**Sector Insights - The Power of Influence**

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**Welcome**

**As the global influencer market continues to expand, its impact on consumer behaviour is undeniable. We explore the rising importance of influencers in shaping travel purchasing decisions and how B2B travel events are bridging the gap between the tourism sector and influencers to foster engagement and drive growth.**

**By Gemma Greenwood**

**Introduction to Influencer Market Growth**

Influencers have skyrocketed in prominence over the past few years, fundamentally reshaping how businesses connect with global consumers. By the end of 2024, the value of the global influencer marketing sector is projected to reach an astounding $24 billion – up from just $1.7 billion in 2016 and $16.4 billion in 2022 – according to [The State of Influencer Marketing Report 2024](https://influencermarketinghub.com/ebooks/Influencer_Marketing_Benchmark_Report_2024.pdf). This exponential growth underscores the increasing effectiveness and vast reach of influencers, especially as social media platforms continue to connect these digital voices with larger, more engaged audiences.

Their impact on consumer behaviour is profound, with nearly half of all consumers (49%) making purchases at least once a month due to influencer posts, the same study found. Additionally, 86% of consumers are inspired by influencers to make a purchase at least once a year, highlighting the powerful sway these personalities hold across demographics.

Their influence is particularly strong among younger generations. A June 2024 [Captiv8](https://captiv8.io/blog/2024/07/12/top-10-social-commerce-stats-of-2024/) study revealed that nearly half of Gen Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) and millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996) trust adverts featuring influencers. This trust often translates into action, as these groups are more likely to follow the recommendations of influencers they admire and respect.

Action is backed by funds to finance their desired purchases. As the largest generation in history, currently accounting for 30% of the global population, Gen Z is emerging as a potential economic powerhouse. According to a recent [‘Spend Z’ report by NielsenIQ](https://nielseniq.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2024/06/NIQ_SpendZ-Report-_LINKS.pdf), this generation is poised to become the wealthiest ever, with their spending power expected to reach an estimated $12 trillion by 2030. This growth trajectory is fuelled by a compound annual growth rate of 4.02% in per capita spending, double the rate of previous generations.

Today, Gen Z accounts for approximately 17.1% of the total global spend of $57.6 trillion. By 2030, that number will grow to 18.7% of $67.2 trillion, particularly as this ‘Zillennial’ population is growing faster than any other.

But it could be even higher – according to Bank of America data, cited in a report by market research firm [GFK](https://www.gfk.com/hubfs/Global%20Gen%20Z%20and%20Millennails_New%20Preview%20Report-1.pdf), Gen Z income will grow 400% over the next decade to $33 trillion. By 2030, this cohort will hold more than a quarter of global income and surpass Millennials’ spending power the year after.

[The Economist](https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2024/04/16/generation-z-is-unprecedentedly-rich) recently reported that the typical Gen Z-er earns an annual household income of US$40,000 plus, more than 50% higher than baby boomers at the same age, while a [Bloomberg report](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-17/gen-z-has-360-billion-to-spend-trick-is-getting-them-to-buy) found this population is currently accountable for an estimated $360 billion in disposable income, a figure that will grow substantially as they enter the workforce, boosting their purchasing power and willingness to spend.

What’s particularly noteworthy is that in 2024, Gen Z travellers have outspent other generations on travel, with an average expenditure of $11,766 on trips, more than any other age group. This trend was underscored by a [PMG](https://www.pmg.com/insights/the-four-trends-defining-summer-travel-in-2024) report, which found that 65% of Gen Zs planned to increase their spending on leisure travel in 2024, compared to 40% of Baby Boomers and 54% of Gen Xers.

Skift research found Gen Z travellers

According to research by [Hopper](https://media.hopper.com/research/activating-gen-z-and-the-future-of-travel), Gen Z travellers claim they spend $3,432 on leisure travel on average per year, though higher income Gen Zers claim to spend upwards of $4,500 per year.

The prioritisation of travel expenditure among Gen Zers is even clearer when looking at lower income households, the research found, with Gen Zers earning less than $50,000 per year spending as much as 49% more on travel than older generations making the same amount.

**TikTok, It’s Travel O’Clock**

Influencers and social channels already play a pivotal role in determining how Gen Z money is spent.

