



Impact of Influencer Marketing on Social Media Users' Travel Intention

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ABSTRACT

Recently, the travel category has gained a lot of traction on social media platforms, with most content creators, bloggers, celebrities, and travelers using social media to convey and share their experiences with their communities. As digital adoption and technological infrastructure improves, the number of social media users and platforms grows. As a result, social media is now playing an increasingly important role in human decision making. This study adopts a descriptive quantitative research design and data was gathered using self-administrated questionnaire, the population of the study taken from the active social media users in western province and a sample of 150 users were selected using the convince sampling method and the hypothesis were tested using the correlation and the regression analysis. Findings revealed that influencer marketing has a positive impact on social media users' travel intentions, with all dependent variables, such as content quality and trustworthiness, showing statistically significant relationships with social media followers' travel intentions. The current study has important implications for destination marketers, tourism, hospitality, and advertising agencies by providing valuable insights for marketers to identify real impact on social media followers' travel intentions to determine the true impact of influencer marketing on travel intention in order to make appropriate decisions accordingly.

Keywords: *Destination Marketing, Influencer Advertising, Influencer Marketing, Travel Intention*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Social media marketing is an emerging dimension within the digital regime and it has infiltrated the daily lives that neither marketers nor consumers can live without. The contents shared by the social media platforms are considerably altering the purchase intentions of the customers. Especially, deciding on travel destinations, begin one of the areas in which social media impact has become prominent. Besides, the previous studies have persuaded that the massive development of the social media marketing has a huge impact on customer's decisions on travel destinations.

Influencer marketing is a common practice in social media platform, in which many organizations try to impact the decision making process of the customers (Lea et al., 2018). 'Vocational, sustained, and highly branded social media stars' who 'exercise influence over a vast pool of potential customers' are referred to as social media influencers. (Abidin, 2018). These influencers are considered as a new type of opinion leader and brand endorser (Freberg et al., 2011) with the power to influence the followers. Traditionally, these influencers were celebrities who were employed in advertising to endorse products. (Glover, 2009). In the context of deciding a local travel destination, by influencing a potential customer's purchase/travel intention, these influencers frequently build a destination image of a tourism area. (Jeong & Jang, 2011).

Due to the intangible nature of the travel products, consumers cannot evaluate it without traveling. As a result, online suggestions/recommendations, reviews can be utilized as evidence and integrate into decisions before booking travel products. This will lower the risk associated with the booking process. Hence the travel industry has a high propensity towards social media influencer marketing and it has been proven to be a highly effective, helpful, and powerful method of reaching out to a specific group of target customers in a trustworthy and approachable manner (Alic, Pestek & Sadinlija, 2017).

In Sri Lankan context, the travel and tourism industry has been the country's third-largest earner of foreign currency (International trade administration, 2021). In light of such positive ground for traveling sector, Sri Lanka is having the utmost success through the travel influencers such as, Christina Plate, Travel with wife, Senuri Ranathunga and Melissa etc. As cited by Cholprasertsuk et al., (2020) these influencers have become a popular source of information in deciding where to travel and planning what to experience based on their posts, reviews, blogs, stories and videos. Furthermore, as cited by Cholprasertsuk et al., (2020), 63 percent of social media users believe that content created by social media influencers is more interesting and compelling than scripted advertising prepared by a marketing professional. Swant, (2016) indicates that, 40 percent of customers have bought something after seeing it on Instagram, Twitter, Vine, or YouTube and seeing it utilized by an influencer.

1.2. Research Problem

As discussed above, many researchers have kept their focus on travel and tourism industry. As per the research study conducted by McNair, (2021), trust and content quality has a great impact on the travel intentions of the customers in relation to the tourism industry. Going on the same direction, Cholprasertsuk et al., (2020) found that, 92.3 percent of customers have been influenced by social media influencers on travel decision making in Thai tourism industry. Moreover, there are few research studies can be found in relation to the travel intention of the social media users.

However, social media influencer marketing in relation to travel intention is yet a less discussed topic in Sri Lankan context. Thus, a deep investigation is required to be done in Sri Lankan context to fill the existing literature gap.

The influencer marketing concept is yet unexplored due to the subject being a relatively new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. Therefore, travel organizations wanted to know the real time updates about the social media users to grow the business even more appealing to the customers. Thus, information relating to social media consumption, travel intention, most preferred Sri Lankan influencers and demographic factors relating to the social media users are more important to the organizations. On the other hand, many destinations marketers, hotel and accommodation providers and advertising agencies are investing their money on social media marketing activities without having a proper understanding on their social media user's travel intention. Hence these organizations need to be identified the social media user's travel intentions.

