthoff’s (2017) view of digital nudging as the subtle use of design, information, and interaction elements to guide user behaviour without limiting freedom of choice. In this sense, travel vlogs can be seen as informal choice architectures, where vloggers’ narratives and audience engagement function as interaction elements that enrich the informational context of tourism and potentially encourage more balanced and responsible practices. In several cases, multiple potential nudging techniques appeared simultaneously within the same vlog segment, reinforcing one another. This observation is consistent with prior research emphasizing that nudges rarely operate through a single cognitive bias but instead reflect the interplay of several mechanisms (Bhatt & Seetharaman, 2023; Mirsch et al., 2017). The study also reinforces the typology proposed by Valta and Maier, with observed nudges falling predominantly within the social and economic domains. This underscores the dual function of travel vlogs: while primarily designed for entertainment and information, they may also potentially serve to shape behaviour in ways that are socially and economically beneficial.

This study does not assess actual audience responses but instead identifies elements that could act as potential digital nudges. Claims about behavioural impact are therefore hypothetical and require testing through experimental or survey-based research. Some techniques overlap with broader persuasive strategies, underscoring the blurred boundaries between persuasion and nudging. Still, viewing vlog content through a nudging lens offers a useful starting point for understanding how subtle cues in digi-

tal travel content may shape tourist decision-making environments.

Motivation for Vlogging

Many vloggers present content that blends critical commentary with promotional messaging, often justifying high prices or discomforts with phrases like ‘totally worth it’. Their motivations appear to be two-fold: providing value to viewers while maintaining credibility and engagement. This dual role, as both informants and influencers, positions vloggers as hybrid agents who both narrate and potentially nudge.

Monetization also plays a substantial role in content creation, with vloggers fulfilling obligations to their sponsors. While digital nudging in this context may be more of a by-product than a primary intent, the potential behavioural influence remains significant. In this sense, vloggers emerge as accidental behavioural architects, shaping tourism patterns indirectly through their content, even when their primary goal is revenue generation or audience engagement.

Conclusion

This study examined how travel vloggers can potentially influence tourist behaviour through digital nudging, focusing on four Croatian coastal cities: Dubrovnik, Split, Zadar, and Šibenik. The primary aim was identify the presence of digital nudges in travel vlog content and to discuss their potential influence on tourist behaviour, with particular attention to the use of subtle behavioural cues. In addition, the research investigated how vloggers present destination-related challenges and what motivates them to create travel content.

Using a purposive sample of YouTube vlogs, a qualitative analysis revealed several recurring themes in response to the three core research questions. Regarding RQ1, vloggers frequently reported on key issues affecting tourist experiences, including overcrowding, noise, limited parking, traffic congestion, and high prices. These challenges were often communicated as cautionary advice for prospective visitors, grounded in personal experience.

RQ2 addressed the types of advice vloggers offer and how this advice could function as digital nudg-

es. Three broad categories emerged: (1) strategies for avoiding crowds and managing seasonality, (2) practical travel tips such as using city passes or carrying cash, and (3) behavioural expectations regarding local customs and regulations. Across all three areas, vloggers acted as informal digital influencers, potentially shaping tourist behaviour through a variety of nudging techniques. These included priming, simplification, framing, loss aversion, and the messenger effect, all of which may contribute to subtle but effective behavioural guidance.

Finally, RQ3 explored vlogger motivations, identifying three dominant drivers: (1) audience growth and content visibility, (2) commercial and financial incentives, often through sponsorships, and (3) a sincere informative intent aimed at helping viewers plan more enjoyable and responsible trips.

Overall, the study highlights the dual role of travel vloggers as both entertainers and informal behavioural influencers. Their content not only reflects tourist experiences but also could subtly guide behaviour. This offers opportunities for ways to manage tourist behaviour that are consistent with the goals of sustainable and responsible tourism.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of digital nudging in the tourism context by addressing a previously underexplored area: the role of travel vloggers as informal behavioural influencers. The findings suggest how digital environments, even outside formal institutional settings, can provide cues and exert potential influence on behaviour through subtle, non-coercive interventions.

