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SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER: A KEY TOOL IN THE DIGITAL CONTEXT THAT IS ABLE TO INFLUENCE THE CONSUMER'S BEHAVIOR

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Dissertation

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NOVA Information Management School
Instituto Superior de Estatística e Gestão de Informação

Universidade Nova de Lisboa

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By

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Master Thesis presented as partial requirement for obtaining the Master's degree in Data-Driven Marketing, with a specialization in Digital Marketing and Analytics.

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STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledge the Rules of Conduct and Code of Honor from the NOVA Information Management School.

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Lisbon, 28-07-2023

ABSTRACT

The theoretical foundation of this study explores the essential role played by influencer traits, with a specific focus on the dimensions of credibility, similarity, expertise and attractiveness. This conceptual framework serves as the backbone for understanding the intricate dynamics between Social Media Influencers and consumer behavior. In the evolving digital landscape, the research captures the changing nature of influencers, recognizing their influence on consumer decisions and actions. The study systematically explores how these characteristics, particularly credibility, wield influence over consumer behavior, shaping their purchase intentions and levels of engagement. This research study the impact of credibility and perceived similarity between the consumers and digital influencers on purchase intention and consumer engagement. In the rapidly evolving realm of influencer marketing, this study's relevance is underscored by its examination of the dynamics surrounding both general influencers and travel influencers. A comprehensive dataset comprising 224 responses from individuals actively following influencers, including those in the travel niche, serves as the bedrock for robust analysis and nuanced conclusions. The practical implications of the research extend to businesses navigating the intricacies of influencer collaborations. The study confirms that influencer credibility significantly influences consumer engagement. Additionally, there is a positive correlation between perceived similarity, consumer perception and attachment, emphasizing the multifaceted impact of these factors on purchase intention. These results provide empirical insights into the complexities of influencer marketing, offering valuable guidance for strategic decision-making in the digital landscape. In an era dominated by DIs, understanding the nuances of their impact is crucial for devising effective marketing strategies. The insights gleaned from this study offer a roadmap for businesses seeking to optimize their engagement with consumers through influencers, both in general and within the specialized domain of travel influencers.

KEYWORDS

Social Media Influencers; Influencer Credibility; Consumer Engagement; Perceived Similarity;
Consumer Attachment; Purchase Intention

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

SM	Social Media
SN	Social Networks
DI	Digital Influencers
SMIs	Social Media Influencers
WOW	Word of Mouth

1. INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of Web 2.0 has resulted in a surge of user-generated content conveyed through Social Networks and internet tools. One aspect of these tools is their ability to facilitate two-way interactions, as exemplified by blogs. In 2009, Newman was already noticing this increase in popularity in recent years, particularly with respect to UGC. This trend is in line with the 21st century's focus on communication and the transmission of messages via SN. An integral component in influencing consumer behavior, acquiring information and post-purchase evaluation is through SN, as stated by Mangold & Faulds (2009). This is achieved by leveraging awareness, attitudes, opinions and purchasing behavior. Moreover, SN are a crucial marketing communication tool as it promotes interactions between companies and consumers, as well as enables them to communicate amongst themselves according to Maghsoodi, Naami and Vakiliinia (2012).

Branding influence through social media has come up through different avenues, hence the power of it. Communication of the brand's message through influencers is highly outlined in Smart insights (2017). Today, brands tend to choose what are known as "micro-celebrities". Therefore, they are star celebrities whose authority and ability to influence internet buyers is indisputable (Khamis et al., 2016). There is also popularity of micro-celebrity platforms such as instagram which however not limited to facebook, twitter and YouTube (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Gageler & van der Schee, 2016).

In the world of Web 2.0 media, we've witnessed three shifts that have paved the way for the rise of Social media influencers. Firstly, these platforms have granted individuals connectivity enabling brands to engage with people in captivating manners than ever before (Mangold & Faulds 2009). Secondly SN have empowered individuals to create and circulate information offering them control over the production organization and sharing of knowledge (Thackeray et al., 2008). Thirdly they have fostered a democratization of knowledge by affording both folks and celebrities a footing for disseminating information and expressing opinions (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Now anyone using networks can become a content creator, with the ability to reach others and exert influence upon them (ho, 2007).

Affection and human relations may be the most important factors that dictate a good relationship between consumers and companies, so building strong and meaningful relationships with customers takes time and involves interactive conversations (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). Consumers perceive SN as a more reliable source of information about products and services (Foux, 2006).

This dissertation aims to study the impact of the effectiveness factors of DIs as communicators, focusing on source credibility, source attractiveness and product compatibility, along with communication and consumer perception of the product on purchase intention. In this sense, this study has the following research question: What is the impact of credibility and perceived similarity between the consumers and digital influencers on purchase intention and consumer engagement?

A six-chapter dissertation begins with an introduction, followed by a literature review in the second chapter covering social media marketing, influencers, and related concepts. The third chapter outlines research questions, hypotheses, and a conceptual model. Methodology details are provided, leading to chapters four and five presenting and discussing research results. The final chapter concludes the study, summarizing findings, contributions, and limitations, with recommendations for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DIGITAL MARKETING AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

With the emergence of social networks and the advance of digital marketing, companies have found new opportunities to engage and connect more closely with their customers. Social networks are defined as a set of applications based on Web 2.0 ideology and technology that enable the creation and exchange of user-created content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The use of social media allows companies to capitalise on the influence and perceived credibility of social networks to connect more and more consumers to their products and brands (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Furthermore, a significant advantage of using social media to communicate sustainability efforts is the ability to reach a wide audience with minimal investment (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The growth of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in recent years has significantly changed the way people communicate and exchange information with each other (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These platforms have not only impacted interaction between individuals, but have also changed the way companies and organisations relate to their customers and the public (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Companies now have the opportunity to engage more directly with consumers, creating an emotional connection and building brand loyalty.

Social media marketing allows companies to use the content created by users to increase the popularity of their brands. Users' trust in the information created by other users on these social networks has become more relevant than the information provided by the companies themselves, in terms of experiences gained through services and products. This reinforces the importance of connecting a particular company's brand to its target customers and developing strategies in order to gain a competitive advantage over its competitors (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

According to Anwar, M. (2019), the current digital age has significantly reshaped both individual and collective perspectives, influencing the way service providers approach their offerings. Nyagadza, B. (2020), in a scholarly article, emphasizes that establishing a strong customer connection through social media not only fosters loyalty but also encourages individuals to recommend the business to other potential customers. Social media marketing involves nurturing customer relationships on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, providing businesses with the means to connect with prospective customers or followers interested in their products and services.

However, it is important to emphasise that the use of social networks also presents challenges. Companies need to be aware of and prepared to deal with negative feedback and with maintaining a consistent online presence (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). It is essential for companies to be attentive to customer comments and feedback, always seeking to resolve problems and maintain the brand's reputation.

2.2 INFLUENCER MARKETING

The strategic use of content on social media by digital influencers has been widely recognised. Digital influencers are able to promote themselves and consume content intentionally, with the aim of attracting and engaging the audience present on their social networks. In addition, influencers have endeavoured to build authentic personal brands, which strengthen their so-called communities and attract a large number of followers (Khamis et al., 2016).

Building an authentic personal brand is especially associated with minor celebrities, as distinct from traditional celebrities who have achieved fame through specific professional talents (Khamis et al., 2016). These digital influencers concentrate followers on social media, where they portray their daily lives and the experiences of their personal lives, which allows for the insertion of paid adverts that result in an intention to purchase products and services (Abidin, 2016). In this way, influencers face a constant challenge of balancing the building of their personal brand, promotional activities and the need to maintain the authenticity demanded by their audience.

The relationship between influencers and followers is characterised by a high level of engagement and interaction. Followers establish personal relationships with influencers, trusting their opinions and considering their experiences to be valuable. In addition, followers often identify with influencers and end up seeking information and advice about products and services in order to create opinions based on the information they provide (Abidin, 2016).

In the context of social media, influencer marketing becomes a powerful form of communication and information transmission. Influencers have the power to mould public opinion and influence consumer decisions (De Veirman et al., 2017). Companies are increasingly aware of the persuasive power of influencers and are investing a growing advertising budget in influencer marketing to promote their products and services (De Veirman et al., 2017).

According to the report entitled "The state of influencer marketing in 2018", influencer marketing is huge and is expected to grow even more (Linqia, 2018). Specifically, the report shows that 86 per cent of marketers used influencer marketing in 2017 and, among them, 92 per cent found it effective; 39 per cent of marketers plan to increase their budgets for influencer marketing in 2018; and 92 per cent of marketers cited Instagram as the most important social media platform for influencer marketing (Linqia, 2018). Brands also agree that Instagram's photo-based platform is the most ideal for influencer marketing compared to other social networks (Phua, Jin & Kim, 2017). In this sense, this research explores the mechanism of SMIs influencing their target audience in the context of Instagram.

2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Social media influencers, often abbreviated as SMIs Social media influencers are personalities who have gained popularity and considerable influence among their followers in a particular field. These influencers act as impartial third parties, using digital channels such as social networks, blogs and other forms of communication to influence the opinions of their target audience. They are known as "social media influencers" or "SMIs" (Freberg et al., 2011). A key factor in the success of influencers is the trust they generate among their followers. Studies show that when there is similarity between the influencer and their target audience, the information they transmit is more trustworthy and increases

the likelihood that followers will purchase the recommended products or services. This trust is based on the expectation that the influencer's statements can be trusted (Phua et al., 2017).

SIMs are defined as a new type of independent third-party communicators who influence public attitudes through the use of social media (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011). Similarly, they are individuals who have a greater potential to influence other people than other ordinary social media users, either through frequent communication or strong personal persuasive power (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard, 2017). SIMs are also referred to as people who have built up a solid base of followers by creating and sharing content on social media (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017).

SIMs publicly share their everyday lives, experiences and opinions through their social media accounts, which may be inaccessible otherwise (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). This is why SIMs are seen as more accessible, authentic and credible compared to popular celebrities (De Veirman et al., 2017). Considering that a similar message is perceived as more authentic and trustworthy when it is communicated by a consumer partner (such as an SIMs) than when it is presented by a celebrity, brands are abandoning traditional advertising tactics such as celebrity marketing (De Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012). Instead, they are using SIMs, incorporating influencer marketing into their social media marketing strategies (De Vries et al., 2012).

Digital influencers play a significant role in strategic communication. They are not only stakeholders in that communication, but also act as content creators who steer the direction of that content. These influencers create a public persona for their followers on digital platforms and develop parasocial relationships with them. According to Hudders et al. (2021), despite their growing role in digital communication and society, the impact of influencers on political communication has been little explored and there is a need to investigate the effectiveness of sponsored influencer recommendations and the appeal of influencers in changing behaviour and shaping public opinion.

2.4 DECISION MAKING

In today's digital world, influencers play a significant role in the consumer decision-making process. Their influence is evident in consumer choices and consumption trends. A study by Phua et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of consumer familiarity with brands and products. Consumers have consistently shown greater interest in well-known and familiar brands. This suggests that the influencers who promote these brands can play a crucial role in consumers' purchasing decisions. Another study conducted by Freberg et al. (2011) emphasised the role of influencers as impartial third parties who can improve the impact of messages transmitted to followers. As digital opinion leaders, influencers have the ability to influence public perceptions of a brand or product.

Trust also plays a key role in the consumer decision-making process. According to Hudders et al. (2021), the credibility of influencers is an essential factor in building purchase intent. Consumers trust influencers when they realise that their opinions are reliable and can be followed. In addition, influencers have the power to mould consumer attitudes and preferences because they are able to establish parasocial relationships with their followers, thus creating a sense of connection and affection. This leads consumers to identify with influencers and consider their recommendations when making decisions related to the consumption of goods and services.

The term "Micro Influencer" is relatively new and generally refers to SMIs who have a limited number of followers (Abdin, 2016). SMIs are categorized typically based on their follower count. Haenlein & Libai (2017) put forth the following classification: mega-influencers, recognized as experts in their field and widely known—such as popular bloggers; and micro-influencers, ordinary individuals with a relative impact on a smaller audience. An intermediate category exists, known as macro-influencers (Borges-Tiago et al., 2023; Kay et al., 2020). In business terms, the term is widely used today to differentiate SMIs who have fewer but more active followers and are known by the audience they communicate with (Dhanik, 2016). Micro Influencers have the ability to connect with their audience and have had a more positive influence on brand trust and purchase intent than regular SMIs.

