



received: 5.05.2023; accepted: 8.11.2023

<http://dx.doi.org/10.16926/sit.2024.02.07>

Tetiana V. KNIAZIEVA<sup>a</sup>, Olena O. KAZANSKA<sup>b</sup>, Lyudmila A. OROCHOVSKA<sup>c</sup>,  
Kateryna A. HORIUNOVA<sup>d</sup>, Taia V. CHERNYSHOVA<sup>e</sup>

## USING INTERNET MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE ECOTOURISM IN UKRAINE (BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE OF NORWAY AND ICELAND)

**How to cite [jak cytować]:** Kniazieva, T.V., Kazanska, O.O., Orochovska, L.A., Horiunova, K.A., & Chernyshova, T.V. (2024). Using Internet marketing and social media to promote ecotourism in Ukraine (based on the experience of Norway and Iceland). *Sport i Turystyka. Środkowoeuropejskie Czasopismo Naukowe*, 7(2), 139–163.

### Wykorzystanie marketingu internetowego i mediów społecznościowych do promocji ekoturystyki na Ukrainie (na podstawie doświadczeń Norwegii i Islandii)

#### Streszczenie

Ekoturystyka to rodzaj turystyki zrównoważonej, który zyskał popularność w ostatnich latach. Jej głównym celem jest ochrona dziedzictwa naturalnego i kulturowego oraz promowanie praktyk odpowiedzialnego podróżowania. Norwegia i Islandia stały się wiodącymi celami ekoturystyki, oferując zapierające dech w piersiach krajobrazy, różnorodną przyrodę i solidne zaangażowanie w zrównoważony rozwój. Kraje te wdrożyły udane kampanie marketingowe w zakresie ekoturystyki, które przyciągnęły znaczną liczbę osób podróżujących w sposób zrównoważony. Z drugiej strony Ukraina jest wciąż na wczesnym etapie rozwoju ekoturystyki. Jednakże ostatnio podjęto wysiłki w celu promowania dziedzictwa naturalnego i kulturowego tego kraju jako potencjalnego

<sup>a</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7223-7013>; Professor; Department of Marketing, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, National Aviation University, Kyiv, Ukraine

<sup>b</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8100-5350>; Associate Professor; Department of Marketing, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, National Aviation University, Kyiv, Ukraine; e-mail: o\_kazanska@edu-nau.com.ua (corresponding author)

<sup>c</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3536-0378>; Associate Professor; Department of Marketing, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, National Aviation University, Kyiv, Ukraine

<sup>d</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2236-4919>; Senior Lecturer; Department of Business and Rural Development Management, Agriculture Academy, Vytautas Magnus University, Akademija Kaunas dist., Lithuania

<sup>e</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9661-9865>; Assistant; Department of Marketing, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, National Aviation University, Kyiv, Ukraine

celu ekoturystyki. W artykule wykazano, że dzięki swoim ogromnym zasobom naturalnym i różnorodnemu dziedzictwu kulturowemu Ukraina ma potencjał, aby stać się znanym kierunkiem ekoturystyki, przyczyniając się do wzrostu gospodarczego kraju, zachowując jednocześnie jego dziedzictwo naturalne i kulturowe. Celem autorów jest zatem analiza, w jaki sposób doświadczenia krajów o rozwiniętym sektorze ekoturystyki pomogą Ukrainie promować ten rodzaj rekreacji na swoim terytorium.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ekoturystyka, turystyka, marketing, media społecznościowe, awans, zrównoważony rozwój.

## Abstract

Ecotourism is a type of sustainable tourism that has gained popularity in recent years. Its primary focus is preserving natural and cultural heritage and promoting responsible travel practices. Norway and Iceland have emerged as leading ecotourism destinations, offering breathtaking landscapes, diverse wildlife, and a solid commitment to sustainability. These countries have implemented successful ecotourism marketing campaigns that have attracted a significant number of sustainable travelers. On the other hand, Ukraine is still in the early stages of ecotourism development. However, recent efforts have been made to promote the country's natural and cultural heritage as a potential ecotourism destination. The article reveals that with its vast natural resources and diverse cultural heritage, Ukraine has the potential to become a well-known ecotourism destination, contributing to the country's economic growth while preserving its natural and cultural heritage. Thus, the authors' objective is to analyze how the experience of countries with a developed ecotourism sector will help Ukraine promote this type of recreation on its territory.

**Keywords:** ecotourism, tourism, marketing, social media, promotion, sustainability.

## Introduction

Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism that focuses on responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment and improving the well-being of local people (The International Ecotourism Society – TIES) (Chandel & Mishra, 2016). It involves responsible travel to natural areas with an emphasis on education, conservation, and community development. Ecotourism aims to minimize the impact of tourism on the environment and promote conservation efforts while benefiting local communities and economies. It often involves small-scale, low-impact tours or visits to areas with unique flora, fauna, and cultural heritage. The goal of ecotourism is to provide travelers with an authentic, immersive experience while also promoting the protection of the environment and supporting local communities. Hence, the concept of this specific type of tourism includes not only providing opportunities for tourists to experience nature but also educating them about conservation efforts.

In as much as ecotourism entails more than just visiting natural attractions or places, it means doing so in a responsible and sustainable manner, with an emphasis on environmental conservation. The history of ecotourism can be

traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, when concerns about environmental conservation and sustainable development began to emerge. In 1964, the US Congress passed the Wilderness Act, which aimed to protect natural areas from development and exploitation. In 1972, the United Nations held the first Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, which emphasized the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development (Higham, 2007).

The term “ecotourism” was first coined in the early 1980s by the Mexican architect Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin, who defined it as “tourism that involves traveling to natural areas with the goal of conserving, observing, studying, or experiencing the natural environment” (Gallagher, 2022; Ostapenko et al., 2021). The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) played a key role in the development of ecotourism by promoting the idea of “low-impact tourism” in natural areas. In the 1980s and 1990s, the world saw the rapid growth of ecotourism as a niche market, driven by increasing awareness of environmental issues and a growing interest in nature-based travel. Initially, the concept of ecotourism was used in Third World countries, but it has developed into a global phenomenon. Many countries, particularly in the developing world, saw ecotourism as a way to generate income while preserving their natural and cultural resources. In 1992, the United Nations held the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, which highlighted the importance of sustainable tourism and led to the adoption of Agenda 21, a comprehensive plan for sustainable development.