Thus, this study will contribute to the current literature by expanding the influencer marketing on travel intention of social media users in Sri Lankan context. More so, findings of the study will be beneficial to the travel organizations, destination marketers, advertising agencies with practical strategies to effectively utilize influencer marketing concept specifically tailoring to the social media users.

1.3. Research Objectives

Followings are main objectives of the study

- ✓ To assess the level of content quality of influencer marketing on social media user's travel intention
- ✓ To assess the level of trustworthiness of influencer marketing on social media user's travel intention
- ✓ To analyse the level of impact on influencer marketing on social media user's travel intention

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media has fundamentally changed the way individuals plan and consume travel products (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Through out the last decade, social media influencer marketing is getting more

attraction, because it has given business enormous access to consumers in ways that were not possible previously (McNair, 2021). Partnerships with social media influencers are being considered by travel companies as a way to not only capture clients' attention, but also to increase sales volume. In that case, Most of the travelers often rely on reviews, posts, blogs, suggestions and contents created by the social media influencers to decide their travel destinations, what to experience and a accommodation in advance (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). As a result, one's influence has become a new sort of digital currency that brands can buy, sell and utilize in their digital marketing campaigns.

2.1. Influencer Marketing

According to Carter, (2016), influencer marketing is industry efforts that attempts to ‘to promote products or increase brand awareness through content spread by social media users who are considered to be influential’. As cited by Jaya & Prianthara, (2020), an influencer is a type of micro celebrity who gains followers by posting textual and visual narratives from everyday life on blogs or other social media platforms. As cited by McNair, (2021), these influencers with well-known social media channels and blogs have changed the way travelers plan and book vacations.

2.1.1. Travel Intention

Altering the travel intention with the social media has become an interesting phenomenon for researchers, more particularly in the field of travel marketing. Therefore, many researchers have been tested the relationship between travel intention and influencer marketing. According to the Hsiao et al., (2013), travel intention is one's motivation to travel and it is affected by demographic variables, visuals and content creations and emotional stories. As per the study conducted by Terttunen, (2017) 82 percent of Instagram user's travel planning was influenced by influencer marketing. Lim et al., (2017) researched that, recognized influencers have a significant impact on consumer's purchase intention. Shuqair and Cragg (2017), concluded that, more research should be done on how the shared content impacted travel intentions of the travelers.

2.1.2. Quality of the Content

Influencer content on social media is defined as, attributes that influencers display on their posts, such as pictures, videos, voice notes, or written words that impact peers (Casaló et al., 2020) and the value that one sets on the content that has been created is the quality of the content. According to Song & Zinkhan, (2003) content quality is "the degree to which customers believe the information is valuable, good, current, accurate, and reliable." How a follower engages with an influencer is heavily influenced by the quality of the content. A beautiful image isn't the only indicator of content quality. It's a link between a company, an influencer, and a consumer, and it "works best when the content is natural,

honest, and realistic (Childers et al., 2019). The researcher, McNair, (2021), found that, content quality has a direct impact on travel intention.

2.1.3. Trustworthiness

Many studies have revealed that trust is a core function in the field of influencer marketing. According to Ohanian, (1990), consumers' trustworthiness refers to their confidence in influencers' ability to deliver the information they believe is most valid and as per the study conducted by AlFarraj et al., (2021), if a consumer has trust in an influencer and the influencer like a brand, the consumer will like the brand as well. McGinnies & Ward, (1980) stated that, for customers, trustworthiness was more impactful than expertise. Without a doubt, a follower's trust in an influencer has a positive impact on the relationship between the influencer and the consumer, as well as the consumer and the business. The researcher, McNair, (2021), found that, trustworthiness has a direct impact on travel intention and Bruhn et al., (2012) stated that, influencers are more assertive in their ability to impact brand attitudes and consumers purchase intentions than traditional media marketing approaches.