According to Khamis et al. (2016), ordinary users eventually became "Instagram famous" with around 35, 000 followers, having the potential to reach an audience comparable to that of celebrities. Influencers with smaller audiences are the most influential channels due to their personalised content, more honest and more detailed product reviews (Booth & Matic, 2011). Research cited by Dinesh (2017) revealed that engagement is considerably higher on SMIs with fewer followers. For micro-influencers with 1, 000 followers, it is around 4 per cent higher than for influencers with 10, 000 followers. In addition, the requirements and investments to become a micro-influencer are relatively low, and the potential reach, in terms of audience and influence, is spectacularly high (Khamis, 2016).

A study by Gómez (2019) emphasises the importance of macro influencers, who have between 100, 000 and 1 million followers. These influencers generally have high engagement rates and get great brand exposure. Their consistent presence on the different social networks gives them a high level of influence within their niche markets. However, it is important to differentiate between relationships with influencers that are paid for and those that are earned organically. Enke and Borchers (2019) emphasise that there is a need to differentiate between influencers who are paid for their partnerships with brands and those who obtain their relationships more organically. This distinction is important for understanding the dynamics and authenticity of the recommendations made by influencers to their followers when making decisions.

2.5 INFLUENCING STRATEGIES OF DIGITAL INFLUENCERS

Self-identity construction:

One form used in SMIs' narrative strategies is photographic posts to document their outfits, styles and identity construction (Delisle & Parmentier, 2016; McFarlane & Samsioe, 2020). These visual portraits are accompanied by textual explanations and commercial information about the products, including brands, prices and purchase links. For SMIs, associating with the symbolic meanings of brands and products is extremely important for their self-image and for communicating unique identity concepts on SM (Kretz & De Valck, 2010). These products and brands can effectively build, reinforce and express SMIs' tastes, skills, achievements and other unique aspects of their identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

Brand love inspiration:

To inspire brand love in consumers, SMIs use narrative strategies that involve the use of enthusiastic language and intense emotional expressions to share their personal experiences, passions and admiration for specific brands and products (Kretz & De Valck, 2010). They share narratives that reflect

a sense of positive emotional connection with brands, presenting the desired or ideal self through digital association with products and brands they want to own or that they consider favourites (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). By conveying enthusiasm for brands through their narratives, SMIs seek to awaken brand love in consumers and influence their purchase intentions.

Self-identity construction:

The evaluation of brand attributes is a strategy used by SMIs to create WOM and present judgements about the performance of brands on certain specific attributes (Kretz & De Valck, 2010). SMIs share their opinions and evaluations of products and brands, seeking to build and maintain their opinion leadership by sharing knowledge and effective arguments to recommend brands and suggest brand choices (Kretz & De Valck, 2010). To be effective, SMIs develop narrative strategies in line with the personas they have established or wish to project (Kozinets et al., 2010). By narrating stories and providing evaluations on brand attributes, SMIs win the approval of the public and influence their perceptions of brands.

2.6 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIGITAL INFLUENCERS

The effectiveness of digital influencers has been the subject of study and discussion in the field of marketing. According to Jarrar, Awobamise and Aderibigbe (2020), "influencer marketing has been shown to be effective when compared to sponsored advertising on social networks" (p. 40). Digital influencers have the ability to build authentic connections with their followers, creating trust and influencing their purchasing decisions. Abidin (2016) emphasises the concept of "visibility work" carried out by influencers, which involves creating promotional content and interacting with followers. This direct and authentic interaction helps to increase the engagement and influence of digital influencers.

Jarrar et al. (2020) emphasise that influencer marketing is particularly effective when influencers have a large number of followers and the product or service being promoted is aligned with the followers' niche of interest. Regarding gender effects in influencer marketing, Hudders and De Jans (2021) found that the effectiveness of recommendations made by influencers can vary based on the gender of the influencer and the target audience. According to them, consumers may feel more inclined to follow the recommendations of influencers of the same gender. However, in certain cases, recommendations from influencers of the opposite gender can have an even greater impact.

To obtain effective results from influencer marketing campaigns, it is essential to carefully select influencers based on their target audience, values and authenticity. According to Jarrar et al. (2020), "authenticity, reach and the ability to engage audiences are key factors in achieving effective results". The role of social media marketing and the evolution of consumer evaluations are also addressed in the study by Chen, Fay and Wang (2011). They analysed how online consumer reviews evolve over time and how these reviews influence consumer behaviour. The results showed that positive consumer evaluations have a significant impact on purchase intentions.

In addition to Jarrar et al. (2020), the study by De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) revealed that the number of influencers' followers and the divergence of the product positively influenced the attitude towards the brand, thus indicating that a greater number of followers and a better fit between

the influencer and the promoted product have a significant impact on consumers' perception of the brand.

The study by Jin, Phua and Kim (2017) investigated the impact of Twitter-based WOM, i. e. celebrity tweets about brands, on the perceived credibility of the source, purchase intention and consumers' social identification. The results showed that celebrity tweets have a significant impact on consumers' perceptions of credibility and purchase intentions, as well as strengthening social identification with celebrities, highlighting the power of recommendations from digital influencers in shaping consumer attitudes towards brands.

We can conclude that all these studies confirm the effectiveness of digital influencers as a marketing strategy. Considering these statements, we can conclude that influencers have the potential to positively impact consumer attitudes and behaviour.

2.6.1 Authenticity and credibility

The credibility of digital influencers plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of marketing campaigns and in establishing trust with consumers. Lou and Yuan (2019) investigated how message value and credibility affect consumer trust in a particular brand's content on social media. They state that "the credibility of influencers is one of the main determinants of consumer trust". The influencer's authenticity and expertise are key factors that influence this perception of credibility where consumers tend to trust influencers more who demonstrate genuine knowledge about a promoted product or service, as well as an authentic connection with the target audience (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Consumers value honesty and expect influencers to be transparent in their business partnerships. Influencers who are considered trustworthy and genuine are more likely to positively influence consumers' purchase intent. This credibility is made up of various attributes, such as expertise, trust and attractiveness, which have been identified in previous research (Nugroho et al., 2022).

The social networking generation, mainly comprising high school and college students, as well as recently employed professionals, is often characterized as tech-savvy and highly style-conscious compared to previous generations. Their primary motivation for engaging in online social interactions is the desire to connect and stay informed about others. Gen Z individuals, aged 14-25, exhibit a stronger inclination towards using online social platforms to communicate and interact with people they know, setting them apart from other age groups. They actively provide feedback and comments on the brands, services, or issues they engage with and value the opinions of others (eMarketer, 2011). Generation Z consumers value influencers who appear authentic, transparent and genuine in their interactions and content. When influencers are perceived as authentic, they establish a stronger connection with their audience, which can positively influence purchase intent (Nugroho et al., 2022).

In addition, the study reveals that brand image plays a mediating role in the relationship between the credibility of the influencer and the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers. Brand image is affected by the perceived credibility of the influencer and this image in turn influences consumers' purchase intent. Therefore, influencer credibility has an indirect effect on purchase intention through brand image (Nugroho et al., 2022).

2.6.2 CONSUMER PERCEPTION

According to Abraham et al, the authenticity of influencers is a crucial factor in consumer perception of influencer marketing. The authors state that "the authenticity of influencers is a crucial aspect in influencing consumer perceptions of brands' influencer marketing efforts in the beauty and cosmetics industry" (Abraham et al., 2022). This statement emphasises the importance of the authenticity of influencers in building consumer trust and creating a positive perception of brands.

Consumers identify with the image and lifestyle presented by influencers, which reflect their own aspirations and identities" (Kharuhayothin & Patarapongsant, 2022). The credibility of influencers is key to influencing consumer perceptions of brands' influencer marketing efforts and the credibility of influencers is linked to the trust consumers place in them, which influences their attitudes towards the brands being promoted (Abraham et al., 2022).

According to Gräve (2017), influencers are seen as more authentic, trustworthy and relatable compared to traditional celebrities. Consumers see influencers as more genuine figures, capable of establishing a close connection with their audience. This perception of authenticity is fundamental, as consumers are increasingly looking for content that is real and transparent.

Influencers are considered experts and have greater credibility in specific areas, which increases consumer confidence in their recommendations and opinions on certain products or services. In contrast, traditional celebrities are valued for their fame and recognition, but may not be seen as experts in specific areas (Gräve, 2017).

2.6.3 Credibility of message

Credibility can be defined as the degree of trust and reliability of the source (Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970). It is intrinsically linked to the quality of the message received by the consumer, influencing the audience to share values, attitudes or habits with the influencer. Various factors can affect the credibility of influencers, such as the knowledge and experience they have on a given topic, as well as trust and goodwill (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). The credibility of the source is a fundamental aspect of the persuasive process, as described by Churchill (1978) and later by Ohanian (1990). These authors define credibility as the ability of a spokesperson in an advert to be believed, considering their expertise and reliability.

Furthermore, it is proven that the empathy and social appeal conveyed by the influencer can influence the public's attitude. It is therefore important to emphasise that influencers with greater social appeal have a greater influence on the audience, in terms of identification with the influencer. The impact of an advertising campaign carried out by an influencer on social media can be greater and more beneficial, both for the brand involved and for the influencer themselves, when the audience has a close relationship with them and considers them a person they trust so we can affirm that highly credible communicators are more effective at producing changes in attitude towards the position

defended (Craig & McCann, 1978), as well as capturing the attention and increasing the recall of the target audience (Sternthal, Phillips, and Dholakia, 1978).

Goldberg and Hartwick (1990) mention the concept of credibility or corporate reputation, emphasising its significant importance, since companies with a more solid reputation also achieve greater confidence in the brand. Reputation, in turn, will increase consumer confidence, thus strengthening the credibility of the advert. Therefore, as well as choosing credible personalities, companies should be concerned about their image and credibility, as this is a crucial dimension in persuading the target audience (Hovland and Weiss, 1951).

The concept of source credibility is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the message (Giffen, 1967). Reliability and expertise are predictors of source credibility (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). Attractiveness is also a characteristic that contributes to the perception of credibility (Ohanian, 1990). In addition, characteristics such as reliability and likeability have been used to assess the credibility of the source (Keller, 1998). Expertise refers to the source's competence or qualification to make statements on a given subject, while trustworthiness is related to the recipient's perception of the source as reliable and genuine. The attractiveness of the source, in turn, encompasses aspects such as physical appearance, sensuality or sexuality, which influence the perception of their attractiveness. (Giffen, 1967).

2.6.4 Reliability, attractiveness and expertise

Reliability:

According to Turban et al. in 2002, examples of customer management uncertainty and Internet shopping parameters that influence customer confidence in purchasing over the Internet include: credit card guarantee policies, product warranty and product return policies, and provision of friendly customer service (by e-mail, telephone or directly on the website).

Lack of trust among customers is the main reason cited for having doubts about online purchases (Lee & Turban, 2001). For online sellers, it is more difficult to reduce the risks to which customers are exposed and to build trust between them, because the difference between trust in a face-to-face situation and during the online buying process is physical distance, since in the physical shop, the customer can decide individually whether they have sufficient confidence and willingness to pay for the product/service (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Another situation occurs online, where the seller and buyer do not interact in person, which is why the potential customer can increase their level of scepticism regarding the legitimacy of the seller and the quality of the product or service itself (Chen et al., 2011).

Trust is crucial because it is a process that is formed before the purchase of the acquired product is finalised or a specific service is delivered (Dasu & Chase, 2013). There are many advantages for companies in relation to building consumer trust, which are structured in a chain where one factor influences another. A higher level of consumer trust also immediately means greater value for the brand, which correlates with brand name recognition and is a key factor in e-loyalty (Dasu & Chase, 2013).

Maximising customer loyalty is also one of the results and consequences of high consumer trust. McGuire (1960) states that trustworthy sources are more persuasive than less trustworthy sources. When information or recommendations about brands and products come from a source that is considered trustworthy, this information is considered credible, and consumers act differently according to the degree of risk and level of trust they have in the information obtained. On SN, these internet celebrities are considered opinion leaders because they have earned a high level of trust and appreciation from their followers (Mendoza et al., 2010).