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was established in December 1992 to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED by monitoring and reporting on agreement implementation at the local, national, regional, and international levels. Since then, ecotourism has continued to evolve and grow in popularity. It is now recognized as a potent tool for conservation, sustainable development, and community empowerment. People in many countries understand why developing ecotourism is worth it:

- 1) it can be an effective way to promote the conservation of natural habitats and biodiversity,
- 2) it can help diversify the local economy and reduce the dependence on traditional industries,
- 3) it can also support cultural preservation and provide opportunities for visitors to interact with local communities and learn about their way of life,
- 4) it can provide opportunities for people to get outside, explore natural environments, and engage in physical activity, which has a positive impact on mental and physical health and well-being (Crosby, 2020).

The World Tourism Organization indicates ecotourism as one of the fastest growing sub-sectors of the tourist industry in many parts of the world. Despite the fact that the ecotourism market has been greatly affected by the COVID-19

pandemic, which has caused travel restrictions worldwide in an effort to prevent the spread of the pandemic, according to the report published by Allied Market Research (Ecotourism Market, 2021), the global ecotourism market garnered 181.1 billion USD in 2019 and is estimated to generate 333.8 billion USD by 2027, manifesting a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 14.3% from 2021 to 2027. These figures suggest that the ecotourism market is growing and becoming increasingly important in the tourism industry.

At the same time, there are ongoing debates about what constitutes “true” ecotourism and the potential negative impacts of tourism on natural and cultural resources. The reason for this is that the “ecotourism” concept is frequently misunderstood and used as a marketing tool for nature-related tourism that does not promote environmental conservation or improvement of the well-being of people in the local communities. A scenario like that may include a tourism company utilizing external resources such as tour guides, transportation, and hotels from a nearby city rather than the local area, often without connection to the local environment and culture, resulting in the locals receiving no economic benefits. In some cases, the label of ecotourism may be given to the location of a hotel in a beautiful environment, which can harm the ecosystem.

A theoretical framework for ecotourism developed by H. Donohoe and R. Needham (2006) is centered on six fundamental concepts: nature-based, preservation, education, sustainability, distribution of benefits, and responsibility. According to the definition of ecotourism presented above, the aforementioned examples of manipulation of the word “ecotourism” cannot be recognized as “true” ecotourism and could even be referred to as “pseudo-ecotourism” (Sheikh, 2008). Pseudo-ecotourism often involves false or misleading advertising, which, when combined with the intricate connection between the increasing number of activities related to ecotourism and the more than two billion users of social media, leads to a complicated situation. This is why efforts to develop and promote responsible and sustainable tourism practices should be a priority for the ecotourism industry. For example, many tourism stakeholders in Northern Europe have observed that ecotourism as an activity, philosophy, and development model fits these countries very well (Viken, 2006).

For example, Iceland is one of the countries that have been able to use its unique natural beauty and geothermal resources to develop a thriving tourism industry, focusing on sustainable and responsible tourism. The country has taken several steps to support and encourage sustainable tourism practices, including the establishment of a certification system for tourism operators who are committed to sustainability. One of the most important aspects of Iceland’s ecotourism strategy is the focus on preserving the country’s natural resources (OECD, 2017). Notably, the country has implemented strict regulations to limit the number of visitors to popular natural attractions such as geysers, waterfalls,

and whale watching. These precautions were taken to prevent potential harm to the natural environment and ensure that visitors will get an opportunity to enjoy these attractions for many years to come.

Another crucial aspect of Iceland's ecotourism industry is the emphasis on local community involvement. Tourism operators in the country have collaborated closely with local communities to ensure that the industry benefits them and that their needs and concerns are taken seriously. This has contributed to fostering a sense of ownership and pride among the local communities and has helped promote the long-term sustainability of the industry (Centre For Public Impact, 2016).

On the contrary, according to A. Viken (2006), ecotourism is not a necessary concept in Norway because their tourism already occurs primarily in natural areas and is inherently sustainable and environmentally friendly. While there are varying opinions, most Norwegians believe that there is no need to emphasize ecotourism because Norwegian tourism already adheres to ecotourism principles. It has many forms, from hiking and camping to kayaking, whale or bird watching, and more. Svalbard, the Lofoten Islands, and the Jotunheimen National Park are among Norway's most popular ecotourism destinations.

Ecotourism has the potential to help Eastern European countries improve their image, as they are often associated with a socialist past, industrial heritage, and environmental contamination. This type of tourism is less widespread in Ukraine than in other Northern countries. At the same time, Ukraine's diverse natural landscapes include the spectacular Carpathian Mountains, the shoreless Black Sea coasts, and the vast steppes. All these areas have significant potential for ecotourism development in the country, and they can offer opportunities for activities such as hiking, horseback riding, birdwatching, and photography. Thus, the important task for us in this context is to research the benefits of true ecotourism based on successful Internet marketing initiatives in other countries, such as Norway and Iceland.

## **Materials and Methods**

Content analysis was used to investigate the connection between ecotourism and marketing. It helped explore existing trends, patterns, and themes in the contemporary social media promotion of nature-oriented tourism. With the help of content analysis, the authors investigated how ecotourism destinations and operators use social media platforms to promote sustainable travel practices and showcase their unique natural and cultural heritage. This includes identifying common themes, such as the emphasis on sustainability, responsible travel, community engagement, and investigating the use of various media such as photos, videos, and stories, to attract potential visitors. Through content

analysis, the authors were able to gain a deeper understanding of the current state of ecotourism marketing and identify potential areas for improvement or future research (Derevyanko et al., 2022). Additionally, it allowed for a systematic and objective analysis of a large amount of data, providing valuable insights into the relationship between ecotourism and marketing in the context of social media promotion of nature-oriented tourism.

The authors also employed the comparative method in their research. It was used to highlight similarities and differences in the state of ecotourism in countries such as Ukraine, Norway, and Iceland. For example, the comparative method helped identify differences between policies to promote sustainable tourism and the influence of the countries' authorities on this type of tourism. Additionally, it allowed us to interpret the data gathered from the content analysis of social media promotion of ecotourism in these countries. By comparing the themes and patterns observed in their marketing campaigns, conclusions were drawn about the effectiveness of different approaches to promoting ecotourism through social media. In summary, the comparative method was a valuable research technique used in the article to emphasize the similarities and differences in the state of ecotourism in Ukraine, Norway, and Iceland and to draw conclusions about the role of marketing and social media in promoting sustainable tourism.