According to [Survey Monkey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/curiosity/gen-z-social-media-and-shopping-habits/), 29% of Gen Z, often referred to as ‘Zoomers’, are more likely to purchase things from companies with a social media presence and 47% use socials as inspiration for their shopping, while a [HubSpot](https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/how-each-generation-shops-differently#genz) consumer trends report found 71% of Gen Z most often discover new products on social media.

Influencers and social media have essentially become the tour guides for Gen Z and millennials, guiding their travel choices and highlighting destinations, accommodations, and activities

TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube – the digital strongholds of influencers –

dominate as preferred platforms for product research. According to the same Survey Monkey research, 17% of Gen Z users turn to TikTok for product research before making a purchase, with influencer recommendations playing a crucial role in their decision-making.

An American survey conducted by [Adobe](https://www.adobe.com/express/learn/blog/using-tiktok-as-a-search-engine) earlier this year revealed that more than 40% of TikTok’s one billion monthly users view the app as a search engine. Of those users, 20% have specifically searched for travel destinations or experiences. When broken down by age, 64% of Gen Z and 49% of millennials report using TikTok in this way.

And, in a recent interview with *Euronews Travel*, TikTok’s Head of Global Business Solutions for Europe, Stuart Flint, revealed: “71% of European TikTok users actively search for travel content, and 77% are inspired to visit a destination or purchase a travel-related product after discovering it on TikTok”, while the Advantage Travel Partnership May 2024 [*Jetsetting into Tomorrow*](https://www.advantagemembers.com/news-listing/new-research-highlights-travel-trends.html) report confirms 38% of Gen Z travellers look to TikTok and Instagram.

**Travel Companies Leveraging Influencers**

Recognising the power of influencers, 70% of travel brands have integrated influencer marketing into their strategies, according to the [Influencer Marketing Hub](https://influencermarketinghub.com/). This enables brands to present their offerings in a relatable, authentic way through trusted voices.

Travel brand-influencer collaborations continue to evolve. For example, Expedia introduced a commission programme, enabling influencers to monetise their content while promoting travel experiences. In an industry first, it launched more than 100 shoppable [Travel Shops](https://www.expedia.com/product/travel-shops/) curated by creators, allowing users to explore and book accommodations based on influencers' experiences. According to Lauri Metrose, Senior Vice President of Global Communications at Expedia, this meets consumers where they already seek inspiration – through social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

The initial invite-only phase includes 100-plus influencers and partners such as actor Jaime Camil, Premier League footballer Virgil Van Dijk, and tourism boards like Visit The USA. By 2025, Expedia plans to expand this feature to more creators.

Similarly, Thailand’s Tourism Authority (TAT) has launched ‘TAT Connex’, an influencer platform aimed at boosting the visibility of Thai tourism businesses. Aligned with TAT’s broader digital transformation strategy, the platform connects influencers, including key opinion leaders (KOLs) and celebrities, with tourism businesses across 10 categories like hotels and attractions.

**Promoting Responsible Travel through Influencer Campaigns**

Influencers are also playing a pivotal role in driving responsible tourism, helping travel brands promote ethical, sustainable, and culturally rich experiences and supporting lesser-known destinations

For instance, in Cambodia, the ‘Homestay Hero’ initiative partners with local bloggers to promote rural homestays, empowering communities and preserving cultural heritage. Similarly, the Azores’ ‘Islands of Sustainability’ campaign showcases the region's commitment to environmental protection, attracting eco-conscious travellers through visually compelling storytelling.

Other examples include Botswana's wildlife conservation campaigns, where influencers highlight ethical safaris, and Peru's ‘Taste of Tradition’ initiative, which promotes sustainable gastronomy by collaborating with food bloggers.

Thailand's ‘Silk Road Rediscovered’ campaign features fashion influencers who promote eco-friendly silk production, while Spain's ‘Accessible Camino’ raises awareness for inclusive and accessible tourism. In Greece, the ‘Island Hopping Collective’ empowers local micro-influencers to showcase remote destinations and community run tourism experiences across the islands, spreading tourism benefits beyond popular hotspots while preserving cultural heritage.

At the 2024 edition of [Arabian Travel Market](https://hub.wtm.com/press/atm-press-releases/arabian-travel-market-2024-sees-15-year-on-year-growth-setting-a-new-show-record-with-more-than-46000-attendees-across-four-days/), one of the many successful global travel industry shows organised by UK events and exhibitions powerhouse, [RX](https://www.rxglobal.com/), a conference session

on ‘[How To Build Influence with Gen Z in Just 30 Seconds](https://www.wtm.com/atm/en-gb/whats-on/atm-conference-programme/sessions-details.3643.214131.how-to-have-a-lasting-impact-on-gen-z.html)’, highlighted the power of user-generated and community led content for promoting sustainable tourism, particularly in lesser-known destinations.