Trustworthiness is defined as the ability to achieve and maintain a verifiable, quantitative state, ensuring legitimacy, dependability, and honesty. Concerns about social media reliability arise from biased feedback caused by intentional manipulation of online evaluations. Influencers' credibility, a crucial aspect in shaping attitudes, directly influences how customers perceive sincerity, honesty, and truthfulness. Moreover, the credibility of the information provided by influencers has a direct effect on attitude, with trustworthiness being a key determinant in brand sentiment favoring purchases (Saini & Bansal, 2022). SM celebrities are considered more trustworthy compared to the content provided by companies, and so these personalities become an increasingly important source of information. These internet celebrities are perceived as trustworthy and therefore have a stronger effect on customers' purchasing decisions related to products and services (Abidin, 2016).

Attractiveness:

The influence of the attractiveness of the source on the preference for a particular communicator and its effectiveness has been highlighted by several authors (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). Liu et al. (2007) state that a good communicator is more likely to influence consumer purchase intentions and can be divided into two elements: likeability and similarity (Gupta, 2017). It is important to emphasise that attractiveness is not just limited to physical appeal, but encompasses a variety of virtuous attributes perceived by consumers in the influencer (Erdogan, 1999).

As mentioned by Erdogan (1999), the consumer's opinion of the communicator's physical characteristics can result in a change in behaviour. Thus, the proper selection of famous communicators is based on attractiveness, taking advantage of the dual effects of celebrity status and physical appeal. Previous studies have shown that physically attractive communicators are more effective in purchase intentions (Friedman et al., 1976; Petty et al., 1983). A study conducted by Petty et al. (1983) also reflected on the influence of communicator attractiveness and consumer preference and found that participants exposed to attractive communicators were more inclined towards the product than those exposed to less attractive communicators.

Furthermore, the results of a study carried out by Caballero et al. (1984) corroborate these statements, indicating that the physical attractiveness of the communicator plays a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes towards the brand. Participants in the study had a more positive attitude towards the product when the communicator was considered attractive in physical terms.

Expertise:

Expertise is a crucial factor in the influence of influencers on social networks. The depth of knowledge they possess about a product or service has a significant impact on the behaviour of recipients. More specialised sources have a greater ability to influence and create conformity in consumers (Ohanian, 1990). The amount of knowledge perceived by consumers also plays an important role in the adoption of products or services suggested by influencers. Consumers take expertise into account when deciding whether to follow an influencer's recommendations (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Although physical attractiveness is often associated with the influence of influencers, it is important to emphasise that expertise plays a key role in the perceived credibility of the influencer and in consumer decision-making. Confidence in the influencer's competence and knowledge influences the way consumers evaluate their recommendations and the attitudes they adopt towards a product or service (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). When consumers perceive the communicator to be highly skilled and knowledgeable about the product or service, they regard the message more positively (Kim, Kandampully & Bilgihan, 2018).

In the context of digital influencers, expertise plays a crucial role in the perception of credibility by followers. Chu and Kim (2011) emphasise the importance of influencers' expertise in perceived credibility. For example, an influencer who has technical knowledge in a certain area and can provide valid information is often considered more trustworthy by the readers of their blog (Chu & Kim, 2011). According to Lou and Yuan (2019), an influencer's expertise in a specific area can make them qualified to promote products or brands related to that field. Followers tend to value the opinions and recommendations of influencers who demonstrate specialised knowledge (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

2.7 PRODUCT MATCH-UP

The match between the product and the influencer on social media is crucial to its effectiveness. Effectiveness depends on the shared characteristics between the product's attributes and the influencer's image and consumers form an image of the product by comparing its qualities with those of the influencer, hoping for compatibility (Khan et al., 2019). According to the Matching Hypothesis (Kamins, 1990), the relationship between the communicator and the characteristics of the sponsored product has a significant impact on the communicator's effectiveness. It is considered vital to use spokespeople who directly resemble the product and possess knowledge about it (Lim et al., 2017)

On the other hand, when there is no consistency between the influencer and the product, consumers may perceive the influencer as not genuine, assuming that they are promoting the product purely out of financial interest. In such cases, influencers are considered less trustworthy (Lee & Koo, 2015). Furthermore, if the influencer does not have a harmonious relationship with the product and does not share common attributes, consumers may remember the influencer, but not the product that was sponsored, resulting in the "vampire effect" which renders the influencer ineffective and which harms the brand (Erfgen et al. , 2015). The match between the product and the influencer is essential to attract the audience and ensure that the message is more effective (Schouten et al., 2020). Product matching is key to significantly improving the influencer's effectiveness and has a positive effect on the consumer's perception of the product itself (Pradhan et al., 2016). Consequently, a good match

between the influencer and the product is one of the most important factors driving consumer purchase intent (Lim et al., 2017). When there is a proper match, there is a correct transfer of meaning and it increases the credibility of the source used to endorse the product (Erdogan, 1999).

Product congruence is a natural development of the theories of meaning transfer and source credibility. The similarity between the communicator and the product image in the advert helps to convey meaning by synthesising information related to the celebrity and the brand (Erdogan, 1999). However, it is important to consider the "cultural milieu" of the target audience, as this influences the interpretation of consumer behaviour and the meaning attributed to the advertised brand (Nelson et al., 2012). When a consumer perceives an advert negatively, this can lead to a negative attitude that is transferred to the brand. On the other hand, when a celebrity with a positive perception is used in an advertising campaign, the influencer's image creates the desired recognition and conveys a positive meaning for the advertised brand.

However, finding a celebrity that fits perfectly with the product image is a challenge for marketing professionals (Rashid et al., 2002). Since the congruence between the celebrity and the product image affects the perception of credibility and attractiveness, using a person who does not reflect the product image can result in an ineffective advertising campaign. It is essential to seek an appropriate match between the spokesperson and the brand in order to obtain favourable behavioural responses from the target audience (Choi & Rifon, 2012).

2.8 PURCHASE INTENTION

Takaya (2019) stated that in 2019, the intention to make a purchase is the inclination of consumers to acquire a brand or engage in activities associated with buying. This can be gauged by assessing the consumer's capacity to acquire a product or service. The decision to purchase is influenced by internal variables and factors within the customer, as well as external variables in the surroundings that guide the individual toward a buying decision.

In addition, the influence of electronic WOM also plays a crucial role in purchase intent. eWOM refers to positive or negative statements made by potential, current or former customers about a product or company, made available to a large number of people and institutions via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Social networks are particularly influential in this regard. Consumers regard social media influencers as reliable sources of information and see them as role models. This results in a greater intention to purchase the products that the influencers promote, especially if those products are tangible (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Tran and Strutton, 2014).

The Source Attractiveness Model was introduced by McGuire in 1985. It distinguishes that the effectiveness of the communication message depends on the degree of attractiveness of the source. Attractive communicators have a greater impact on the beliefs and purchase intentions of the recipients compared to their less attractive counterparts (Erdogan, 1999). Attractiveness depends on the following components: similarity, familiarity and likeability. Similarity refers to the level of similarity between the source and recipient of the communication message. Similarities can be established by sharing the same lifestyle, needs, preferences, values, goals, behaviours and/or interests. Familiarity is related to knowledge about the celebrity, which is acquired through exposure

to the source. Here, the more the recipient believes they know the source, the greater the persuasive impact of the communication message.

Likeability is the last component of the model, which focuses on the degree to which the source is liked by the recipient. Likeability can be caused by the communicator's physical appearance or behaviour. However, the likeability of a source affects the persuasiveness of communication messages, making them more effective (Shahrokh & Arefi, 2013) and all these factors affect purchase intention.

Influencers have the power to mould consumers' opinions through their recommendations and communications, thus creating a sense of willingness to buy. This is because consumers are influenced to buy a specific product based on their ideals and preferences, influencers inspire them to modify these beliefs and preferences (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Influencers have a significant impact on consumers' purchase intent, especially among millennials, who consider them reliable sources of information. Consumer perception of the product and SMIs' effectiveness factors when communicating a product, such as source credibility, source attractiveness, product compatibility and communication are highly influential on consumers' purchase intention.

2.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To examine the outlined general and specific objectives, four primary research hypotheses have been formulated based on the literature review. These hypotheses establish connections between SMI effectiveness factors, consumer perceptions of the product, and purchase intentions:

H1: Credibility positively impacts consumer engagement with travel influencers.

H2: Perceived similarity between the consumer and the travel influencer positively affects consumer engagement.

H3: Consumer Perception of travel influencer positively affects consumer engagement.

H4: Consumer attachment mediates the relationship between DI credibility and purchase intention.

H5: Consumer attachment mediates the relationship between DI similarity and purchase intention.

To assess the formulated hypotheses, the ensuing conceptual model has been delineated:

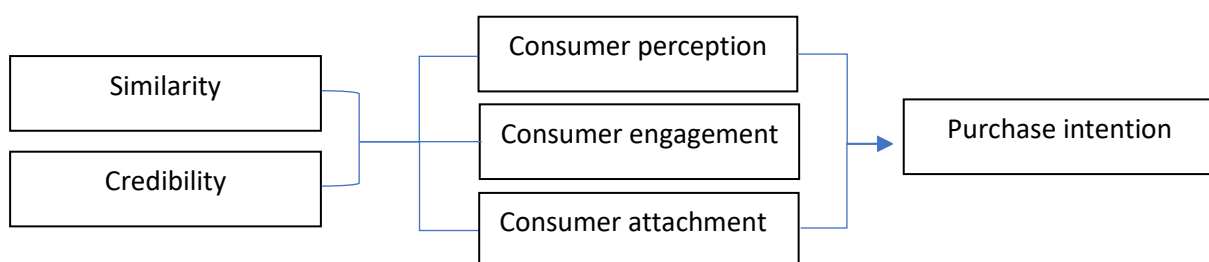


Figure 1 - Conceptual Model. Source: Author

3. METHODOLOGY

In a digital space saturated with influencers, this research strategically shifts its focus to a specific category — travel influencers. These influencers specialize in sharing and promoting travel experiences, offering insights into diverse destinations and cultural encounters. Given the contemporary relevance and widespread interest in travel, the primary question guiding this study becomes: "In what ways do the effectiveness factors of SMIs impact consumer perceptions of the product and purchase intentions?"

By narrowing the scope to travel influencers, the study aims to unravel the intricate interplay between digital attributes and consumer experiences, examining how these influencers, with their unique qualities, influence perceptions and engagement within the realm of travel and exploration.

This study adopts a hypothetical-deductive methodology, aiming to unravel causal relationships between variables. The initial phase employs exploratory research to delve deeply into the impact of SMI effectiveness factors as endorsers on consumer perceptions of the product and purchase intentions. Consequently, a quantitative approach is implemented, involving the collection of numerical data and subsequent analysis through statistical tests.

This study aims to discern how various attributes of SMIs as endorsers influence consumer perceptions of the product and purchase intentions. The primary focus includes source credibility, similarity, consumer attachment, consumer engagement, consumer perception and purchase intention.

1. Identify Influential Characteristics: Examine and determine the specific characteristics of SMIs as endorsers that significantly influence purchase intentions, with a specific emphasis on source credibility, source attractiveness, product match-up, and communication.
2. Examine Endorser Impact: Assess how the characteristics of SMIs as endorsers, including source credibility, source attractiveness, product match-up, and communication, shape consumer perceptions about the products they endorse.
3. Understand Consumer Perception Impact: Investigate the extent to which consumer perceptions of the product impact purchase intentions.
4. Evaluate Mediation Effect: Assess the mediating effect of consumer perceptions about the product in the relationship between SMIs' effectiveness factors (source credibility, source attractiveness, product match-up, and communication) and purchase intentions.

3.4 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

This research will be supported by primary data collected through quantitative research. To validate the conceptual model, a questionnaire-based survey was employed. Quantitative research plays a crucial role due to its unique ability to reveal insights that other types of studies may not capture, employing real-world data to test theories against human interpretations of the world (Creswell, 1994). The deductive approach is commonly used in questionnaire surveys, offering advantages such as ease of administration, consistent results, low cost, and straightforward development, analysis, and interpretation (Manfreda et al., 2006).