## Results

### Opportunities for ecotourism in Iceland, Norway and Ukraine

Iceland has a reputation for its commitment to environmentally friendly and sustainable tourism. Its exceptional natural beauty and geothermal resources abundance have enabled the country to cultivate a thriving tourism industry that emphasizes responsible and sustainable practices.

Iceland has implemented an ecotourism strategy to promote responsible travel and raise awareness of the importance of protecting the natural environment. With the passage of Constitutional Bill No. 33/1933, an additional provision was incorporated into the Constitution of the Republic of Iceland. According to this constitutional amendment, "Iceland's nature is the foundation of all life in the country. Responsibility for protecting nature precaution and long-term vision guided by sustainable development. The maintenance of natural diversity shall be promoted and the growth and development of the biota ensured" (Venice Commission, 2020).

The country has taken numerous steps to sustain and promote sustainable tourism practices, including the establishment of a certification system for tour-

ism operators dedicated to sustainability. Within its borders, this country offers a number of opportunities for ecotourism. Several tour operators (Elding Whale Watching, Reykjavik Sailors, North Sailing, Gentle Giants) offer whale-watching tours that emphasize environmental consciousness and respect for the whales and their habitat. Iceland boasts a variety of magnificent glaciers, with Vatnajökull being the largest in Europe. Tourists can go on guided glacier hikes and learn about the geology of the glaciers and their importance to the local ecosystem. Iceland provides opportunities for visitors to learn about its natural history and conservation efforts by touring several national parks, including the Thingvellir National Park, which is home to unique geological formations, waterfalls, and hiking trails.

One of the key aspects of Iceland's approach to ecotourism has been the focus on preserving the country's natural resources. Currently, about 25% of the country is under formal protection in either national parks or other types of protected areas. Some of those areas are of international importance, such as the large Vatnajökull National Park, Surtsey, and Thingvellir National Park, which have been recognized as UNESCO World Heritage sites, and the important bird area Mývatn-Laxá, which is a Ramsar site (Ministry of the Environment, Energy, and Climate, 2023a). For instance, the country has enacted strict laws to limit the number of tourists who can visit well-liked natural landmarks, such as geysers and waterfalls. The Ministry of the Environment, Energy, and Climate is responsible for the majority of environmental and nature conservation issues. However, environmental issues are often cross-sectoral, as most industries and other human activities generally impact the natural environment. As a result, a lot of issues fall under the responsibility of multiple ministries or are subject to inter-ministerial co-ordination (Ministry of the Environment, Energy, and Climate, 2023b).

Examples of such laws aimed at preserving the natural environment of Iceland are the Environmental Impact Assessment Act, the Nature Conservation Act, the Soil Conservation Act, and the Pollution Prevention Act. These laws govern a variety of actions, including construction, mining, and waste management, and they also ensure that all of them are carried out in an environmentally responsible manner. Iceland has also ratified several international agreements and treaties intended to protect the environment such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement on climate change. It is supposed that these measures will ensure that tourists can continue to enjoy these sights for many years to come.

The importance placed on local community involvement in Iceland's ecotourism industry is another crucial factor (Mihai, 2023). Local communities have benefited from the tourism industry and had their wants and concerns taken into consideration thanks to the tight collaboration between operators and the

community. This has helped create a sense of ownership and pride among the local communities and to promote the long-term sustainability of the industry.

Norway has a robust legal framework in place to protect and preserve its natural environment. Article 112 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway states the following:

Every person has the right to an environment that is conducive to health and to a natural environment whose productivity and diversity are maintained. Natural resources shall be managed on the basis of comprehensive long-term considerations which will safeguard this right for future generations as well. The authorities of the state shall take measures for the implementation of these principles (Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2023).

Table 1 displays a comprehensive compilation of laws and regulations overseen by the Ministry of Climate and Environment in Norway. These legal measures collectively exemplify the nation's unwavering dedication to the preservation of its natural environment and the promotion of sustainable practices. By adhering to these regulatory frameworks, Norway seeks to ensure the well-being of both contemporary and future generations, fostering a harmonious coexistence between human activities and the preservation of its invaluable natural resources.

Table 1

*Laws and regulations of nature protection in Norway by the Ministry of Climate and Environment*

Act	Description
Nature Diversity Act	This Act aims to protect biological, geological, and landscape diversity, along with ecological processes, through conservation and sustainable use. In a way environment provides a basis for human activity, culture, health, and well-being both now and in the future. The Act also establishes protected areas, such as national parks, nature reserves, and wildlife sanctuaries, to preserve significant natural habitats.
Svalbard Environmental Protection Act	The Act aims to preserve the virtually untouched environment in Svalbard, respecting the continuous areas of wilderness, landscape, flora, fauna, and cultural heritage. The Act allows for environmentally sound settlement, research, and commercial activities within this framework.
Cultural Heritage Act	This Act aims to protect archeological and architectural monuments and sites and preserve cultural areas in all their variety and details, both as part of cultural heritage and identity and as an element in the overall environment and resource management.
Pollution Control Act	The Act aims to protect the outdoor environment from damage, reduce existing pollution and the quantity of waste, and promote better waste management.



Table 1  
*Laws and regulations...* (cont.)

Act	Description
Outdoor Recreation Act	This Act aims to protect the natural basis for outdoor recreation and guarantee the public's right of access to the countryside, including passage through it and spending time there. This ensures opportunities for outdoor recreation as a healthy, environmentally sound, and well-being-giving leisure activity is preserved and promoted.
Environmental Information Act	The Act aims to provide public access to environmental information, making it easier for individuals to contribute to the protection of the environment, safeguard themselves from environmental damage, and influence public and private decision-makers in ecological matters.

Source: Government.no, 2023.

The Norwegian government has also implemented policies to promote sustainable tourism practices and to preserve the environment, such as the "Leave No Trace" principle, which encourages visitors to minimize their impact on natural areas by packing out all trash and respecting wildlife.