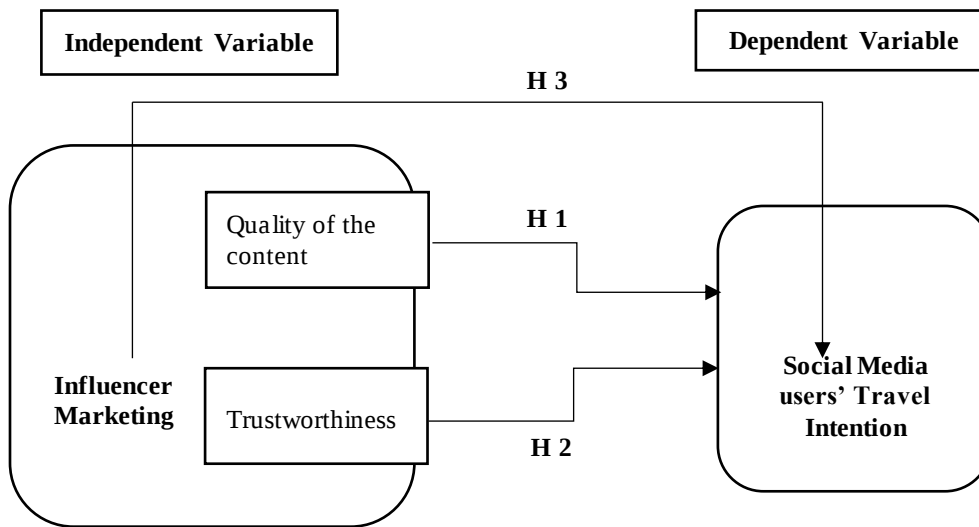
2.2. Impact of influencer marketing on Travel Intention

Many recent literatures can be found in relation to the impact of influencer marketing and travel intention and much of the findings flow towards a same direction unless in very rare cases. The research study conducted by, McNair, (2021) has identified that, influencer trustworthiness and content quality has a positive impact on followers travel intention and if influencers wish to impact their followers, they should work on improving the quality of their content. Further, study revealed that, perceived content quality is less subjective than trust, it can nevertheless signify different things to different people. As noted by Deegan, (2021), influencer marketing can be a highly effective communication tool for advertising services within the travel and tourism industry. Study further revealed that, social media influencers who holds the trustworthiness and quality contents and willingness to collaborate with a brand has the capability to impact the purchase intention of their followers. However, this study concluded that, influencer marketing is crucial to marketers since followers want to mimic a specific lifestyle and social image.

Another study conducted by Nam & Dân, (2018) tested the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase intention with four independent variables including influencer credibility, information quality, relationship between influencer and product and consumer involvement. The results showcased that the trust of influencer is the key component of influencer marketing.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: McNair, 2021

3.1. Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework of the study, following hypothesis can be formed.

Hypothesis 1

H1: Influencer marketers' content quality has a positive relationship with their social media user's travel intention on social media platforms

Hypothesis 2

H2: Influencer marketers' Trustworthiness has a positive relationship with their social media user's travel intention on social media platforms

Hypothesis 3

H3: Influencer marketing has a positive relationship with the travel intention of the social media user's travel intention on the social media platforms

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

Research design is the general plan of the research which helps to obtain answers to research question, it includes, Research philosophy, Research approach, Research strategy, time horizon and techniques and procedures. The research philosophy of the study falls under positivistic, epistemological assumptions, by separating the researcher from the study. This research study falls under the deductive

research approach due to the fact that study has focused on an existing theory. The research strategy is identified as the “Survey”, because the required data was collected using a questionnaire. The time horizon of the study can be identified as one-shot/ cross- sectional, due to the fact that data were gathered only one time.

4.2. Population and Sampling

According to the Department of Census and Statistics' mid-year population projections, the study population is drawn from Sri Lanka's western province, which has the country's largest population, including, Colombo, Gampaha, and Kaluthara districts, accounting for 28 percent of Sri Lanka's total population of 6,149,000 people (Department of Census & Statistics, 2019). Thus, the study's target population is active social media users who lives in the Western Province. Data were gathered from a sample of 150 active social media users who lived in Western province using the convenience sampling method.

4.3. Data Collection Method

To achieve the research objective of the study, the researcher collected secondary data as well as primary data to carry out the research. The required primary data were collected using a questionnaire with the use of online platforms and the secondary data were gathered by referring to the previous studies and other secondary information sources.