His ***Excellency Harris Whitbeck, Minister of the Guatemala Tourism Board***, shared insights on the country’s successful strategies for attracting Gen Z travellers, emphasising sustainability and eco-friendly initiatives. ***“Gen Z is highly educated and curious. With 78 million TikTok users in Latin America, it’s a powerful marketing tool. However, we aim to attract visitors with a lower impact on resources by using AI and Big Data to target the right audience,” he explained.***

Fellow speaker Marc-Antoine Simon, Industry Manager, Travel and Tourism – MENA at TikTok, emphasised Albania’s rise as a tourist destination in 2022. Thanks to an influx of user-generated TikTok videos, Albania saw a 44% increase in flight searches from the UK, with a significant uptick from the US as well, demonstrating the profound impact of social media on tourism growth.

**Influencers Take to Travel Show Stages**

Arabian Travel Market is also bringing in influencers to explain first-hand the power of social media and storytelling. At the 2024 edition, influencer and TV star Paris Norriss, host of acclaimed destination show *Guy in Dubai* and adventure travel show *Guy in the Sky*, presented a session entitled[Telling Timeless Stories with Media, Film & TV](https://www.wtm.com/atm/en-gb/whats-on/atm-conference-programme/sessions-details.3643.214136.telling-timeless-stories-with-media-film--tv.html)*,* exploring the role of meaningful travel stories, building strategic partnerships and the best opportunities to showcase destinations and products with lasting legacy.

In addition, Dave Cornthwaite, a record-breaking adventurer, bestselling author and award-winning community leader, aligned his keynote with ATM themes around entrepreneurship and sustainability. As the founder of SayYesMore, a social enterprise geared towards positive change, his session, [The Power of Failing Forwards](https://www.wtm.com/atm/en-gb/whats-on/atm-conference-programme/sessions-details.3643.213743.summit-the-power-of-failing-forwards.html), communicated that: “failure is an essential and inevitable part of the entrepreneurial journey and life is one big experiment.”

Similarly, this year’s WTM London conference sessions feature multiple influencer-related sessions, including [Making an Impact with the Right Partnerships in Film, TV & Social Media](https://www.wtm.com/london/en-gb/whats-on/conference-programme/sessions-details.4071.226913.making-an-impact-with-the-right-partnerships-in-film-tv--social-media.html) and [Driving Change: Lessons and Inspiration From the World’s Longest Journey in an Electric Car](https://www.wtm.com/london/en-gb/whats-on/conference-programme/sessions-details.4071.226892.driving-change-lessons-and-inspiration-from-the-world%E2%80%99s-longest-journey-in-an-electric-car.html), the latter presented by sustainable adventurer, Wiebe Wakker, who travelled 95,000 kilometres from Amsterdam to Sydney in an electric vehicle and aims to promote sustainable travel and living.

Influencer-led conference content is starting to penetrate corporate and MICE travel events too, with the upcoming [IBTM World 2024](https://www.ibtmworld.com/en-gb.html) in Barcelona (November 19 to 21) featuring a session on [The Power of Influence](https://www.ibtmworld.com/en-gb/whats-on/conference-programme/sessions-details.4053.228575.the-power-of-influence.html). Experts will explain how companies can use influencers to tell their unique event story from both a B2B and B2C perspective and how to create social advocacy in their organisation. Influencers will also share ideas for successful campaigns and the likely returns in a session moderated by influencer marketing and personal brand expert Gordon Glenister.

IBTM World is also developing conference content with Julius Solaris, an event industry influencer with a large following on LinkedIn. The founder of consulting and media company Boldpush, named one of the most influential meeting industry individuals by media for the past 10 years, is an event technology guru, and will [discuss alternatives to the traditional ‘all-in-one’ software to grow events](https://www.ibtmworld.com/en-gb/whats-on/conference-programme/sessions-details.4053.229217.julius-solaris-and-chris-sykes-swoogo-discuss-all-in-one-software-doesn%E2%80%99t-exist.html).