Norway is renowned for its natural landscapes, from the fjords to the mountains, forests, and wilderness areas. As a result, Norwegian ecotourism offers a diverse range of activities, from hiking and camping to kayaking, whale watching, bird watching, and more. Some of the most popular ecotourism destinations in Norway are Svalbard, the Lofoten Islands, and the Jotunheimen National Park. Another aspect of Norway's ecotourism industry is the various organizations and certifications that promote and recognize sustainable tourism practices, such as Eco-Lighthouse, Green Key, and Nordic Swan Ecolabel.

For instance, Green Travel certifies tourism businesses in Norway that meet specific standards, rules, and guidelines for environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and sustainable development. These include, among other things, waste reduction, encouraging regional growth, the use of renewable energy sources, the efficient use of water resources, and implementing energy efficiency measures. Tourism companies that obtain Green Travel accreditation can use it as a powerful marketing tool to promote their services as socially and environmentally responsible. Tourists can also rely on Green Travel accreditation as a standard when choosing a destination in Norway, knowing that their tour will be both environmentally friendly and beneficial to the area's long-term development. Certification programs like Green Travel lead to economic growth in ecotourism by attracting investors interested in environmentally beneficial and sustainable initiatives. Additionally, they can stimulate the development of local communities, as certified tourism businesses often collaborate with local suppliers and offer programs that allow tourists to learn about the culture and traditions of locals.

In general, there are various organizations that certify and set criteria for ecotourism. For example, Green Globe Certification and EarthCheck are the organizations that certify hotels, resorts, and other travel-related enterprises worldwide for their environmental and social policies. Similarly, the Rainforest Alliance accredits travel agencies located in protected zones in more than 70 countries. These certifications encompass the criteria for culture preservation, social responsibility, economic viability, and nature conservation, similar to how the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) operates.

Overall, Norwegian ecotourism provides a sustainable way to experience the natural beauty of Norway while also encouraging environmental stewardship and responsibility. In contrast, in Ukraine ecotourism is still a relatively new concept, and its presence is not yet as developed as in Norway. However, rich and diverse natural environments, including unique landscapes, nature reserves, and wildlife, offer great potential for ecotourism development.

Some of the possibilities of ecotourism in Ukraine include its biodiversity. Ecotourists can visit nature reserves, national parks, and wildlife sanctuaries to observe and learn about an immense variety of wild animals, including brown bears, wolves, lynxes, rare bird species, and more. Moreover, Ukraine has an array of natural landscapes, such as the steppes, the Black Sea coast, and the Carpathian Mountains. Hiking, horseback riding, birdwatching, and photography are just a few activities that can be done in these locations. As Ukraine has a rich cultural heritage with many historical towns, castles, and religious sites, this cultural richness can also be a compelling argument for developing ecotourism in the region.

While Ukraine has a great potential for ecotourism, it also faces challenges that should be overcome to develop this industry. One of the most significant barriers to ecotourism in Ukraine is the lack of infrastructure. Several ecotourism sites are located in rural areas where basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and water supply are often absent. It is also related to limited access to financing, as many ecotourism enterprises in Ukraine struggle to obtain funding for operations and expansion. This includes accommodation, transportation, communication, and informational centers where tourists can acquire the details required.

Another issue is that policymakers and the general public may not be informed enough about the potential of Ukrainian ecotourism. As a result, ecotourism activities might endure lack of promotion, funding, and support. There is also lack of coordination among government agencies, ecotourism businesses, and local communities (Britchenko & Saienko, 2017). Due to lack of regulations and guidelines for ecotourism, unscrupulous operators may exploit the environment and local communities for their profit. If uncontrolled ecotourism operations are not adequately controlled, they risk causing environmental degrada-

tion. Unrestricted use of resources and unauthorized access to natural areas may endanger local species and delicate ecosystems.

Additionally, the Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war has resulted in considerable damage to natural areas and ecosystems, impacting the availability and attractiveness of ecotourism destinations in Ukraine. The hostilities in the territory of Ukraine have caused insecurity, instability, and a significant decrease in the number of tourists visiting Ukraine. As a result of the full-scale war, there are fewer transportation and lodging options in the affected regions, which deters many potential tourists (Warsaw Institute Review, 2022). We must point out that many nations that attempt to encourage ecotourism face similar difficulties. These are not exclusive to Ukraine. To overcome these challenges, stakeholders — including the government, the commercial sector, and local communities — will need to collaborate to establish an ecotourism sector in Ukraine that is sustainable and ethical to unlock the full potential of its ecotourism industry.

### **Ways to promote ecotourism through online marketing**

Depending on the target market, location, and objectives of the marketing effort, ecotourism is promoted in various ways. In the early days of ecotourism, promotion was typically conducted through travel brochures, travel magazines, and travel agencies. These commercials highlighted the distinctive and unspoiled qualities of ecotourism locations and how they provided a platform for experiencing nature's sustainability and responsibility.

With the introduction of the Internet and social media, ecotourism has been promoted via numerous online platforms. Websites, blogs, social media platforms, and online travel providers are all examples. Now, let us examine current Internet-based strategies for promoting ecotourism:

- Online platforms. Promoting ecotourism can be accomplished with the help of websites such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and Airbnb. They provide the opportunity to promote eco-friendly products and tourist hotspots and can also be used to attract potential clients (Zhou et al., 2019);
- Social media. Social media can be an effective tool for marketing ecotourism, especially in conjunction with hashtags, to create some curious and informative content that piques the attention of potential clients. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter can be used to promote an ecotourism destination's sustainability activities and natural beauty;
- Content marketing. Various forms of content, such as blog posts and videos, can be used for storytelling to showcase a destination's unique features and sustainable tourism initiatives. Such content can be disseminated through

the destination's website and various social media channels, serving as an effective means of attracting potential ecotourists;

- Search engine optimization (SEO). Improving a destination's website for search engine optimization (SEO) can increase its visibility and ranking in search results, especially when users search for ecotourism-associated keywords. As a result, the destination's website will receive more organic traffic, increasing its exposure and potential for attracting visitors interested in sustainable tourism. Search engine marketing has emerged as a thriving industry in the digital world, allowing destinations to gain a deeper understanding of their foreign clientele and identify which type of ecotourism destination should be promoted (Clark et al., 2019).