4.4. Data Presentation and Analysis

Due to the quantitative nature of the study, collected data were analyzed using “Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS- 26), including, assumption testing, correlation analysis, regression analysis to test the hypotheses.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

To identify the basic nature of the research variables, descriptive statistics were calculated. As per the table, mean values for three variables: quality of the content, trustworthiness and travel intention, respectively state, 3.65, 3.46 and 3.58 which have dispersed from the mean values amounting 0.65, 0.59 and 0.64 of standard deviation lay at the acceptable range.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	QOC	TRU	TI
Mean	3.6552	3.4686	3.5819
Median	3.7143	3.5714	3.7143
Mode	4.00	3.71	3.86
Std. Deviation	0.65834	0.59333	0.64423
Variance	0.433	0.352	0.415
Skewness	-.734	-.912	-.907

Source: Survey data, 2022

5.2. Reliability Test

The Cronbach's Alpha value for all independent and dependent variables were respectively 0.818, 0.779 and 0.844, which were above 0.7. Therefore, it can be concluded that, the questionnaire of the study remains the same and the questionnaire or the measurement continue to be stable over the time and the similarity of the measurement within a given time period is ensured.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

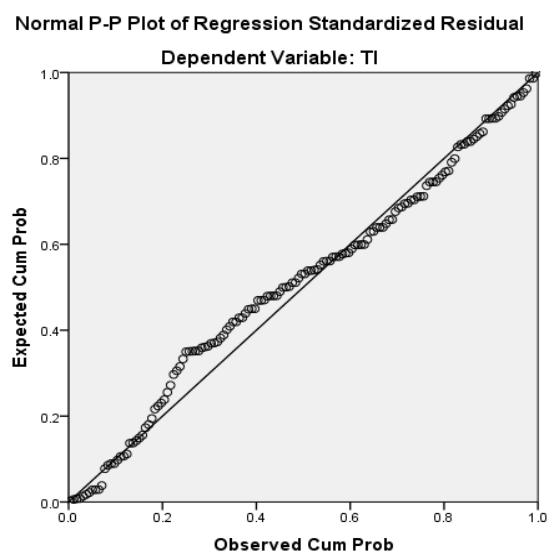
	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
QOC	0.818	7
TRU	0.779	7
TI	0.844	7

Source: Survey data, 2022

5.3. Assumption Testing

5.3.1. Normality Test

Figure 2: Normal Probability Plot



Source: Survey data, 2022

The following normality test demonstrates the normality of the distribution. The majority of residuals should be close to the linear line, to be considered as a normal distribution. As per the below normal probability plot, it can be assumed that majority of residuals are close to the linear line and thus the data set is normally distributed.

5.3.2. Multicollinearity Analysis

According to Weisburd, D. & Britt, C., (2013), a serious multicollinearity in a model is represented by anything under 0.20 tolerance and anything that exceeds 10 of VIF value. As per the multicollinearity analysis, all two independent variables exceed 0.20 of tolerance level and all VIF values were less than 10. Hence, it can be concluded that, there is no multicollinearity among independent variables and they are perfectly correlated.

Table 3: Multicollinearity Analysis

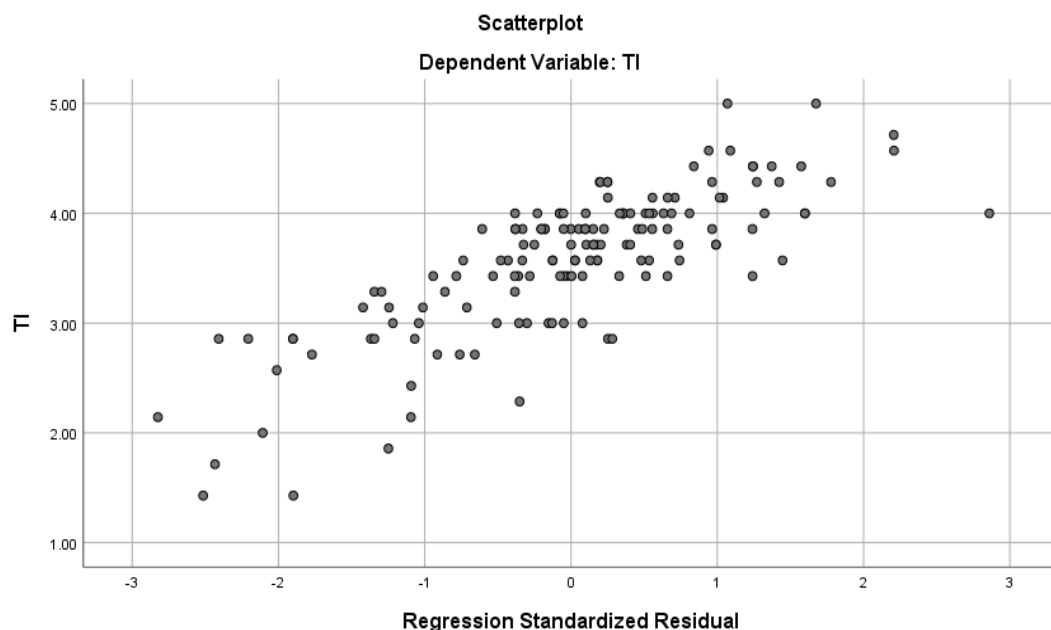
	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	Statistics VIF
QOC	0.592	1.69
TRU	0.592	1.69