In the data analysis phase, topics are investigated by collecting numerical data, which is then analyzed using methods with a mathematical foundation, particularly statistics (Creswell, 1994). A well-designed survey can provide valuable insights into unexplored areas for future research, especially when considering how current information is used (Hing et al., 2011).

The questionnaire-based survey, described as "structured schedules used to obtain mostly quantitative information, by way of direct questions, from informants, either by self-completion or via interview" (Hing et al., 2011), underwent a pre-test to ensure clarity and reduce inaccuracies in answer perception among 10 convenience-selected respondents (Manfreda et al., 2006). Consequently, the sample for this research will be non-probabilistic, chosen for convenience.

3.5 SURVEY AND SCALES

The survey is crafted in English predominantly composed of closed-ended questions. The questionnaire is segmented into four sections. The initial section aims to elucidate the purpose of the questionnaire through its introduction. Here, respondents can find the study's objectives, information regarding data confidentiality, and details on informed consent. To ensure that only individuals who follow DIs on SM respond to the survey, a selection and exclusion question is posed at the beginning where if the individual selects that they don't follow DIs, they will be taken to the end of the questionnaire. The second section focuses on the utilization of SN, along with the frequency at which respondents consult them. The third section introduces questions designed to gauge variables in the conceptual model including viewing a post by a travel influencer. The final section pertains to general inquiries about the interviewee, including personal data.

For this study, it is captivating to analyze how the survey structure varies across different age groups, abilities, and current situations. The survey aims to characterize the sample by determining the frequency of social network (SN) usage among interviewees, categorized as monthly, weekly, or daily. Additionally, the survey investigates whether respondents follow Travel DIs (DIs) and explores the specific characteristics that attract them to these influencers.

The survey also delves into the trustworthiness and credibility attributed to influencer content by participants. It assesses whether respondents feel adequately informed by influencer content and gauges the overall enjoyability of such content. Furthermore, the survey explores whether interviewees actively follow influencer recommendations and make purchases influenced solely by the endorsement of these influencers.

In conducting this survey, a predominant 5-point Likert Scale has been employed. This structured approach allows participants to express nuanced opinions, as they select one of several response alternatives (Yamashita, 2022). Research contends that Likert-scale surveys are instrumental in capturing a comprehensive understanding of participant perspectives, thereby enhancing the strength of research claims.

Table 1 - Description and Measurement of Variables.

Construct	Source	Number of items	Scale	Question
Credibility	Ki et al. 2020	5 items	Likert scale	1. The influencer is credible 2. The influencer is a specialist 3. The influencer is skilled 4. The influencer content is informative 5. The influencer is well-informed
Similarity	Ki et al. 2020	3 items	Likert scale	1. The influencer is like me 2. The influencer has similar tastes and preferences as me 3. The influencer has a lot in common with me
Consumer Attachment	Ki et al. 2020	3 items	Likert scale	1. I felt personally connected to the influencer 2. I felt emotionally attached to the influencer 3. The influencer seems to be part of my life
Consumer Engagement	Vivek et al. 2014	8 items	Likert scale	1. I have an interest in learning more about the influencers content 2. I have a preference for content that is associated with the influencer 3. I dedicated significant attention to anything related to the influencer 4. I stay updated on things connected to the influencer 5. Anything connected to the influencer captures my attention 6. I have a strong passion for the influencer's content. 7. My days would not be the same without the presence of the influencer 8. The influencer has a good personality
Consumer perception	Qureshi (2012)	7 items	Likert scale	1. These posts have been marked as sponsored 2. These posts are obviously sponsored 3. The brand's presence is visible in the posts 4. These posts clearly communicate the service being advertised 5. I think influencer posts are honest

				6. I think the influencer's posts are trustworthy
				7. I think the influencer's posts were trully convincing
Purchase Intention	Alalwan (2018)	7 items	Likert scale	1. I could consider go to one of the hotels advertised by the influencer 2. I wish to purchase products or services endorsed by influencers in advertisements 3. It's probable that I'll purchase products or services that influencers promote on SM 4. I am considering purchasing products and services that influencers promote on SM 5. I prefer to buy products that influencers promote rather than those that appear via advertising directly from the brand 6. I buy products and consider staying at hotels recommended by travel influencers. 7. I believe that the hotels and products recommended by travel influencers are of high quality.

Source: Author

3.6 SAMPLE

The collection of data took place through an online self-administered questionnaire, chosen for its ability to gather standardized and easily comparable data from a sizable population in a quick and cost-effective manner (Ponchio et al., 2021). Online questionnaires were deemed suitable, given that participants are expected to be familiar with the Internet and SM, making it an effective means to reach this specific audience.

Before the primary research survey commenced, a pretest was executed to assess the questionnaire's viability and duration. Feedback from 10 relevant participants in the study's population was collected, aiming to refine and enhance the questionnaire design before the broader data collection phase. Importantly, participants in the pretest were distinct from those included in the main survey.

The study's focal demographic comprises individuals who follow online DIs, with convenience sampling serving as the chosen non-probability methodology for sample selection (Malhotra & Birks, 2020). To reach participants in a different digital context, online surveys were distributed through various SN, including Instagram and Whatsapp. The survey link was publicly shared via WhatsApp groups and other SN such Instagram, encouraging participants to further disseminate the link. Confidentiality of the results was maintained, with a guarantee that the collected data was strictly for academic purposes and analyzed. The survey received 224 responses. However, only 159 responses were considered for analysis. Out of 224, 46 respondents were excluded because they didn't follow DIs and only 159 respondents were followers of DIs (DI) on SN from this subset. Unfortunately, 18 respondents did not complete the survey.

3.7 ANALYTICAL APPROACH AND STATISTICAL METHODS

The analysis of the study results involved a systematic and rigorous process, employing appropriate statistical tools and software to derive meaningful insights. The statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a widely utilized software for data analysis in the social sciences.

Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were calculated to summarize and present the main features of the dataset, providing a comprehensive overview of the participants' responses. This initial step helped in understanding the central tendencies and variability within the data. To assess the relationships between variables, correlation analysis was employed. This involved calculating correlation coefficients to measure the strength and direction of associations between SMIs' effectiveness factors, consumer perception of the product, and purchase intention. The results of these correlation analyses contributed to understanding the interplay between different study variables and the Kurtosis & Skewness data normality test was carried out for each hypothesis presented.

Moreover, inferential statistics, including t-tests and ANOVA, were utilized for group comparisons. These tests helped identify any significant differences in purchase intention across different demographic groups, such as gender, age, and social media platform preference.

Regression analysis was employed to explore the predictive power of SMIs' effectiveness factors on purchase intention. This analysis provided valuable insights into the relative importance of each effectiveness factor in influencing participants' intent to purchase.

Furthermore, mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether consumer perception of the product mediated the relationship between SMIs' effectiveness factors and purchase intention. This allowed for a nuanced understanding of the underlying mechanisms through which these factors exerted their influence.

The entire analytical process adhered to standard statistical practices, ensuring the robustness and reliability of the study findings. By employing a combination of these statistical techniques, the study was able to uncover valuable patterns and associations within the data, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between SMIs' characteristics and consumer behavior.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Utilizing the online survey platform Qualtrics facilitated the primary data collection, while the subsequent analysis of results was conducted using SPSS. To gauge the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha, a coefficient ranging from 0 to 1, was calculated, with values of 0.6 or less considered unsatisfactory (Malhotra & Birks, 2020). The application of Cronbach's alpha plays a pivotal role in the validation and assessment of internal consistency in research studies. This coefficient serves as a reliable statistical measure that allows for the evaluation of response consistency on a scale, offering valuable insights into the reliability of the measurement instruments used in the study.

Upon examination of Table 2, it is evident that each variable in the present survey with more than 3 scales registers a value above 0.7. This signifies commendable reliability and internal consistency, providing confidence in the robustness of the collected data.

Table 2 - Summary of Reliability and Internal Consistency Analysis.

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Credibility	.813	5
Similarity	.667	3
Consumer attachment	.658	3
Engagement	.864	8
Consumer Perception	.829	7
Purchase Intention	.593	7

Source: Author

The application of Cronbach's alpha proves instrumental in assessing the internal consistency across various scales in our study. Specifically, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.813 was determined, indicating a heightened level of internal consistency for our credibility scale. Similarly, the Cronbach's alpha for our similarity scale yielded a value of 0.667, denoting a moderate internal consistency. In some cases, a Cronbach's Alpha above 0.7 may be considered good, but in other contexts, values above 0.6 could still be acceptable. Moving forward, the consumer attachment scale demonstrated a moderate Cronbach's alpha of 0.658, affirming a higher level of internal consistency. This pattern persisted, with the engagement scale registering a Cronbach's alpha of 0.864, emphasizing a strong internal consistency. Furthermore, the consumer perception scale showcased a Cronbach's alpha of 0.829, underscoring its commendable internal consistency. Lastly, the purchase intention scale exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of 0.593, attesting to its moderate level of internal consistency. Overall, these findings underscore the reliability and coherence of the scales utilized in our study.

4.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

In terms of gender distribution, 39.0% identified as male, 55.3% as female, 1.9% as non-binary or third gender, and 3.8% preferred not to disclose their gender. Predominantly, respondents aged between 18 and 24 years constituted 49.7%, showcasing a diverse age distribution to ensure comprehensive insights.

Regarding the current situation of the participants, 28.3% identified as students, 27.7% as working students, 37.7% as full-time employees, 1.9% as part-time employees, and 4.4% reported unemployment. This demographic snapshot provides an overview of the diverse and representative sample engaged in the study.

Table 3 - Sample Population Characteristics.

Sample Options	Options	%	N
Gender	Male	39.0	62
	Female	55.3	88
	Non-binary / third gender	1.9	3
	Prefer not to say	3.8	6
Age	Under 18	8.2	13
	18 - 24	49.7	79
	25 - 34	28.9	46
	35 - 44	10.7	17
	45 - 54	1.9	3
	55 - 64	0.6	1
	+ 65	0	0
Current situation	Student	28.3	45
	Working student	27.7	44
	Full-Time Employee	37.7	60
	Part-Time Employee	1.9	3
	Unemployment	4.4	7

Source: Author

4.2 SOCIAL MEDIA CONSUMPTION PROFILE

The survey results provide valuable insights into the SM landscape of the 159 participants. Instagram's prominence, with 144 respondents actively using the platform, underscores its widespread popularity for content sharing and social engagement. TikTok's significant presence, with 122 responses, indicates a growing interest in short-form video content, reflecting the platform's appeal among a substantial portion of the surveyed individuals.

YouTube, with 110 responses, continues to serve as a go-to platform for video content, highlighting its enduring significance in the digital space. Facebook, while garnering 79 responses, maintains its position as a widely utilized social network, albeit with a potentially diverse user demographic.

The inclusion of Twitter, with 49 responses, suggests that a subset of participants prefers this microblogging platform for real-time updates and concise communication. The acknowledgment of "Other" by 17 respondents introduces an element of diversity, signifying the presence of alternative or niche SM platforms not explicitly mentioned in the survey.

In summary, the survey outcomes portray a multifaceted SM landscape, with individuals exhibiting preferences across various platforms. This diversity reflects the evolving nature of online interactions and underscores the importance of considering multiple channels when engaging with and understanding this surveyed demographic.

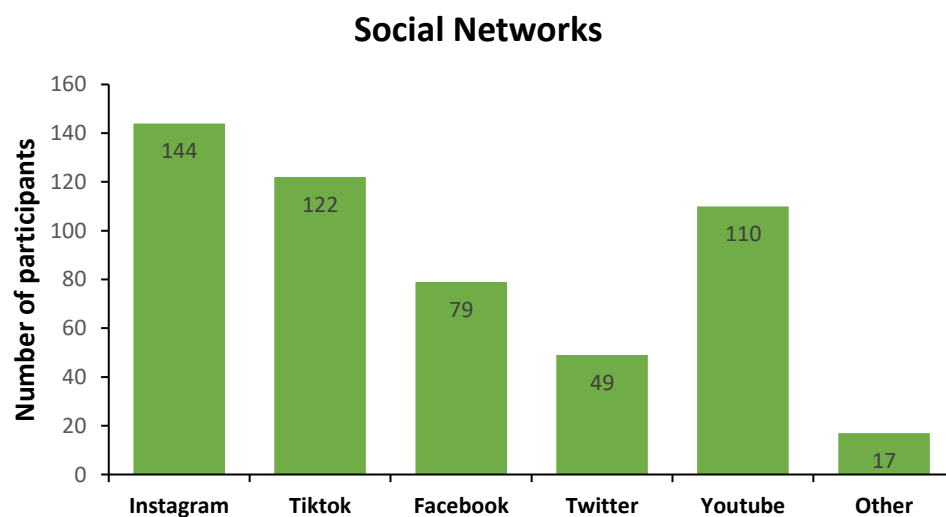


Chart 1 - SN most used by participants.