In addition, collaborating with social media influencers can be helpful in promoting ecotourism to a targeted audience, particularly those who express interest in environmentally conscious travel and have a large following on social media platforms. Working together with ecotourism bloggers may help promote the benefits of ecotourism and encourage tourists to choose more sustainable practices, such as collaborating with tourism companies, organizations, and even governments. Several marketing strategies can be applied to promote ecotourism, and it is important to use a variety of tactics in order to effectively reach the target audience and showcase the distinctive aspects and sustainability endeavors of the destination (Khan et al., 2022). The aforementioned methods are just a few examples of the many existing promotional tools.

While showcasing attractive images and videos of natural surroundings, unique wildlife and local cultural experiences on social media can be helpful, it is not enough. An effective ecotourism marketing strategy typically includes emphasizing the distinctive and sustainable characteristics of a destination or tour package while targeting the environmentally conscious and socially responsible travel market. One of the most important aspects of an effective ecotourism marketing strategy is focusing on reaching travelers who prioritize sustainability, nature, and cultural experiences, and highlighting the positive environmental impact of choosing ecotourism, such as conservation efforts, supporting local economies, and reducing carbon footprint. To reach a larger audience and tap into an existing network of sustainable travelers, we need to use online travel agents (OTAs).

In recent times, there has been a shift in the ecotourism industry towards experiential marketing, which entails creating immersive experiences for potential ecotourists to sample before making a booking. Advertisers are focused on virtual reality experiences, interactive web content, and social media campaigns, encouraging users to generate content. The appliance of virtual reality technology offers an opportunity to experience a destination or activity before booking, increasing potential ecotourists' interest and ultimately leading to higher bookings.

### *Lessons from Iceland*

Generally, ecotourism is marketed by emphasizing natural, cultural, educational, and unique aspects, which can be experienced while emphasizing the significance of responsible and sustainable travel. Marketing strategies will almost always focus on the country's natural beauty, rich wildlife, and various outdoor activities. Yet the organizers of such marketing campaigns may significantly vary depending on the level of ecotourism development in a specific country. It is well known that countries with a long-standing tradition of nature conservation and sustainable tourism have implemented regulations and policies to protect the environment and natural resources. Furthermore, such countries' governments have collaborated with tourism industry stakeholders to promote ecotourism initiatives. The Icelandic Tourism Cluster, for example, is a collaboration between the government and private sector stakeholders in the tourism industry to promote sustainable tourism development and innovation.

The Icelandic Tourism Cluster was established in 2011 and has expanded to encompass more than 170 members from various sectors of the Icelandic tourism industry, such as tour operators, accommodation providers, transportation companies, and more. Its primary objective is to endorse Iceland as a sustainable tourism destination and assist its members in adopting sustainable tourism practices. To accomplish this, the cluster provides several resources and services, including education and training initiatives, research and analysis, networking events, and marketing assistance.

In addition, the Icelandic government has implemented regulations and policies to protect the environment and natural resources. For example, the Environment Agency of Iceland is responsible for monitoring and enforcing laws related to protected areas, wildlife, and natural resources. The government has also implemented a carbon neutral strategy, aimed to make Iceland carbon neutral by 2040, and has invested in renewable energy sources such as geothermal ones and hydropower.

Iceland's focus on renewable energy has allowed it to position itself as a front-runner in sustainable development and environmental responsibility. The tourism industry in Iceland reflects this commitment to sustainability, as many ecotourism activities, such as visiting geothermal areas and glaciers, are powered by renewable energy sources. This emphasis on renewable energy further emphasizes Iceland's position as a champion of sustainable development and has contributed to the country's appeal as an ecotourism destination. The Icelandic Tourism Board, responsible for promoting Iceland as a tourist destination, was also established by the government with this purpose in mind.

Iceland offers a notable case study of done-right ecotourism, providing valuable lessons that can be applied to Ukraine's emerging ecotourism industry. Thoroughly examining Iceland's successes in implementing sustainable tourism

techniques into practice, Ukraine can gain essential methodologies and opportunities to foster the growth of its own ecotourism activities.

The following essential lessons from Iceland's prosperous ecotourism business should help Ukraine's ecotourism industry:

1. **Emphasis on sustainability:** Iceland's ecotourism industry is firmly grounded in sustainable principles, encompassing strategies to minimize environmental impact and support local communities. This sustainability-focused approach has contributed to Iceland's popularity as an ecotourism destination and can serve as a guiding model for Ukraine. By adopting a similar strategy, Ukraine can effectively manage the development of its own ecotourism industry. This might include initiatives such as waste reduction, utilization of renewable energy sources, and promotion of responsible wildlife viewing practices.
2. **Infrastructure development:** Iceland has made significant investments in infrastructure related to ecotourism, including the setting up of roads, trails, and visitor centers. Investments in the infrastructure have made it easier for tourists to visit Iceland's natural features while ensuring that the sector runs responsibly. Similarly, Ukraine may prioritize funding for ecotourism facilities like well-maintained trails, educational and visitor facilities. These initiatives will not just improve travelers' experiences but will also support environmentally friendly management techniques.
3. **Collaborate with Local Communities:** By closely collaborating with regional communities, Iceland's ecotourism sector develops. Through this collaboration, locals may profit from tourism while also preserving the environment. In order to strengthen its ecotourism industry, Ukraine also might benefit from emulating Iceland's strategy and encouraging partnerships with local populations. This could include activities like providing financial aid to neighborhood companies, giving local residents a say in tourism development choices, and making sure that everyone in the neighborhood shares equally in the positive effects of tourism.
4. **Establish a Sustainable Tourism Certification System:** Iceland has implemented a certification program for sustainable tourism businesses, ensuring that enterprises promoting themselves as ecotourism operators meet responsible tourism standards. Ukraine could consider developing a comparable certification program or engaging with existing ones to ensure the credibility and authenticity of its ecotourism offerings. This would enhance transparency, instill confidence in tourists, and foster responsible practices within the industry.

#### *Lessons from Norway*

The Norwegian government also works with local communities and tour operators to develop sustainable tourism practices and provides funding and sup-

port for eco-friendly tourism projects. In addition, Norway's tourism industry is encouraged to obtain eco-certifications, such as the Nordic Swan Ecolabel or the Eco-Lighthouse certification. The certification program, Eco-Lighthouse, is a widely recognized standard for environmental management in the tourism industry in Norway, presented by the Norwegian Ecotourism Association, a membership-based organization established in 2003.