Source: Survey data, 2022

5.3.3. Homoscedasticity

Around the regression line, a scatter plot shows a random array of dots. As a result, there are no obvious signs of funneling in any of the independent variables, indicating that the homoscedasticity assumption was met.

Figure 2: Normal Probability Plot



Source: Survey data, 2022

5.4. Correlation Analysis

According to the table 4, probabilities of the relationship between quality of the content and travel intention and trustworthiness and travel intention is 0.000, indicating a highly significant relationship between independent and dependent variables.

According to Tavakol et al., (2011), the relationship between quality of the content and travel intention is a strong relationship as Pearson correlation lie between the range of 0.600 – 0.800. There is a moderate relationship between trustworthiness and travel intention as Pearson Correlation lie between the range of 0.400 – 0.600.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

		QOC	TRU	TI
QOC	Pearson Correlation	1	.639**	.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
TRU	Pearson Correlation	.639**	1	.439**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000
TI	Pearson Correlation	.611**	.439**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey data, 2022

5.5. Regression Analysis

5.5.1. Model Summary

The Coefficient of Determination, or R Square, indicates the proportion of variance in one variable that is explained by the other. R square of the model is 0.377 and therefore, 37.7% of the dependent variable can be explained from the independent variables; quality of the content and trustworthiness.

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.614 ^a	0.377	0.369	0.51177	0.377	44.560	2	147	0.000	1.705

Source: Survey Data, 2022

5.5.2. ANOVA

The P value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, as seen in the below table 6. It demonstrates that the overall model used is statistically significant and accurately predicts the dependent variable and thus it can be concluded that, the model is a valid model.

Table 6: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	23.341	2	11.670	44.560	.000 ^b
	Residual	38.500	147	0.262		
	Total	61.841	149			

Source: Survey data, 2022

5.5.3. Coefficients

Table 7: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1.276	0.268		4.767	0.000	0.747	1.805
	QOC	0.547	0.083	0.559	6.611	0.000	0.384	0.711
	TRU	0.088	0.092	0.081	.959	0.339	-0.093	0.270

Source: Survey data, 2022

As per the above table 7, it demonstrates the beta (β) and significance (p) values of each independent variable on the dependent variable, travel intention; quality of the content ($\beta = 0.547$, $P = 0.000$), trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.088$, $P = 0.339$). All two independent variables indicate positive values. The significance value for the quality of the content lie on the accepted range which is $P < 0.05$. Therefore, it can be concluded that, content quality demonstrates a significant positive relationship with the dependent variable: travel intention. The significance value for the trustworthiness is 0.339 and indicates a positive but weak relationship with the travel intention. This following regression model can be presented as follows.

$$\hat{Y} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \epsilon$$

$\hat{Y}$ = Dependent variable = Social media user's Travel Intention (TI)

X_1 = Independent Variable 1 = Quality of the content (QOC)

X_2 = Independent Variable 2 = Trustworthiness (TRU)

α = Constant value

ϵ = Error

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3 \dots$ represent the Coefficients

$$\begin{aligned}\hat{Y} &= 1.276 + 0.547 X_1 + 0.088 X_2 + \epsilon \\ \text{TI} &= 1.276 + 0.547 \text{QOC} + 0.088 \text{TRU} + \epsilon\end{aligned}$$

Formula 1: Regression model

5.6. Hypothesis Testing

To test the hypothesis of the study, multiple regression was adopted. The hypothesis can be tested using Pearson correlation values and significance values taken from Correlation table and p - value (Sig value) and the coefficient (B) taken from the multiple regression tables. Following table demonstrates the summary of the regression analysis.