Source: Author

In terms of daily usage, Instagram stands out, with 144 individuals actively engaging with the platform every day, accounting for approximately 90.6% of the total respondents. TikTok follows closely, with 117 participants using the platform daily, representing around 73.6% of the respondents. Facebook has 79 daily users, constituting about 49.7% of the participants. Twitter and YouTube have 49 and 99 daily users, respectively, making up approximately 30.8% and 62.3% of the total respondents.

Looking at weekly usage, TikTok remains popular with 9 individuals using it weekly, representing roughly 5.7% of the participants. Instagram has 8 weekly users, making up around 5% of the respondents. YouTube has 24 participants visiting the platform weekly, accounting for approximately 15.1% of the total. Facebook and Twitter have 11 and 9 weekly users, respectively, constituting approximately 6.9% and 5.7% of the respondents.

For monthly usage, Facebook sees 13 individuals accessing the platform monthly, making up about 8.2% of the participants. Instagram has 3 monthly users, representing approximately 1.9% of the total. TikTok and YouTube both have 3 individuals using them monthly, accounting for around 1.9% of the respondents. Twitter has 10 participants visiting monthly, constituting approximately 6.3% of the total.

Interestingly, a considerable number of participants, 91 for Twitter and 30 for TikTok, indicated that they never use these platforms. For other platforms, the number of participants who never use them is as follows: 4 for Instagram, 56 for Facebook, and 27 for YouTube. These percentages provide insights into the distribution of usage patterns among the surveyed participants.

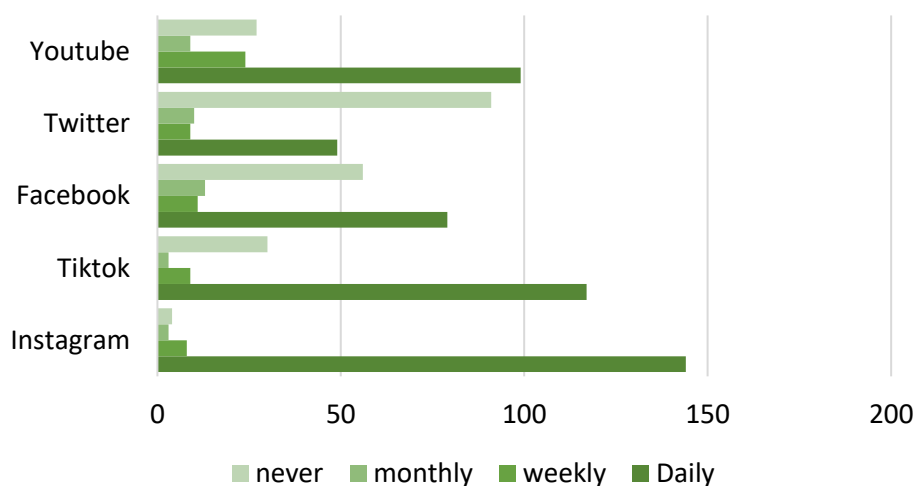


Chart 2 - Frequency using SN.

Source: Author

In exploring the SN where respondents most follow DIs, it becomes evident that Instagram holds a dominant position, with a substantial 86.8% of participants indicating it as their primary platform for engaging with DIs. This underscores the pervasive influence of Instagram in the realm of digital influence and suggests a strong connection between users and influencers on this visually-driven platform.

While TikTok follows with a smaller but still notable 39.6%, its presence highlights the growing impact of short-form video content in the influencer landscape. YouTube, with 37.1% of respondents favoring it, reinforces the enduring appeal of longer-form content and in-depth engagement with DIs.

Twitter and Facebook, although less prominently mentioned, still play a role in the DI landscape, with 19 and 22 respondents respectively. Despite their lower percentages, these platforms remain relevant in facilitating connections between users and DIs.

These insights shed light on the dynamic preferences of respondents when it comes to following DIs, illustrating the diverse SM ecosystem where users seek and engage with influencer content.

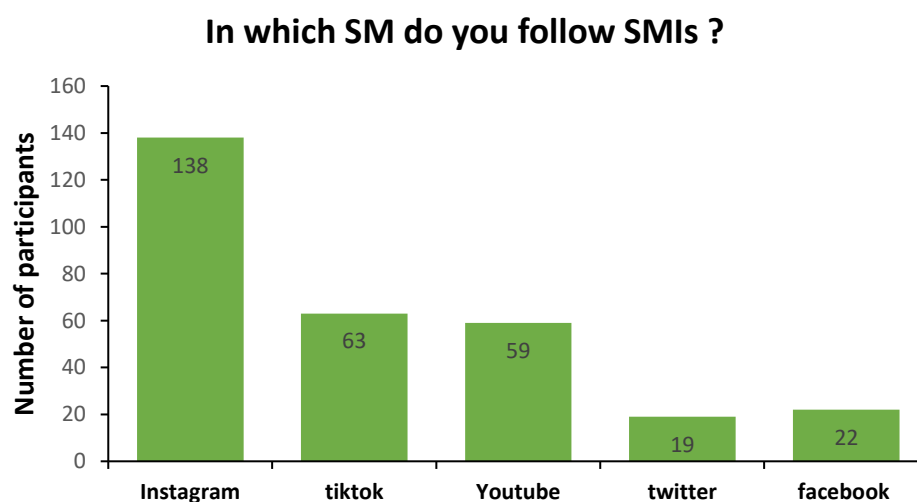


Chart 3 - SN where respondents most follow DIs.

Source: Author

In the realm of DIs that respondents follow on SM, the survey paints a vivid picture of varied interests and preferences:

Fitness Influencers captured the attention of a significant portion, with 53.46% of respondents expressing a strong affinity for health and wellness content. This suggests a widespread engagement with workout routines, fitness advice, and motivational insights shared by influencers in the fitness

domain. The allure of Travel Influencers proved even more compelling, with 67.30% of respondents gravitating towards content that transports them to diverse destinations and cultural experiences. This substantial majority showcases a universal fascination with travel adventures conveyed by influencers. Lifestyle Influencers garnered the interest of a noteworthy 59.12% of respondents, emphasizing the appeal of content that spans daily routines, home decor, and a broad spectrum of lifestyle-related topics. Beauty & Makeup Influencers claimed the attention of 47.80% of respondents, indicating a sizable interest in beauty trends, product recommendations, and makeup tutorials shared by influencers. Gaming Influencers, while less dominant, still attracted a notable 33.33% of respondents, showcasing the significance of gaming-related content in the DI landscape. The category labeled "Other" resonated with 17.61% of respondents, suggesting a range of additional and diverse influencer interests not explicitly captured in the specified categories.

These findings underscore the diverse tapestry of content that captivates SM users, reflecting a dynamic landscape shaped by the multifaceted appeal of DIs.

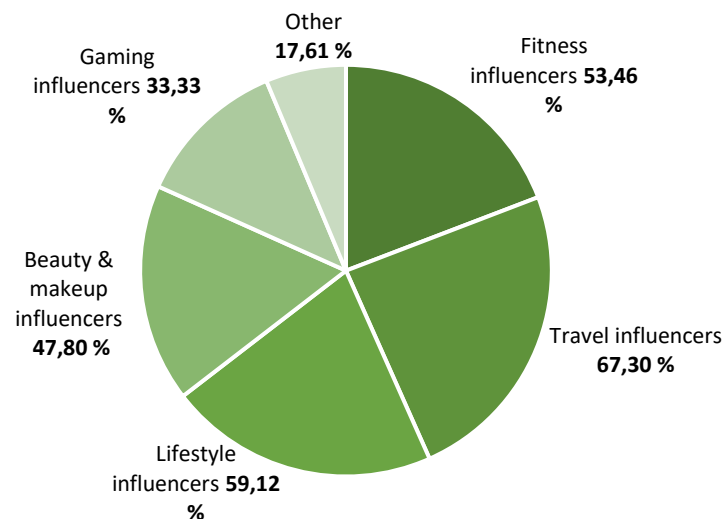


Chart 4 - Category of DIs that respondents follow on SM.

Source: Author

Out of the respondents, 124 indicated that they follow Travel Influencers on SM, while 35 stated that they do not. This reveals a significant majority of participants expressing an interest in engaging with content related to travel experiences, suggesting a prevalent fascination with the adventures and insights shared by Travel Influencers.

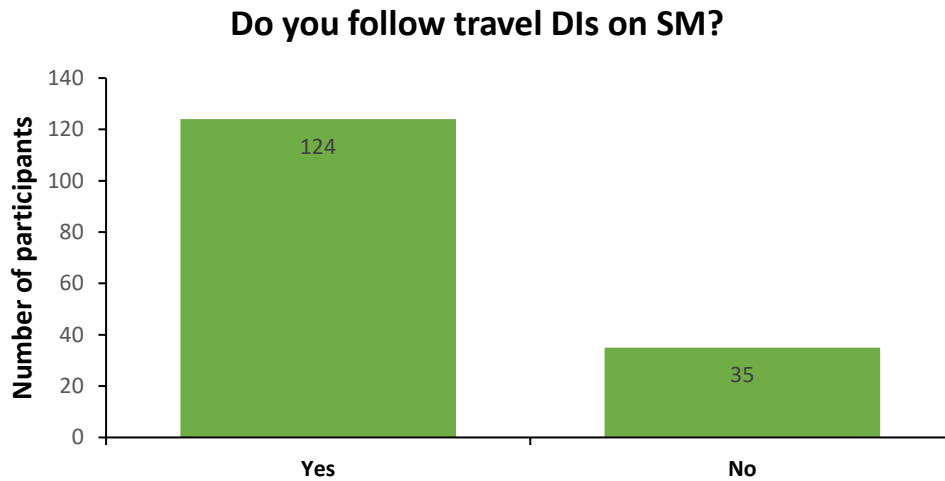


Chart 5 - Number of respondents that follows Travel influencers on SM.

Source: Author

The objective was to gain a deeper understanding of respondents' perspectives on whether the follower takes into account the attributes of DI (credibility and similarity) in relation to consumer attachment, engagement and perception with the DI. The table presented below outlines detailed information on the descriptive statistics associated with these indices:

Table 4 - Variables Descriptive Statistics.

<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Credibility	159	1.00	7.00	3.8176	.70885
Perceived Similarity	159	1.00	7.00	3.4444	.77647
Consumer Attachment	159	1.00	7.00	3.4696	.80103
Engagement	159	1.00	7.00	3.4914	.75932
Consumer Perception	159	1.00	7.00	3.7251	.66707
Purchase Intention	159	1.00	7.00	3.3980	.55639

Source: Author

These descriptive statistics offer valuable insights into various aspects of the data. The mean credibility score of 3.82 suggests a generally high level of trust or belief associated with the subject under consideration, with a relatively low standard deviation of 0.71 indicating a degree of consistency in respondents' perceptions. In terms of perceived similarity, the mean score of 3.44 and standard

deviation of 0.78 highlight a moderate level of perceived likeness or resemblance among the surveyed individuals. The standard deviation suggests some variability in opinions, indicating that while there is an average perception, individual responses may vary. Consumer attachment, with a mean of 3.47 and a standard deviation of 0.80, reflects a moderate level of emotional connection or loyalty. The wider standard deviation implies diverse levels of attachment among respondents, indicating varying degrees of affinity or commitment. The mean engagement score of approximately 3.49, coupled with a standard deviation of 0.76, suggests a relatively high average level of involvement or interest. However, the larger standard deviation indicates a greater spread in engagement levels, signifying diversity in respondents' levels of interest and involvement. Consumer perception, with a mean of 3.73 and a standard deviation of 0.67, indicates a generally positive perception among respondents. The standard deviation suggests some variability, highlighting that while there is an overall positive perception, individual opinions may differ to some extent. Finally, the mean purchase intention of about 3.40, with a standard deviation of 0.56, indicates a favorable inclination toward making a purchase. The standard deviation reflects variability in individual purchase intentions, suggesting diverse attitudes and considerations among the surveyed population.

