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Digital Ethno-Marketing and Rural Storytelling: Framing Folk Culture for the Digital Traveller

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Abstract: *This study explores how digital ethno-marketing—through social media and influencer engagement—can help promote Romania's rural identity. By using authentic storytelling and modern digital tools, rural communities can share their traditions in ways that attract experience-seeking tourists. The research highlights the emotional and strategic value of digital narratives in building sustainable rural tourism.*

• Introduction

Mass tourism often dilutes cultural heritage, particularly in rural areas. In response, this study explores digital ethno-marketing as a tool to preserve and promote Romanian rural identity through modern digital platforms. It focuses on how social media and influencer narratives can revive interest in folk traditions, crafts, and customs, making them relevant to the experience-driven digital traveller. Digital storytelling offers rural communities the chance to become authors of their own narrative, rather than passive subjects of tourism

• Material and method

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to explore the intersection of digital marketing and rural cultural promotion. The approach includes an exploration of relevant academic literature to establish a theoretical foundation, combined with the observation and interpretation of various digital campaigns that highlight Romanian rural identity.

Additionally, data was gathered from digitally engaged travellers to understand their perceptions and emotional responses to online representations of folk culture.
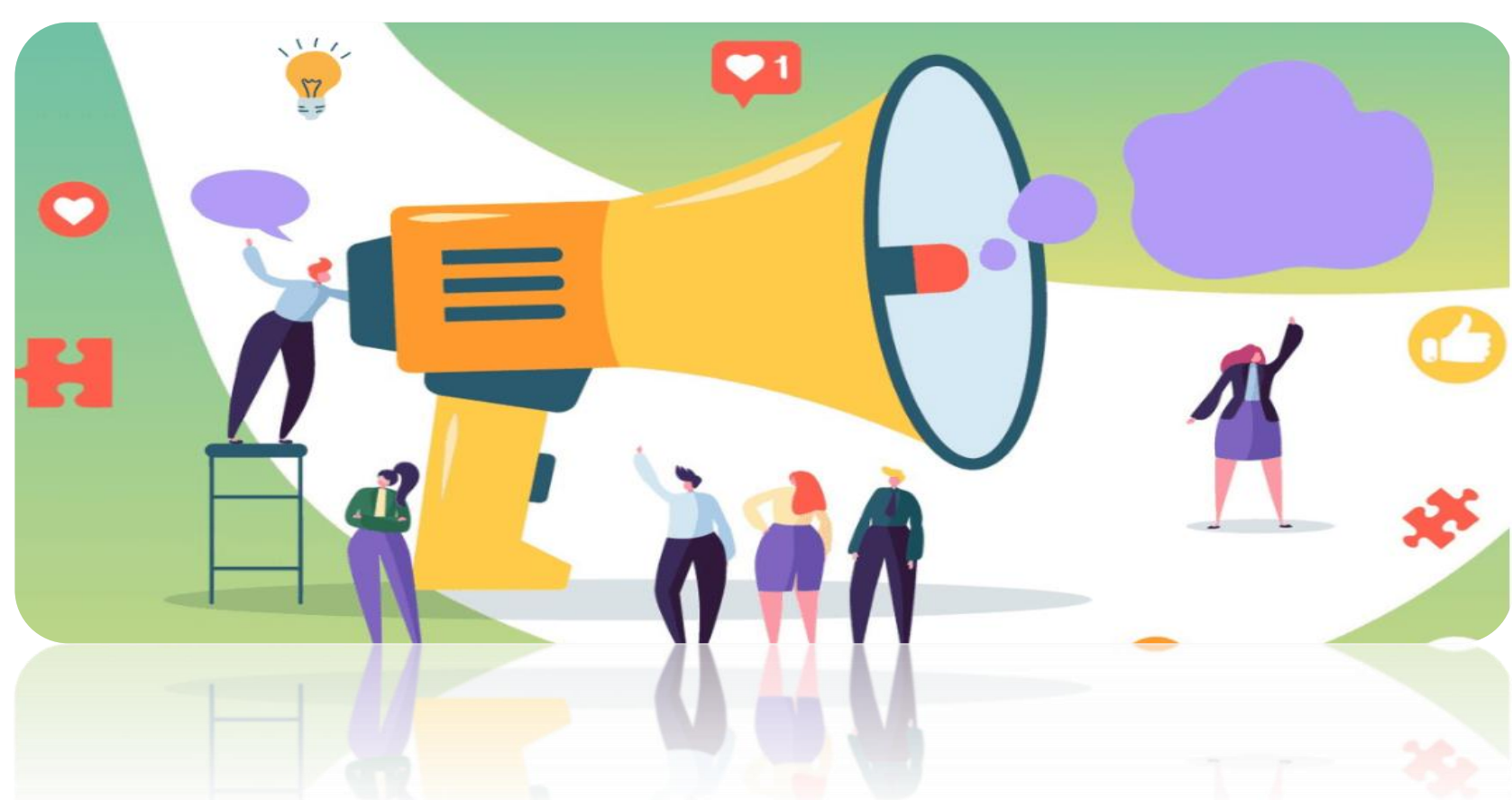
• Results and discussions

Emotional Impact: 78% of respondents felt more connected to destinations with authentic cultural stories.

Influencer Power: Posts from micro-influencers (5k–50k followers) had higher trust and engagement than generic ads.

Content Types: Short-form videos and personal narratives were most effective.

Strategy Gap: Many rural campaigns lack cohesion and storytelling skills, often relying on outdated visuals or clichés.

Digital platforms can bridge tradition and innovation, but only when used with intentional narrative strategies.

• Conclusions

Digital ethno-marketing can reinvigorate rural tourism by turning traditions into compelling stories. To succeed, local tourism stakeholders must:

o Prioritize-authentic,emotion-driven content.

o Collaborate with niche influencers

o Invest in digital storytelling trening

These strategies enhance rural visibility, sustain cultural identity, and attract modern travellers who seek meaningful experiences over mass consumption.