And, following the resounding success of her session at July’s [ILTM Asia Pacific](https://www.iltm.com/asia-pacific/en-gb.html) in Singapore, [Simone Heng](https://simoneheng.com/), former international broadcaster for Virgin Radio Dubai, HBO Asia, and CNBC, will speak on ‘The Power of Human Connection’ at IBTM World 2024. A key media influencer and human connection specialist, Simone explain how to use three rules of rapport to create authentic connections that bring people together regardless of geography, culture or polarised views, soft skills highly relevant to the travel and tourism sector.

IBTM World Conference Content Manager Lucy Dyer said the MICE industry is keen to learn more about influencer impact and strategy via global forums like IBTM World, with the show looking to experts, as well as leisure travel influencers, to share advice, best practice and trends.

“The industry is seeking more guidance on influencer strategy and with Tik Tok being used by the next generation of event planners to find venues, exhibitors will need more training on how to leverage this platform,” she said. “IBTM World plays a pivotal role in this education process and will evolve conference content to meet this demand going forward.”

**From Show Floors to Social Feeds**

Given the impact of influencers on leisure travel, it’s no surprise that WTM London has an established influencer programme in place. Show Project Manager Nicole Smart explained that while influencers are a relatively “new” media audience, WTM has been engaging with them for more than a decade, recognising their importance in shaping travel trends.

WTM London hosts the largest gathering of international travel media globally, including a growing number of influencers and content creators.

The pinnacle of the show’s influencer engagement is the Travel Influencer’s Lunch, an exclusive event introduced in 2023, attracting 145 influencers and 45 exhibitors and offering a unique platform for networking and collaboration. Due to its popularity, the lunch is moving to a larger venue for the 2024 event to accommodate the increasing demand.

WTM London partners with [Traverse](https://www.traverse-connect.com/), a leading influencer marketing agency, to curate the best content and invite top influencers to the event, effectively expanding the reach of WTM London to the wider influencer community.

Beyond the lunch, WTM offers influencers a comprehensive experience. They can use WTM Connect Me, a meetings tool, to schedule pre-arranged meetings with exhibitors, optimising their time at the event. During the three days, influencers engage with exhibitors, attend a range of conference sessions, network with peers, and partake in various meetings. They also have access to the WTM London Media Centre, equipped with working areas, filming backdrops, and other amenities to facilitate content creation.

The WTM London experience is widely regarded by influencers as a key annual gathering where they can connect, learn, and form lasting partnerships. WTM’s efforts underscore its recognition of influencers as a key audience, ensuring they play a pivotal role in delivering what Smart calls “the most influential three days in the travel industry”.

**Elevating Exhibitor Value**

ATM is following suit, with its first influencer programme planned for the [2025 edition](https://www.wtm.com/atm/en-gb.html) (April 28 to May 1). This capitalises on Dubai’s dual status as a global travel and tourism hub and a magnet for content creators, bloggers, and influencers. According to [StarNgage](https://starngage.com/app/global/influencer/ranking/united-arab-emirates%22%20%5Cl%20%22%3A~%3Atext%3DWe%27re%20currently%20tracking%20a%2Cbetween%201%2C000%20and%2010m%20followers%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), an influencer marketing platform tracking profiles with followers between 1,000 and 10 million, the UAE is home to around 27,315 influencers, with a significant percentage Dubai based.

ATM Exhibition Director Danielle Curtis has acknowledged the value of tapping into this dynamic community. The cornerstone of ATM's new programme, she said, will be the ‘Informal Influencer Speed Networking’ event, designed to facilitate meaningful connections between exhibitors and more than 50 travel influencers and bloggers.

“This event aims to create an informal yet conducive environment where exhibitors can meet influencers to explore potential collaborations,” said Curtis. “The goal is to foster partnerships that leverage influencers' reach to enhance brand visibility and engagement for exhibitors.”

Exclusive to marketing and social media personnel from registered exhibitors, the event promises to become a critical element of ATM's strategy, aligning with Dubai's reputation as a hotspot for innovative and trend-setting influencer marketing.

Sister shows [WTM Africa](https://www.wtm.com/africa/en-gb.html) and [ILTM Africa](https://www.iltm.com/africa/en-gb.html) are also looking to expand influencer involvement. Having invited content creators from around the world on its hosted media trips in the past, ahead of the 2025 edition of both shows (April 6 to 8 for ILTM Africa and April 9 to 11 for WTM Africa), it is exploring new ways to connect influencers with exhibitors, according to Marketing Manager Olivia Gradidge.