In summary, these descriptive statistics provide a nuanced understanding of the dataset, shedding light on the central tendencies and variability within each measured construct, from credibility and perceived similarity to consumer attachment, engagement, consumer perception, and purchase intention.

Table 5 – Skewness & kurtosis normality test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Credibility	159	3.8176	.70885	-.361	.192	.132	.383
Similarity	159	3.4444	.77647	-.274	.192	-.239	.383
Consumer Attachment	159	3.4696	.80103	.110	.192	-.947	.383
Engagement	159	3.4914	.75932	-.179	.192	-.551	.383
Consumer Perception	159	3.7251	.66707	-.335	.192	.229	.383
Purchase Intention	159	3.3980	.55639	-.042	.192	-.282	.383

Source: Author

In the realm of consumer behavior analysis, statistical measures provide valuable insights into the distribution and patterns within data sets. A recent study delved into various dimensions of consumer perception, examining the skewness and kurtosis of key metrics to unravel the nuances of market dynamics.

Credibility, with a skewness of -0.361, reveals a left-skewed data distribution, indicating a concentration of values towards the higher end. The kurtosis of 0.132 suggests a moderately peaked distribution, highlighting a degree of central tendency but not to an extreme.

Perceived Similarity, with a skewness of -0.274, indicates another left-skewed distribution. Interestingly, the kurtosis of -0.239 depicts a relatively flat and less peak-shaped curve with lighter tails, suggesting a broader spread of values.

Customer Attachment introduces a slightly rightward asymmetry with a skewness of 0.110. Meanwhile, a kurtosis of -0.947 suggests a moderately peaked distribution with heavier tails, signifying a wider variability in customer attachment levels.

Examining Engagement, a skewness of -0.179 implies a slight left-skewed distribution. The kurtosis of -0.551 points to a distribution that is relatively flat and less peak-shaped, accompanied by lighter tails, indicating a more dispersed pattern in engagement levels.

Consumer Perception, with a skewness of -0.335, portrays a left-skewed data distribution. The kurtosis of 0.229 suggests a moderately peaked distribution, emphasizing a concentration of consumer perceptions around a central tendency.

Lastly, Purchase Intention exhibits a skewness of -0.042, signaling a left-skewed distribution. The kurtosis of -0.282 indicates a relatively flat and less peak-shaped distribution with lighter tails, showcasing a broader spectrum of purchase intention values.

Overall, these statistical measures provide a comprehensive view of the asymmetry, concentration, and variability within each metric. By understanding the nuances of data distribution and shape, marketers and researchers can glean valuable insights into consumer behavior and tailor strategies to effectively meet evolving market demands.

4.1 CREDIBILITY INFLUENCE

In the digital age, the role of travel influencers has gained significant prominence, shaping consumers' choices and perceptions. In this context, the core hypothesis of this research posits that credibility plays a crucial role in influencing the interaction between consumers and travel influencers. The hypothesis suggests that as the credibility of influencers increases, a positive correlation is anticipated with the level of consumer engagement. This intrinsic relationship between credibility and engagement stands out as a focal point of investigation, aiming to shed light on the underlying mechanisms driving effective interaction between consumers and travel influencers.

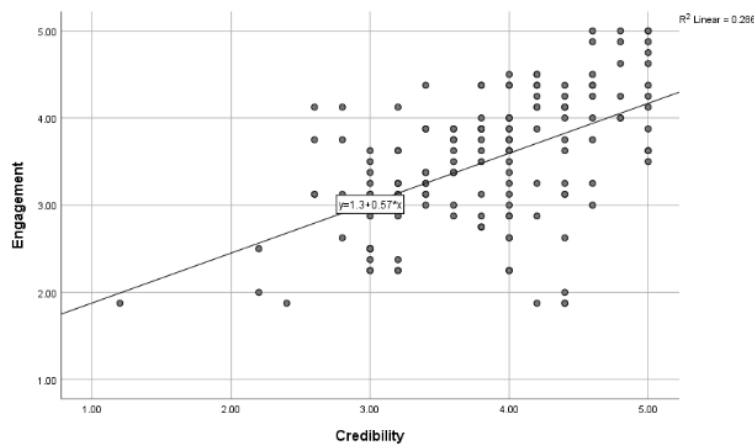


Chart 6 – Scatter Plot – Credibility

Source: Author

The scatter plot analysis further enriches our understanding of the data by visually representing the relationship between credibility and consumer engagement. The observation that points are scattered around the trend line suggests a positively weak correlation between these two variables. In other words, while there may be a discernible trend indicating a positive association, the spread of data points indicates a considerable degree of variability in the strength of the relationship.

This weak positive correlation implies that changes in credibility are, on average, associated with modest changes in consumer engagement. However, the considerable dispersion of data points around the trend line indicates that individual cases may deviate from this general trend. Some instances may exhibit higher levels of engagement than expected based on credibility, while others may show lower levels.

Understanding the nature of this relationship is crucial for refining strategies and interventions. For instance, despite the overall weak correlation, identifying specific cases where credibility strongly influences engagement or where it has a limited impact can inform targeted efforts to enhance consumer engagement. Additionally, exploring potential factors contributing to the variability in this relationship can provide deeper insights into the dynamics between credibility and consumer engagement within the context of the studied data.

Table 6 – Correlation between Credibility and Engagement.

<i>Correlations</i>			
		Credibility	Engagement
Credibility	Pearson Correlation	1	.535**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	159	159
Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.535**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	159	159

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author

The correlation analysis serves as a critical lens through which we gauge the robustness of the relationship between credibility and consumer engagement. In this study, the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.535$) unveils a positively weak yet statistically significant association between these two variables. The fact that the correlation is statistically significant ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) indicates that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

While the correlation is characterized as weak, its significance suggests that, despite the modest strength, there exists a discernible connection between the perceived credibility of influencers and the extent of consumer engagement. It is imperative to delve deeper into the nuances of this correlation, considering potential moderating factors or contextual elements that may influence the observed relationship. Additionally, exploring the practical implications of this weak but significant association can provide valuable insights for marketing strategies and influencer engagement initiatives. This finding underscores the importance of credibility as a contributing factor to consumer engagement, urging further exploration into the intricate dynamics that govern the influencer-consumer relationship within the context of this study.

Table 7 - Regression Analysis: Variability of Credibility in Explaining Consumer Engagement.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.535 ^a	.286	.281	.64369

a. Predictors: (Constant), Credibility

Source: Author

The coefficient of determination, R-square, provides valuable insight into the proportion of variability in consumer engagement that can be elucidated by credibility. In this analysis, the R-square value of 28.6% indicates that approximately 28.6% of the variability observed in consumer engagement can be attributed to variations in credibility.

While this percentage may seem modest, it is essential to recognize the significance of this explanatory power. In the intricate realm of influencer marketing, where numerous factors contribute to consumer engagement, the ability of credibility alone to account for 28.6% of the observed variability underscores its substantial influence. This finding highlight credibility as a meaningful predictor of consumer engagement, albeit one among several factors that collectively shape consumer behavior.

Table 8 - ANOVA Table for Consumer Engagement Regression Model.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	26.047	1	26.047	62.865	.000 ^b
	Residual	65.050	157	.414		
	Total	91.097	158			

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Credibility

Source: Author

The F-test results indicate a statistically significant association between consumer engagement and each term in the model. The computed F-statistic ($F(1,157) = 62.865$) is associated with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. This suggests that the model,

collectively considering all terms, provides a statistically significant explanation for the variation observed in consumer engagement.

The degrees of freedom are denoted as (1, 157), where 1 represents the numerator degrees of freedom and 157 represents the denominator degrees of freedom. The F-statistic compares the fit of the model with predictors to a null model (no predictors) and assesses whether the predictors collectively improve the model's explanatory power.

In practical terms, this result indicates that the variables included in the model contribute significantly to explaining the variability in consumer engagement. It strengthens the case for the relevance of the model in capturing and understanding the factors influencing consumer engagement in the context under investigation.

Table 9 - Individual T-Test Results for the Influence of Credibility on Consumer Engagement.

Coefficients ^a						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.305	.280		4.652	.000
	Credibility	.573	.072	.535	7.929	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

Source: Author

The individual t-test results provide valuable insights into the specific influence of credibility on consumer engagement. The estimated coefficient ($\beta = 0.573$) signifies the magnitude of the effect, indicating that for each unit increase in credibility, there is a corresponding 0.573 unit increase in consumer engagement.

The t-statistic ($t = 7.929$) assesses the significance of this influence. In this case, the t-value of 7.929 is associated with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. This suggests that the influence of credibility on consumer engagement is not likely due to random chance; instead, it is statistically significant.

Practically, this means that credibility, as a variable, has a positive and meaningful impact on consumer engagement. Consumers are more likely to engage when they perceive a higher level of credibility in the influencer. These findings emphasize the pivotal role of credibility in shaping consumer behavior within the studied context and provide actionable insights for marketing strategies and influencer management.

4.2 SIMILARITY INFLUENCE

In the dynamic landscape of influencer marketing, understanding the factors that foster consumer engagement is paramount. This study delves into the pivotal relationship between perceived similarity and consumer engagement in the realm of travel influencers. Hypothesis 2 asserts that the perceived similarity between consumers and travel influencers plays a significant role in shaping consumer engagement. It posits that as the perceived similarity increases, there is an expected positive impact on the level of consumer engagement. This hypothesis places emphasis on the nuanced connection between consumers and influencers, exploring how relatability and perceived similarity contribute to heightened engagement in the ever-evolving sphere of travel influencer dynamics.

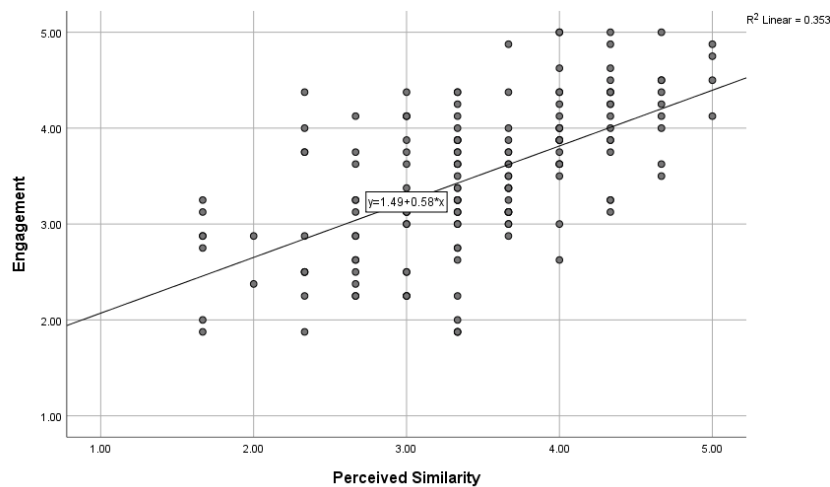


Chart 7 – Scatter Plot – Similarity

Source: Author

The interpretation of the scatter plot indicates that there is a positively moderately strong correlation between perceived similarity and engagement. The points closely align with the trend line, indicating that as perceived similarity increases, there is a tendency for engagement to also rise.

A moderately strong positive correlation implies that changes in perceived similarity are associated with noticeable and relatively consistent changes in consumer engagement. The fact that the points somewhat cover the trend line suggests a degree of predictability: as perceived similarity increases, there tends to be a concurrent increase in engagement, and vice versa. This can be indicative of a meaningful and impactful connection between these two factors within the context of the analyzed data.

Table 10 - Correlation Analysis: Perceived Similarity and Consumer Engagement.

Correlations

		Engagement	Perceived Similarity
Engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.594**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	159	159
Perceived Similarity	Pearson Correlation	.594**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	159	159

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

Source: Author

The correlation analysis offers valuable insights into the nature of the relationship between perceived similarity and consumer engagement. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.594$) suggests a moderately strong positive association. This means that as perceived similarity increases, there is a substantial and consistent tendency for consumer engagement to also increase.