The Norwegian Ecotourism Association offers its members various resources and support services, including marketing and networking opportunities, training and certification programs, as well as access to industry research and best practices. It represents a network of Norwegian ecotourism companies, ranging from small family businesses to large corporations. In addition to supporting its members, the Norwegian Ecotourism Association also aims to increase awareness about sustainable tourism practices and promote Norway as a destination for environmentally responsible travel. The association collaborates with other organizations and stakeholders in the tourism industry, and even government agencies to advocate for policies and ecotourism initiatives.

Another initiative of the Norwegian Ecotourism Association is the development of the Norwegian Ecotourism Strategy, which outlines a number of goals and objectives to guide the sustainable development of ecotourism in Norway. The Norwegian Ecotourism Strategy has several main goals, one of which is to promote sustainable tourism in rural and remote areas of Norway, focusing on supporting the establishment of locally owned and operated ecotourism enterprises. Another significant goal is to encourage responsible tourist behavior, which includes promoting low-carbon transportation options, minimizing waste and energy use, and respecting local cultures and environments.

Eco-certified Norwegian travel providers (Eco-Lighthouse/Miljofyrtn) encourage sustainable and responsible travel practices that minimize tourists' carbon footprint. They accomplish this by maximizing the use of existing public transport systems, offering guided tours that involve walking, biking, or using public trains and electric fjord cruise boats, instead of relying on fleets of tour buses. These companies consistently promote the importance of everyone's participation in environmental conservation. By choosing eco-certified travel providers, tourists can contribute to ecotourism while enjoying their travel experiences.

In Norway, electric car and bike rentals have become popular options for transportation, with companies such as Greenmobile and eMobility offering e-car rental services. These companies operate an extensive network of charging stations, numbering more than 10,000, and are located throughout the country. The availability of electric rental vehicles and charging infrastructure promotes low-carbon transportation and contributes to Norway's overall efforts toward sustainable tourism.

Tourism in Norway is also characterized by a strong emphasis on green initiatives, as reflected in its Powered By Nature tagline. Accommodations in Norway adhere to stricter environmental standards than those mandated by European laws, focusing on low energy consumption and sustainable practices, including innovative food waste and leftover management. These hotels and inns rely heavily on sustainable energy sources such as windmills, solar panels, and connections to local hydropower providers. For instance, the Svart Hotel, located near the Svartisen Glacier in Holandfjorden, is the first energy-positive hotel in the world: it generates more energy than it consumes through sustainable means, and any excess energy returns to the national energy grid.

Ukraine can benefit from Norway's substantial expertise in a variety of ecotourism-related fields, particularly in the following crucial areas:

1. **Education and Training:** A variety of education and training programs are made available to operators within Norway's ecotourism sector. These programs play a decisive role in providing operators with the information and skills required to manage their businesses sustainably and responsibly. For instance, the Norwegian nonprofit organization, the Ecotourism Academy, offers a range of ecotourism training and workshops. The academy's courses cover a wide range of subjects, such as environmentally responsible tourism or company growth. Ukraine has the opportunity to learn from Norway's educational and training programs, enabling its ecotourism providers to uphold best practices and moral principles.
2. **Monitoring and evaluation (M&E):** This is an essential part of any ecotourism program. Norway's ecotourism initiatives undergo monitoring and evaluation through a sophisticated system. This system uses a variety of instruments, including questionnaires, interviews, and environmental monitoring. These tools collect data to monitor program development, identify issues, and make necessary corrections (Yasynska et al., 2022). For instance, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) is a global organization that provides ecotourism professionals with information and support. The society offers a toolbox and a training course as part of its monitoring and evaluation resources. Another organization that supports environmental sustainability is the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The UNEP provides monitoring and evaluation resources, including a guidebook and toolkit. By adopting Norway's well-structured system and basing it on the available resources from organizations like TIES and the UNEP, Ukraine can cultivate a culture of transparency and accountability in its own ecotourism endeavors.
3. **Embrace Innovation:** Norway's ecotourism sector continually embraces innovation as a strategy, attracting visitors while preserving the environment. For example, the country has recently introduced several ecotourism experiences, focused on sustainable fishing and farming. Ukraine has an oppor-



tunity to follow Norway's lead by fostering a culture of innovation and creativity within its ecotourism approach. Exploring novel strategies, sustainable technologies, and immersive activities can enhance Ukraine's attractiveness as an eco-friendly destination, appealing to contemporary eco-conscious travelers.

Overall, while Norway has a well-established ecotourism industry and embodies the motto "Nature does not belong to us, we belong to nature" by Abhijit Naskar, Ukraine is still in the early stages of developing its own ecotourism sector. To get support from the Ukrainian government for ecotourism promotion, a comprehensive marketing strategy should be devised. It should highlight the benefits of ecotourism for Ukraine and its potential to contribute to the national economy. It should encompass a delineation of the target demographic, a list of prospective ecotourism areas in Ukraine, and a budget for the marketing effort.

#### *Applicability to Ukraine*

The target audience for the ecotourism marketing campaign in Ukraine is environmentally conscious travelers aged between 25 and 45 years old who are interested in sustainable travel experiences. This audience is characterized by a high education level and above-average income and searches for unique travel experiences that contribute positively to both the environment and local communities.

Potential ecotourism destinations in Ukraine are the Carpathian Mountains, the Danube Delta, the Black Sea coast, Kamianets-Podilskyi, Shatskyi National Nature Park, Oleshky Sands, and Askania-Nova biosphere reserve. The approximate cost of marketing channels may include the following components: Social Media Advertising (20,000 USD); Influencer Marketing (15,000 USD); Content Marketing (15,000 USD); Search Engine Marketing (15,000 USD); Events and Sponsorships (20,000 USD); Press Releases and Media Relations (15,000 USD).

The expected budget for this marketing campaign is 100,000 USD. It should be allocated across various marketing channels, including digital advertising, social media campaigns, email marketing, and content creation. This campaign should help attract a significant number of sustainable travelers to Ukraine. The specified budget for digital advertising is intended for creating and launching ads on popular online platforms such as Google and Facebook that are targeted at the relevant audience. The social media campaigns should include the creation and promotion of content on various social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. The content creation process involves producing engaging and informative blog posts, videos, and photos that showcase the allure and advantages of ecotourism destinations in Ukraine.