In addition, the study aligns with the typology of nudging domains proposed by Valta and Maier (2025), illustrating how tourism-related nudges may fall within the domains of social influence and economic behaviour. Vlog content, though primarily created for entertainment or promotional purposes, could therefore be interpreted as a vehicle for social norm transmission and value framing in travel decisions. In doing so, this research fills a significant gap in the literature by bridging behavioural science, tourism studies, and digital media analysis. It underscores the

importance of integrating informal, peer-based communication channels into theories of behavioural influence, especially in high-mobility, experience-driven sectors such as tourism.

Practical Implications

This study highlights opportunities for DMOS, tourism marketing professionals, and policymakers to strategically collaborate with vloggers in promoting sustainable tourist behaviour. By embedding digital nudging techniques in influencer content, destinations could leverage vloggers' credibility and peer influence to address issues such as overtourism, congestion, and cultural insensitivity. For Croatian tourism in particular, several actionable insights emerge:

- **Simplification:** Promoting tools like integrated passes or bundled tickets could potentially reduce planning complexity while dispersing flows across both iconic and lesser-known sites, therefore reducing congestion.
- **Framing:** Presenting off-peak visits as 'exclusive experiences' or overcrowding as a negative may help shift behaviour toward more sustainable patterns.
- **Priming:** Associating less visited attractions with authenticity may encourage exploration beyond hotspots.
- **Loss aversion:** Emphasising what tourists risk missing (e.g. quiet mornings in the Old Town, avoiding queues) could motivate more responsible timing and choices.
- **Messenger effect:** Vloggers' credibility makes them potentially effective communicators of sensitive issues such as cultural respect, environmental awareness, or behaviour in heritage zones.

Altogether, DMOS could move beyond traditional influencer marketing by engaging vloggers not only as promoters but as partners in potentially shaping more sustainable tourist practices.

Limitations

Despite the valuable insights provided, this study is not without limitations. The analysis focused on a spe-

cific geographic and thematic scope (selected Croatian coastal cities), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other types of destinations or cultural contexts. Additionally, only English-language vlogs were analysed, potentially excluding locally oriented digital narratives and culturally specific communication styles. The selection also favoured videos with higher view counts, possibly introducing a bias toward more commercial or polished content that may not fully reflect the diversity of traveller perspectives.

Moreover, the study primarily relied on qualitative interpretation, which, while rich in depth, may be influenced by researcher subjectivity. This study does not measure actual behavioural changes; it only identifies elements that could function as potential digital nudges. The absence of audience reception data, such as comments, shares, or behavioural tracking, also limits conclusions about how viewers actually interpret and act upon the nudges presented. Finally, the dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of digital content means that findings may be time-sensitive and subject to shifts in influencer practices, platform algorithms, or tourism trends.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings open avenues for other further research. Comparative studies across platforms (e.g. TikTok, Instagram) or cultural contexts could reveal how digital nudging techniques are adapted and perceived by different audiences. Additionally, research in other types of destinations, such as rural, urban, or non-coastal regions, could help test the transferability of insights derived from Croatian coastal settings.

Future work may also employ surveys and experiments to measure the behavioural outcomes triggered by vlog content. Such approaches would strengthen causal claims and deepen the understanding of how digital nudges influence actual tourist decisions.

Furthermore, addressing the limitations of the present study – such as language bias, selection of high-visibility content, and lack of audience response data – would enhance the generalizability of findings. Incorporating multi-language content and a broader range of content creators could offer a more detailed view of digital nudging in tourism.

Ultimately, future research should aim to bridge the gap between digital storytelling and policy design, exploring how collaborations between content creators and DMOS can strategically promote sustainable, responsible tourism.

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