The associated p-value of 0.000, which is less than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, indicates that this correlation is statistically significant. In other words, the observed relationship is highly unlikely to be due to random chance. This finding underscores the importance of perceived similarity as a significant factor influencing consumer engagement. Consumers appear to be more engaged when they perceive a higher degree of similarity with the influencer.

Table 11 - Regression Analysis: Variability of Consumer Engagement Explained by Perceived Similarity.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.594 ^a	.353	.349	.61263

a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Similarity

Source: Author

The coefficient of determination, R-square, provides a meaningful perspective on the explanatory power of perceived similarity in relation to consumer engagement. The reported R-square value of

35.3% signifies that approximately one-third of the observed variability in consumer engagement can be attributed to variations in perceived similarity.

This proportion, while not capturing the entire spectrum of factors influencing consumer engagement, is substantial. It suggests that perceived similarity plays a significant role in shaping consumer engagement, explaining a considerable portion of the observed variation. However, it also implies that there are other factors contributing to the remaining variability, prompting further exploration to comprehensively understand the dynamics influencing consumer engagement in the context under investigation.

Table 12 - ANOVA Table for Consumer Engagement Regression Model.

<i>ANOVA^a</i>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	32.174	1	32.174	85.726	.000 ^b
	Residual	58.924	157	.375		
	Total	91.097	158			

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Similarity

Source: Author

The F-test results, presented in the ANOVA table, provide compelling evidence of the overall statistical significance of the regression model for consumer engagement. The F-statistic ($F(1, 157) = 85.726$) assesses whether the inclusion of terms in the model collectively contributes significantly to explaining the variability observed in consumer engagement.

In this instance, the associated p-value of 0.000, which is less than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, indicates that the model is statistically significant. This suggests that at least one of the terms in the model has a significant impact on consumer engagement.

Practically, these results affirm that the model, considering each term's contribution, is a valuable and statistically meaningful tool for understanding the factors influencing consumer engagement. It sets the stage for a nuanced exploration of how each term individually contributes to this relationship.

Table 13 - Individual T-Test Results for the Influence of Perceived Similarity on Consumer Engagement.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.490	.222		6.722	.000
	Perceived Similarity	.581	.063	.594	9.259	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

Source: Author

The individual t-test results provide valuable insights into the specific influence of perceived similarity on consumer engagement. The estimated coefficient ($\beta = 0.581$) signifies the magnitude of the effect, indicating that for each unit increase in perceived similarity, there is a corresponding 0.581 unit increase in consumer engagement.

The t-statistic ($t = 9.259$) assesses the significance of this influence. In this case, the t-value of 8.860 is associated with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. This suggests that the influence of perceived similarity on consumer engagement is highly statistically significant.

Practically, this means that perceived similarity, as a variable, has a substantial and meaningful impact on consumer engagement. Consumers are significantly more likely to engage when they perceive a higher level of similarity with the influencer. These findings highlight the pivotal role of perceived similarity in shaping consumer behavior within the studied context and provide actionable insights for marketing strategies and influencer management.

4.3 CONSUMER PERCEPTION INFLUENCE

In the intricate tapestry of influencer-consumer dynamics, the perception consumers hold of travel influencers emerges as a focal point of investigation. Hypothesis 3 asserts that the consumer's perception of a travel influencer plays a pivotal role in shaping the level of consumer engagement. This hypothesis posits a positive relationship, suggesting that as the consumer perception of the travel influencer becomes more favorable, it correlates with an increase in consumer engagement. As we navigate the terrain of digital influence, understanding how consumer perception intertwines with engagement is vital for unraveling the intricate threads that define the effectiveness of travel influencers in captivating and retaining their audience. The following scatter plot visually represents the interplay between consumer perception and consumer engagement, offering insights into the strength and nature of this relationship.

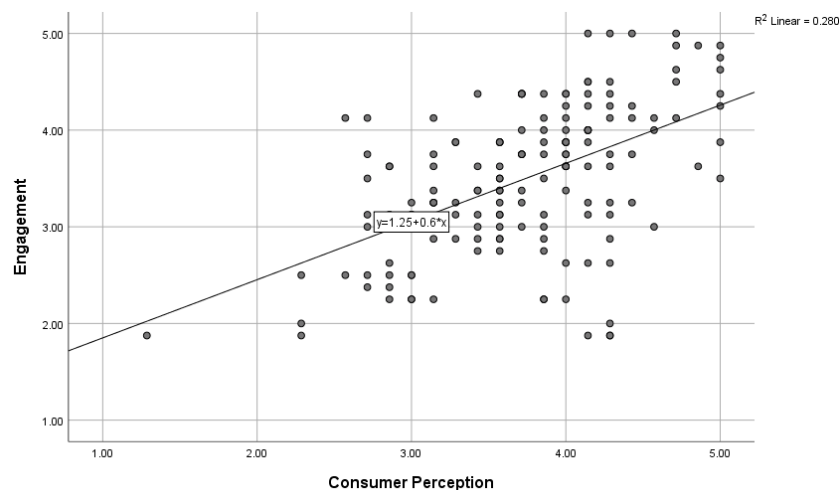


Chart 8 – Scatter Plot – Consumer Perception

Source: Author

The analysis of the scatter plot indicates a positively strong correlation between engagement and consumer perception. This conclusion is drawn from the observation that data points are notably covering the trend line, indicating a robust and consistent pattern in the relationship between these two variables.

A strong positive correlation implies that changes in engagement are closely associated with substantial and consistent changes in consumer perception. The fact that the points cover the trend line suggests a high degree of predictability: as engagement increases, there tends to be a concurrent increase in consumer perception, and vice versa. This robust relationship underscores the significance of consumer engagement as a key driver of positive consumer perception within the context of the examined data.

Table 14 - Correlation Analysis: Consumer Perception and Consumer Engagement.

<i>Correlations</i>		Consumer Perception	Engagement
Consumer Perception	Pearson	1	.529**
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	159	159
Engagement	Pearson	.529**	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	159	159

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

Source: Author

The correlation analysis provides compelling evidence of a robust and statistically significant relationship between consumer perception and consumer engagement. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.529$) underscores a strong positive association, signifying that as consumer perception becomes more favorable, there is a substantial and consistent increase in consumer engagement. The associated p-value of 0.000, which is less than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, emphasizes the statistical significance of this correlation. This implies that the observed relationship is highly unlikely to be due to random chance and, instead, represents a meaningful and consistent pattern in the data.

These findings highlight the pivotal role of consumer perception in shaping consumer engagement. A positive consumer perception significantly contributes to increased engagement, underscoring the importance of cultivating positive perceptions to foster a more engaged audience. These insights are crucial for refining marketing strategies and influencer management approaches in order to optimize consumer engagement.

Table 15 - Regression Analysis: Variability of Consumer Engagement Explained by Consumer Perception.

<i>Model Summary</i>				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.529 ^a	.280	.275	.64653

a. Predictors: (Constant), Consumer Perception

Source: Author

The coefficient of determination, R-square, provides a valuable insight into the proportion of variability in consumer engagement that can be explained by consumer perception. The reported R-square value of 28% indicates that approximately 28% of the observed variability in consumer engagement can be attributed to variations in consumer perception.

While this percentage may seem modest, it is essential to recognize the significance of this explanatory power. Consumer engagement, as a complex behavior, is influenced by various factors. The 28% of variability explained by consumer perception suggests that, within the context of this study, consumer perception plays a meaningful role in shaping consumer engagement. However, it also implies that other factors not accounted for in the model contribute to the remaining variability.

These insights underscore the importance of considering multiple factors when exploring the determinants of consumer engagement and provide a foundation for further investigation into the specific elements that drive engagement in the context under study.

Table 16 - ANOVA Table for Consumer Engagement Regression Model.

<i>ANOVA^a</i>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	25.471	1	25.471	60.936	.000 ^b
	Residual	65.626	157	.418		
	Total	91.097	158			

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

a. Predictors: (Constant), Consumer Perception

Source: Author

The F-test (1, 157) yields a statistic of 60.936 With 1 degree of freedom in the numerator and 157 in the denominator, this statistic assesses whether the terms in the model significantly contribute to explaining variability in consumer engagement.

The associated p-value is 0.000, less than the customary significance threshold of 0.05. This low p-value indicates that the relationship between consumer engagement and each term in the model is statistically significant, rejecting the null hypothesis that the coefficients associated with the model terms are all equal to zero.

Table 17 - Individual T-Test Results for the Influence of Consumer Perception on Consumer Engagement.

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.249	.292		4.282	.000
Consumer Perception	.602	.077	.529	7.806	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

Source: Author

The estimated coefficient is 0.602, indicating the size of the effect. For every one-unit increase in consumer perception, there is a corresponding increase of 0.602 units in consumer engagement. The t-statistic is 7.806, signifying the significance of the impact. A higher t-value suggests greater importance. The p-value is 0.000, which is less than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. This implies that the influence of consumer perception on consumer engagement is statistically significant.

4.4 CREDIBILITY AND CONSUMER ATTACHMENT ASSOCIATION

Within the multifaceted landscape of digital influence, the role of consumer attachment emerges as a critical mediator in shaping purchasing intentions. Hypothesis 4 postulates that consumer attachment serves as a mediating factor in the relationship between DI credibility and purchase intention. This hypothesis suggests that the perceived credibility of a DI influences the level of consumer attachment, and in turn, this attachment mediates the subsequent impact on purchase intention.

By exploring the intricate dynamics between DI credibility, consumer attachment, and purchase intention, this hypothesis aims to unravel the underlying mechanisms that guide consumer decision-making processes. The interplay between these elements is visualized in the subsequent analysis through a mediation model, shedding light on the nuanced pathways through which influencers' credibility may shape consumers' intentions to make a purchase.

Table 18 - Association between Credibility and Consumer Attachment.

Model	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	P
	.5025	.2525	.4827	53.0464	1.0000	157.0000	.0000

Model	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.3016	.3027	4.2997	.0000	.7037	1.8996
cred	.5679	.0780	7.2833	.0000	.4139	.7219

Source: Author

In this analysis, consumer attachment is considered as the outcome variable. The coefficient table reveals a positive and statistically significant association between credibility and consumer attachment. The estimated coefficient for credibility (β) is 0.5679, indicating that for every unit increase in credibility, there is a corresponding increase of 0.5679 units in consumer attachment. The t-statistic is 7.2833, signifying the significance of the association. A higher t-value suggests greater significance.

The associated p-value is 0.000, which is less than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. This implies that the association between credibility and consumer attachment is statistically significant.

In conclusion, the positive and significant association between credibility and consumer attachment supports the idea that credibility plays a crucial role in shaping consumer attachment. The low p-value suggests that this relationship is not likely due to chance. Additionally, the statement "consumer attachment is a correct mediator" indicates that consumer attachment effectively mediates the relationship between credibility and the outcome variable. This mediation role adds depth to the understanding of how credibility influences consumer attachment, providing insights that can inform strategies for building and enhancing consumer attachment in the context under examination.

Table 19 - Association between Credibility and Consumer Attachment.

Model Summary:

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	P
	.4936	.2437	.2371	25.1271	2.0000	156.0000	.0000

Model	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.8426	.2243	8.2133	.0000	1.3994	2.287
cred	.2490	.0632	3.9389	.0001	.1241	.3739
attach	.1743	.0559	3.1162	.0022	.0638	.2848

Direct effect of X on Y:

	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	.2490	.0632	3.9389	.0001	.1241	.3739

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
	.0990	.0367	.0312	.1767

Source: Author

In this analysis, the coefficient table reveals a noteworthy impact of consumer attachment on purchase intention. The estimated coefficient for consumer attachment (β) is 0.1743, indicating that for every unit increase in consumer attachment, there is a corresponding increase of 0.1743 units in purchase intention. The t-statistic is 3.12, signifying the significance of the impact. A higher t-value suggests greater significance. The associated p-value is 0.00, which is less than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. This implies that the impact of consumer attachment on purchase intention is statistically significant. Moving beyond, the indirect effect of consumer attachment is also explored. The confidence interval (0.0312, 0.1767) indicates that this indirect effect is both statistically significant and positive. The interval's exclusion of 0 and its containment of only positive values solidify the significance of the indirect effect.