Ukraine has a growing community of travel bloggers who are passionate about promoting sustainable tourism in the country. These bloggers share their

experiences and insights about eco-friendly travel, highlighting the country's natural beauty and unique cultural heritage. They could collaborate with local businesses and organizations to support sustainable tourism initiatives and promote responsible travel practices. Some notable Ukrainian travel bloggers are Anton Ptushkin (@ptuxermann), who has 5.63 million subscribers on his YouTube channel (as of February 2023), Vlad Khilchenko (@OdnoyPravoy), who has 179 thousand subscribers (as of February 2023), Max Uzol and Olya Manko (@uzolimanko), who have 162 thousand subscribers (as of February 2023), and Ukrainian-language travel project Blog 360 (@Blog360channel) with 26.9 thousand subscribers on YouTube (as of February 2023).

Collaboration with stakeholders and policymakers is also essential. It may encourage a sense of ownership and responsibility for the initiative, resulting in a stronger commitment and dedication to achieving the stated objectives. One of the most important aspects of promoting ecotourism is emphasizing its sustainable nature and responsible tourism practices, which can garner support from politicians who prioritize sustainable development. This approach emphasizes the importance of promoting environmentally-friendly tourism that preserves the natural surroundings or local communities. This can also help receive support from stakeholders who recognize sustainable tourism as a means to support economic growth while protecting the environment.

An illustrative example of advertising suitable for online promotion on multiple social media platforms is provided below:

Are you an eco-conscious traveler in search of your next eco-friendly adventure? Take a look at Ukraine! From the Carpathian Mountains to the Danube Delta, our beautiful country has an array of breathtaking ecotourism destinations. Immerse yourself in nature's pristine beauty while contributing to local communities with sustainable travel practices. Join us in preserving Ukraine's natural beauty for generations to come. #EcotourismUkraine #SustainableTravel #ResponsibleTourism (Manifest, 2023).

The following steps listed above can help convince the Ukrainian government to support ecotourism through marketing. A crucial aspect of ensuring success is continual monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the marketing campaign, making necessary adjustments to its strategies.

## Discussion

Utilizing social media for promoting ecotourism is crucial in today's digital age, given that the majority of travelers use the Internet to research and plan their trips. Following a survey conducted by Expedia in 2019, 57% of global travelers used the Internet to research and plan their trips (Sadiku, 2022). However, this percentage has likely increased since 2019, as the COVID-19 pandemic ex-

pedited the shift towards digital and online travel planning. In recent years, social media has become a powerful tool for influencing modern tourists' decision-making processes and shaping their ecotourism behavior. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have enabled ecotourism destinations and operators to reach a wider audience and showcase their sustainable tourism products and services. Through social media, they can share photos, videos, and stories about their ecotourism experiences, providing potential visitors with an immersive and authentic preview of what they can expect.

Tourists use social media platforms during various stages of their trip, i.e. before, during, and after. During the pre-trip phase, social media is often used to research and plan the trip. Using social media platforms such as TripAdvisor, Yelp, or travel blogs, travelers can find information about their destination, such as attractions, accommodation, and activities. They can also use social media to get recommendations and advice from friends, family, or influencers (Hysa et al., 2022). During the on-site phase of their trip, social media can be used to share the experiences in real-time. Many tourists document their travels on social media by posting photos, videos, and stories about their adventures. This can contain sharing their interactions with nature, wildlife, and local communities. Some travelers also use social media to connect with locals and other travelers, enhancing their experience.

In the post-trip phase, tourists often turn to social media to reflect on their experiences and share their impressions with others (Holod et al., 2020). They may provide valuable feedback to ecotourism destinations and operators by leaving reviews and comments on social media platforms, which can influence other travelers' decision-making, encouraging sustainable tourism practices. Additionally, sharing their experiences on social media might invoke feelings of nostalgia, inspiring them to plan future trips and revisit ecotourism destinations. Furthermore, social media platforms allow ecotourism destinations and operators to collect helpful feedback from their customers and promptly respond to any concerns or criticisms. They can enhance customer relationships and demonstrate their commitment to sustainable tourism practices by engaging with an audience on social media.

Social media platforms also provide a forum for ecotourists to share their experiences, exchange travel tips, and interact with other like-minded individuals. This creates a sense of togetherness around ecotourism, with travelers sharing their experiences and encouraging others to visit these unique destinations. Connecting with fellow ecotourists, travelers may acquire a deeper appreciation for the natural environment and learn how to travel more sustainably. According to the International Telecommunication Union's report, as of 2020, the number of Internet users in Ukraine was approximately 25 million (International Telecommunication Union, 2020). This figure corresponds to a penetration rate of

around 58%, which is relatively low compared to other European countries. Despite this, the number of Internet users in Ukraine has been steadily rising in recent years, and it is projected to continue increasing as access to the Internet becomes more prevalent.