“In the past, we hosted influencers from the US, Asia and South Africa, mainly focusing on luxury travel and primarily prolific on Insta, Twitter and YouTube,” she said. “We now want to look at how we can offer our exhibitors the best exposure via these channels, before, during and after the shows.”

**The Rising Influence of Digital Creators at Travel Events**

Another RX sister show, [PROUD Experiences](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cgemmagreenwood%5CDocuments%5CRX%20GLOBAL%5CSECOND%20DRAFT%5CPROUD%20Experiences%2C), has achieved this, demonstrating the growing impact of influencers on travel events. The 2024 edition (June 3 to 5) achieved a collective reach of approximately 3.4 million across platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Event Director Simon Mayle noted: “The true value of the influencers we invited to the show will be revealed throughout the year as we provided opportunities to meet with many of the 182 exhibitors to source content and make connections to visit LGBTQ+ friendly hotels, resorts, and destinations. This approach has garnered glowing feedback from exhibitors, who were able to connect with influencers on a one-to-one basis, leading to potential collaborations.”

The 2024 edition hosted 15 influencers in 2024, a 40% increase from the previous year, ranging from authors and TV hosts to content creators and musicians. Its speed networking-style press roundtable sessions allowed smaller, emerging brands to share their stories with influencers, while larger brands utilised press conferences to present their latest news. PROUD Experiences also featured “Instagram-worthy” moments, from the rainbow carpet to performances by world-famous drag artists, which encouraged influencers to share their experiences actively.

Mayle emphasised that influencers have played a crucial role in not only promoting the show but fostering long-term connections between exhibitors and the LGBTQ+ travel community.

Influencers have also been integral to the event's content sessions since 2019, serving as headline speakers, panellists, and moderators, while providing insights on how brands can benefit from media collaborations.

**Travel Shows as ‘The’ Influence**

PROUD Experiences has also seen a rise in influencers posting about the show itself, offering followers a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the LGBTQ+ travel industry.

“Influencers are vital to the evolution of PROUD Experiences,” said Mayle, noting that travellers are increasingly turning to social media for travel inspiration. The event's role as the largest international LGBTQ+ travel forum enables influencers to source diverse content, underscoring its importance as a resource for both influencers and the brands they represent.

PROUD Experiences is a prime example of how RX’s travel events have evolved into influencers.

The same can be said for [ILTM Cannes](https://www.iltm.com/cannes/en-gb.html), the flagship RX’s ILTM Collection of luxury travel shows. Cannes is the end-of-year show that everyone in the luxury travel industry wants to attend. The industry’s most influential names become the talk of the town as they create exciting new itineraries, do business and build lifelong bonds.

Comprising four days of high-quality pre-scheduled appointments, educational sessions, networking, parties and much more, this is a calendar appointment not to be missed, and so the very nature of the “elite ILTM Cannes experience” deems the show an influencer in its own right, according to ILTM Portfolio Director Alison Gilmore.

“In essence, ILTM Cannes brings together the ‘who’s who’ of the global luxury travel sector, each an influencer due to their experience, expertise and industry following,” she said. “We hand-pick every buyer, exhibitor and media professional that attends this invitation only event, and the collective impact of this gathering should not be underestimated.”
This year’s event takes place at the Palais des Festivals from December 2 to 5, bringing together

the most exclusive and sought after travel designers and the world’s finest hospitality brands.
Coverage generated by luxury travel media, compounded by social media feeds by other ILTM Cannes attendees, is a force to be reckoned with, said Gilmore.
“From party posts and red carpet moments snapped, to the latest news on luxury travel trends and new products and services, the show is a high-profile event that everyone in the sector, whether they attend or not, takes notice of via the strong coverage generated, thanks to the astounding influence of the ILTM community,” she explained.

As every travel show in the RX portfolio continues to grow in size and stature, each revered as a must-attend show in their sub-sector and region, there is no doubt influencers will play an increasingly vital role in contributing to their success.

At the same time, the definition of an influencer in the context of these events will continue evolve, whether those in attendance are social media sensations, celebrities, high-profile speakers, or simply the buyers and exhibitors who garner a strong following from their industry peers.

As this landscape shifts, one thing remains certain – influencers will continue to shape travel trends and foster deeper connections between brands and consumers, driving purchasing decisions and industry innovation. RX travel events are the unparalleled stage where these powerful dynamics converge, solidifying their role as essential platforms for industry growth.

**ENDS**