Table 8: Summary of the Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Status	Justification
H1	Positive Significant	Accepted	Pearson Correlation = 0.611 Sig Value = 0.000 P-value = 0.000 Coefficient = 0.547
H2	Positive Significant	Accepted	Pearson Correlation = 0.439 Sig Value = 0.000 P-value = 0.339 Coefficient = 0.088
H3	Positive Significant	Accepted	R= 0.614 R square = 0.377 TI = 1.276 + 0.547QOC + 0.088TRU + ϵ

Source: Survey data, 2022

5.7. Summary of Key Findings

As per the descriptive statistics of demographic variables, it can be concluded that, almost all (93%) respondents follow travel influencers in social media platforms and 60.2% from the whole sample is represented by females. More specifically, 57% of the respondents follow less than 5 social media travel influencers and 28% respondents follow 6-10 travel influencers in their social media accounts.

From the total sample, 48.4% respondents use Instagram whereas, 45.3% respondents use Facebook as their main social media platform. Only 5.5% respondents use Tiktok as their main social media platform. More than 75% of the respondents lie between the age categories of 21 – 30.

Based on the Pearson Correlation, Quality of the content and trustworthiness respectively has a 0.611 and 0.439 correlation values towards the dependent variable: travel intention. Thus, quality of the content has a strong correlation with the travel intention whereas trustworthiness has a moderate correlation with the travel intention.

As per the table 8, β coefficient of the quality of the content indicates 0.547 and if the quality of the content increases by one unit while other variables are constant, travel intention increases by 0.547 (54.7%). β coefficient of the trustworthiness is 0.088, indicating that if trustworthiness increases by one unit while other variables are constant, travel intention increases by 0.088 (8.8%). Further, the P- value of the quality of the content is less than 0.05 level of significance, indicating a significant relationship. The P- value of the trustworthiness is 0.339 indicating a weak relationship with travel intention. Therefore, it can be concluded that, all the three hypotheses have been accepted.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Managerial Implication

The managerial implications of the study are beneficial to the destination marketers, advertising agencies, hotel and accommodation provides, social media influencers and general public. Therefore, the findings of the study can directly apply to the social media users to change the travel intention. Therefore, following recommendations can be made.

The findings of the study are beneficial to the destination marketers to promote the destinations to the target customer base by directly focusing on most attractive influencers. According to the findings of the study, social-media influencers are one type of promotional media that must be developed favorably in order to boost a tourist destination's image.

The study also provides important insights to the advertising agencies to effectively implement their digital marketing campaigns. The findings of the study revealed that, Instagram is having more attraction than Facebook, hence digital marketing experts can use these insights to incorporate their digital marketing campaigns via Instagram platform. On the other hand, hotels, accommodation provides can use the findings of the study to grow their business with the use of influencers by tracking the most attractive social media platforms.

The findings of the study are also crucial to the influencers, when deciding on the social media platform to give shout outs to their followers. The findings revealed that, Instagram is having more attraction than Facebook. Tiktok and Pinterest is still not having a larger customer base comparing with the Instagram and Facebook.

Finally, general public can also get insights from this research study as a general source of information.

6.2. Areas for Future Research

Influencer marketing is a vital and emerging area in the business world. This study has unravelled the layers of influencer marketing by evaluating two potential factors that can connect an influencers' attributes to their followers. These are just two of many considerations. Future research should look into factors like credibility and authority, as well as attributes like follower counts and average interactions. Each attribute will contribute to a full picture of the lever's influencers must use to sway their followers.

Furthermore, the study employed a survey as a data gathering tool, which may have drawbacks because some questions may cause respondents to become confused and refuse to respond. As a result, future researchers should consider adapting questions to reveal deeper emotional drivers. In terms of the study,

it was primarily conducted in a quantitative manner. As a result, conducting both qualitative and quantitative research methods that can offer more helpful insights would be more apprehensive.

6.3. Limitations

- The study was mainly focusing on the travel, tourism sector with a special consideration placing on the social media users. Therefore, generalizing the findings in to other contexts need to be further investigate
- The study's geographical scope will be limited to the western province; as a result, generalizing the findings will necessitate further examination.
- The study's sample size is only 150 respondents, which means it may not be able to produce accurate results from a large population.
- The study used the convenience sample technique, as a result, researcher biases can be discovered, which might be noted as a study limitation.

6.4. Conclusion

This study was mainly undertaken to measure the impact of influencer marketing on travel intention of the social media users. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. As per the regression analysis, independent variables of the study; quality of the content and trustworthiness respectively has a positive significant and positive weak relationship with the travel intention. Therefore, all three hypotheses were accepted. Furthermore, the implications of the study provide a pool of knowledge to travel and tourism industry, destination marketers, advertising agencies, hotel and accommodation provides etc. Finally, this research study contributes to the existing body of literature and as well as to the future researchers as a source of literature.

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