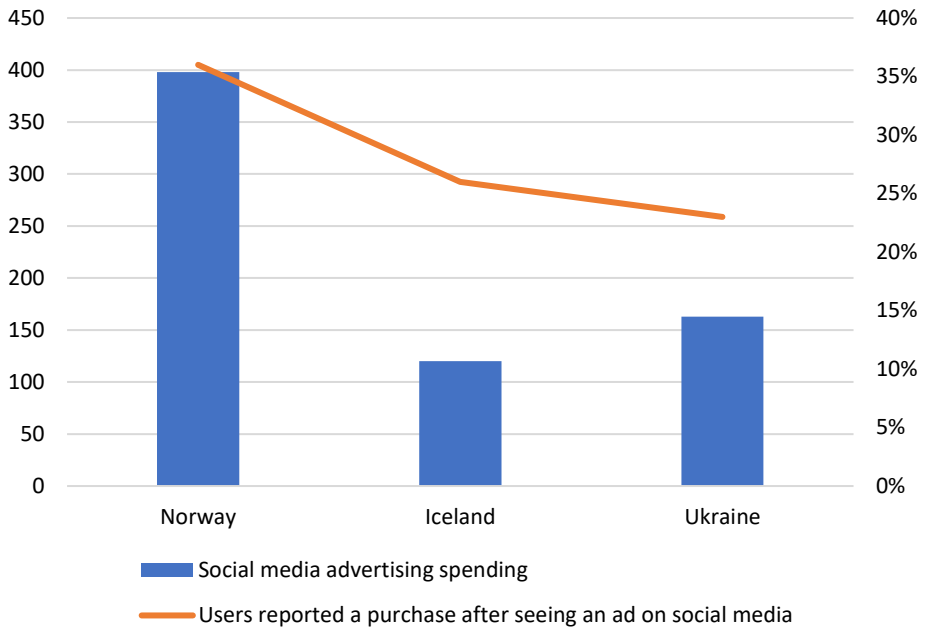
Social media advertising is an effective tool to reach a wider audience and increase ecotourism awareness. Norway, Iceland, and Ukraine all have different levels of social network advertising interest. The projection for 2021 indicates an increase in social media advertising spending in Ukraine, reaching 163 million USD compared to the previous years. Likewise, social media advertising expenditure in Norway is expected to reach 398 million USD, while in Iceland, it is anticipated to attain 120 million USD in 2021 (Degenhard, 2022). The rise in popularity of social media advertising in these countries can be attributed to a growing user base on social media platforms. Nonetheless, the level of popularity may vary depending on factors such as population size, level of digitalization, and competition in the market.

In Ukraine, social media advertising has become increasingly popular in recent years, and it has already proven its effectiveness in reaching a younger demographic that is more likely to be active on social media platforms. According to a survey conducted by Statista in 2021, around 23% of social media users in Ukraine reported a purchasing activity after seeing an advertisement on social media (Degenhard, 2022). In Norway, approximately 36% of social media users reported making a purchase after seeing a social media advertisement, while in Iceland, this figure was about 26% (Wheel & Anchor, 2020).

A visual comparison between the social media advertising budget and the proportion of users who reported completing a purchase after seeing an advertisement on social media is presented in Figure 1.

Given that this comparison is displayed graphically, the connection between advertising expenditure and customer response on social media platforms can be easily understood and conveyed.

The effectiveness of social media advertising can also depend on the specific social media platform used, as different platforms may have different user demographics and preferences (Levchenko et al., 2021). Also, the advertising's content and quality, the targeting strategy, and the overall campaign goals can impact its effectiveness. With the emergence of social media platforms, the tourism industry has experienced significant transformation in recent years. Social media has become an essential tool for tourists to explore and plan their trips, especially in the context of ecotourism. Social media has also grown in popularity as a platform for tourists to share their ecotourism experiences with others. Social media has helped create a sense of togetherness among ecotourism enthusiasts, allowing them to connect with others who share their passion for sustainable tourism.



*Figure 1*

Comparison of Social Media Advertising Budget and Purchase Conversion Rates

Furthermore, social media has become an essential marketing tool for ecotourism destinations and operators, enabling them to promote their offerings to a global audience. Targeting social media advertising at specific demographics and interests ensures that the right message reaches the right audience. This can result in increased brand awareness, customer engagement, and ultimately more bookings for ecotourism destinations and experiences. In conclusion, social media has become an integral part of the tourism industry, especially in the context of ecotourism. Not only does it provide a platform for travelers to research, plan, and share their experiences but it also functions as a potent marketing instrument for ecotourism destinations and operators.

## Conclusion

Social media can assist ecotourism by increasing the visibility and accessibility of ecotourism destinations and activities to a wider audience. Ecotourism destinations can effectively showcase their unique natural resources, local cultures, and sustainable practices using social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Incorporating social media into the marketing

strategy of ecotourism destinations and operators can have a significant impact on promoting sustainable travel. By sharing captivating photos, engaging videos, and inspiring stories on various social media platforms, potential visitors can be attracted, and sustainable travel can be advocated.

Besides attracting visitors, social media can also help develop a sense of togetherness around ecotourism, with travelers sharing their experiences and inspiring others to explore these unique destinations. Therefore, leveraging social media platforms can be a cost-effective way to market ecotourism and reach a larger audience. However, social media also can have some disadvantages. If not managed responsibly, it can lead to overtourism and damage to delicate ecosystems. Visitors may have unrealistic expectations as a result of social media, leading to disappointment when they arrive and discover that the reality does not match their expectations.

Overall, social media has a positive impact on ecotourism by raising awareness and attracting visitors. However, the responsible use of it is critical to ensure the sustainability of ecotourism benefits over the long term. Showcasing an ecosystem, species, or landscape to ecotourists with marketing can generate value, which can be used to promote the funding for the protection and preservation of these natural resources. The Norwegian and Icelandic governments actively support the development of ecotourism due to its alignment with their overarching objectives for sustainable development and economic growth. Both countries have unique natural landscapes and wildlife that serve as major attractions for tourists. Ecotourism provides a way to showcase these resources while minimizing negative impact on the environment to which Ukraine can be equal.

In addition, ecotourism can provide economic benefits for local communities while helping preserve cultural heritage through the encouragement of traditional ways of life. By lending their support to ecotourism, the Norwegian and Icelandic governments promote responsible tourism practices that protect the environment and respect the rights and needs of local communities. In Ukraine, ecotourism is a developing industry that has gained attention and focus in recent years. Compared to countries like Norway, ecotourism promotion in Ukraine is still in its early stages. However, there have been efforts to promote ecotourism in the country, particularly highlighting its natural and cultural heritage along with rural areas. The marketing strategies typically focus on the country's diverse flora and fauna and the unique experiences tourists can gain.

Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, it is crucial to continue developing and promoting ecotourism not only within the country but also on a global scale. The Russian-Ukrainian full-scale war has decreased tourism in Ukraine, deterring many potential visitors from traveling to the country. However, it is essential to continue efforts to promote ecotourism, as it has the potential to contribute to

economic growth, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation. By promoting Ukraine's unique natural and cultural heritage and encouraging sustainable tourism practices, ecotourism can become a driver of the country's tourism industry and attract visitors from all over the world regardless of the ongoing challenges.

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#### DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article *Using Internet marketing and social media to promote ecotourism in Ukraine (based on the experience of Norway and Iceland)*.

#### FUNDING

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article *Using Internet marketing and social media to promote ecotourism in Ukraine (based on the experience of Norway and Iceland)*.

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