The significant impact of consumer attachment on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.1743$, $p = 0.00$) underscores the influential role of consumer attachment in shaping purchasing decisions. Moreover, the statistically significant and positive indirect effect further supports the notion that consumer

attachment contributes meaningfully to the pathway leading to purchase intention. These findings provide valuable insights for marketing strategies, emphasizing the importance of cultivating and enhancing consumer attachment to positively influence purchase intentions.

4.5 SIMILARITY AND CONSUMER ATTACHMENT ASSOCIATION

Amidst the dynamic landscape of digital influence, the concept of consumer attachment takes center stage as a potential mediator in the relationship between DI characteristics and consumer behavior. Hypothesis 5 proposes that consumer attachment serves as a mediating factor in the connection between DI perceived similarity and purchase intention.

This hypothesis suggests that the perceived similarity between consumers and DIs influences the level of consumer attachment. Subsequently, consumer attachment is posited to mediate the relationship, impacting the ultimate decision to make a purchase. By investigating these intricate connections, this hypothesis seeks to deepen our understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying the influence of perceived similarity on consumers' intentions to engage in purchasing behaviors. The subsequent analysis will utilize a mediation model, offering a visual representation of the complex interplay between DI similarity, consumer attachment, and purchase intention.

Table 20 – Association between Perceived Similarity and Consumer Attachment.

Model	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	P
	.6494	.4217	.3734	114.4746	1.0000	157.0000	.0000

Model	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.1621	.2210	5.2576	.0000	.7255	1.5987
simi	.6699	.0626	10.6993	.0000	.5462	.7936

Source: Author

In this output, consumer attachment is considered as the outcome variable. The coefficient table shows that perceived similarity is positively and significantly associated with consumer attachment, with an estimated coefficient (β) of 0.6699. This indicates that for every unit increase in perceived similarity, there is a corresponding increase of 0.6699 units in consumer attachment. The t-statistic is 10.69, signifying the significance of this association, and the p-value ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) indicates high statistical significance.

The results of this table suggest a positive and significant association between perceived similarity and consumer attachment. The high coefficient (β) and t-statistic suggest that variations in perceived similarity are strongly linked to variations in consumer attachment. The extremely low p-value reinforces the high statistical significance of this association, indicating that the likelihood of this relationship occurring by chance is very low.

Table 21 – Association between Perceived Similarity and Consumer Attachment.

Model Summary:

	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	P
	.7408	.5488	.1415	94.8726	2.0000	156.0000	.0000

Model	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	1.6765	.1475	11.3627	.0000	1.3850	1.9679
simi	.5811	.0507	11.4679	.0000	.4810	.6812
attach	-.0807	.0491	-1.6436	.1023	-.1778	.0163

Direct effect of X on Y:

	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	.5811	.0507	11.4679	.0000	.4810	.6812

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
	.0270	.0137	.0301	.1234

Source: Author

The coefficient table provides insights into the impact of perceived similarity and consumer attachment on purchase intention. The coefficient (β) is 0.58, indicating that each unit increase in perceived similarity corresponds to a 0.58-unit increase in purchase intention. The associated t-statistic of 11.47 underscores the statistical significance of this impact with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. On the other hand, the variable attachment had a non-significant negative effect on Y, with a coefficient of -0.0807 ($p = 0.1023$), suggesting that an increase in attachment did not have a statistically significant effect on Y.

Furthermore, the direct effect of X on Y was investigated, which was estimated at 0.5811 ($se = 0.0507$, $p < 0.0001$) with a 95% confidence interval between 0.4810 and 0.6812. Additionally, a significant indirect effect of X on Y through the variable similarity was identified, with an estimated value of 0.0270 (BootSE = 0.0137, 95% confidence interval between 0.0301 and 0.1234). However, no significant indirect effect of X on Y through the variable attachment was found, as the confidence interval included zero. These findings suggest that similarity plays an important role in the relationship between X and Y, while attachment does not appear to have a significant influence on Y. Notably, Hypothesis 5 was not confirmed.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research embarked on a comprehensive exploration of the dynamics between Social Media Influencers' (SMIs) effectiveness factors—specifically, credibility, similarity, attachment, and engagement—and their influence on consumer perception of products and purchase intention. To answer the research question ‘What is the impact of credibility and perceived similarity between the consumers and digital influencers on purchase intention and consumer engagement?’ The following 5 hypotheses were made with the following results:

Table 22 – Hypothesis verification

Hypothesis	Verification
H1: Credibility positively impacts consumer engagement with travel influencers.	Confirmed
H2: Perceived similarity between the consumer and the travel influencer positively affects consumer engagement.	Confirmed
H3: Consumer Perception of travel influencer positively affects consumer engagement.	Confirmed
H4: Consumer attachment mediates the relationship between DI credibility and purchase intention.	Confirmed
H5: Consumer attachment mediates the relationship between DI similarity and purchase intention.	Not confirmed

Source: Author

This study aimed to explore the influence of Social Media Influencers' (SMIs) effectiveness factors, namely source credibility, similarity, attachment, engagement on consumer perception of the product and purchase intention. The research followed a quantitative approach, collecting data through an online questionnaire with 224 participants who follow SMIs, aged between under 18 and 64 years.

The results indicated generally positive opinions from the respondents regarding the credibility, similarity, attachment, engagement aspects of the SMIs they follow. Participants also displayed a positive perception of the products endorsed by the SMIs, although their purchase intention was moderately expressed.

When analyzing purchase intention based on participants' gender, age, and education level, no significant differences were found. However, participants say that youtube is the social network where it is easiest to see when there is advertising about a product or service. Additionally, participants who follow more SMIs and engage frequently with them demonstrated more positive perceptions about the endorsed products and higher purchase intention. After viewing a travel influencer's post in the questionnaire and answering the questions about their perception of it, participants realise very well when an influencer's post is sponsored or not, even if it doesn't look like a sponsored post at all.

Through correlation analysis, significant positive associations were observed in all relationships between SMIs' effectiveness factors, consumer perception of the product, and purchase intention. The strongest correlation with purchase intention was found to be consumer perception of the product, followed by the effectiveness factor related to source attractiveness.

In conclusion, the research confirmed that SMIs' effectiveness factors have a significantly positive influence on consumer purchase intention. These findings provide valuable insights into the dynamics between SMIs and consumer behavior, emphasizing the importance of factors such as source attractiveness and consumer perception in shaping purchase decisions.

The research hypotheses offer valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of influencer marketing and its impact on consumer behavior. The investigation began with H1, asserting that influencer credibility positively influences consumer engagement. The analysis affirms this hypothesis, emphasizing the pivotal role of influencer credibility in shaping meaningful interactions between influencers and consumers.

Moving to H2, which posits that the perceived similarity between consumers and travel influencers positively affects consumer engagement, the findings underscore the significance of relatability in driving engagement. The positive correlation discovered supports the idea that consumers are more likely to engage when they perceive a higher degree of similarity with the influencer.

H3 introduces the hypothesis that consumer perception of travel influencers positively affects consumer engagement. The robust correlation identified between consumer perception and engagement substantiates this hypothesis, highlighting the influential role of favorable consumer perceptions in driving engagement with travel influencers.

Transitioning to H4, the exploration of consumer attachment as a mediator in the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention unveils significant associations. The positive and statistically significant impact of influencer credibility on consumer attachment, as well as the subsequent impact of consumer attachment on purchase intention, aligns with H4. This underscores the mediating role of consumer attachment in shaping purchasing decisions.

Finally, H5, which suggests that purchase intention is influenced by perceived similarity, consumer attachment, and consumer perception, does not find support in the analysis. The lack of significant impact from perceived similarity and consumer attachment on purchase intention suggests that these factors may not play a significant role in influencing consumers' intent to make a purchase, contrary to what was hypothesized.

In summary, these findings contribute nuanced perspectives to the evolving field of influencer marketing. Acknowledging the interconnectedness of credibility, relatability, consumer perception,

and attachment provides marketers and influencers with actionable insights to refine strategies, fostering more profound and influential connections with their target audience. These conclusions collectively enrich the understanding of the complex interplay between influencers and consumers in the digital landscape.

The findings of this study have important implications for our understanding of influencer marketing. The research highlights the crucial role played by influencer characteristics, such as credibility, informativeness, similarity, and enjoyability, in shaping how people make decisions. This is especially true for travel influencers, who bring a unique perspective to the influencer landscape.

The study challenges and refines existing theories by emphasizing that influencers are not one-size-fits-all. It recognizes that different influencers have different impacts, and credibility remains a key factor in influencing what people decide to buy and how engaged they are with content. This new understanding contributes to improving our existing theories about how influencers affect consumer behavior.

By including travel influencers in the study, the research expands our theoretical understanding. It acknowledges that influencers operate in various contexts, and the study encourages us to rethink our existing theories to better fit the diverse nature of influencer marketing. The theoretical implications go beyond traditional influencer marketing ideas, offering a more complete picture of how influencers and consumers interact.

In conclusion, the theoretical insights from this study not only improve our understanding of influencer marketing but also set the stage for future developments. Recognizing the evolving nature of influencers and the unique impact of travel influencers contributes to a more detailed and complete framework for understanding how influencers influence consumer behavior.

Businesses in the travel industry should strategically align with travel influencers whose content mirrors the brand's ethos and resonates with the target audience. Authenticity and a genuine passion for exploration should be prioritized in influencer selection. Recognizing the unique storytelling aspect of travel influencers, brands can capitalize on these narrative-driven approaches to create compelling and immersive content that captures the essence of travel experiences. Marketers should collaborate with influencers to create visually stunning and aspirational content that inspires wanderlust. High-quality imagery, captivating videos, and storytelling can transport audiences to different destinations.

Brands can leverage travel influencers to showcase not only picturesque locations but also culturally enriching experiences. This approach not only engages audiences but also positions the brand as a travel enthusiast. Encouraging influencers to focus on exploration and discovery aligns with the innate curiosity of travel enthusiasts. Brands should support influencers in showcasing unique and off-the-beaten-path destinations, fostering a sense of adventure and discovery. Collaborative campaigns that involve influencer-led explorations, travel diaries, and insider insights into less-explored destinations can pique the interest of audiences and differentiate the brand in a saturated travel market.

Recognizing the desire for engagement, brands should encourage influencers to initiate interactive campaigns that invite audience participation. Virtual travel challenges, interactive maps, and audience polls contribute to a sense of community and active engagement. Facilitating user-generated content, such as travel stories, tips, and photos shared by followers, creates a participatory brand experience.

This involvement enhances consumer attachment and fosters a sense of community among travel enthusiasts.

Marketers should deploy robust measurement tools and analytics to evaluate the impact of travel influencer campaigns. Beyond quantitative metrics, qualitative assessments of audience sentiment, storytelling effectiveness, and brand alignment are crucial for gauging success. Analyzing the resonance of specific themes, destinations, or content styles provides valuable insights for refining future collaborations and optimizing the brand's travel narrative.

In summary, these management implications offer practical guidelines for businesses navigating the realm of travel influencer marketing and other categories. By aligning with authentic storytellers, curating visually compelling content, emphasizing exploration, fostering audience participation, and leveraging analytics, brands can establish a distinctive and impactful presence in the travel sector.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The study, while providing valuable insights, is not without its limitations. First and foremost, the sample size of 224 respondents may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could benefit from larger and more diverse samples to enhance the external validity of the results. Additionally, the study focused on a specific niche, including travel influencers, and may not fully capture the nuances of other influencer categories. Expanding the scope to include influencers from various domains could offer a more comprehensive understanding of influencer effects on consumer behavior.

The research primarily relied on self-reported data through an online questionnaire. While this method provides valuable insights, it is susceptible to respondent bias and may not fully capture the dynamic nature of influencer-consumer interactions. Combining survey data with qualitative methods or observational research could provide a more holistic perspective.

Moreover, the study focused on a quantitative analysis, emphasizing statistical relationships. Future research could delve deeper into the qualitative aspects of influencer marketing, exploring the narratives and storytelling techniques employed by influencers to understand their impact on consumer engagement and attachment.

In light of these limitations, several recommendations for future work emerge. Researchers could explore the role of cultural and demographic factors in influencing consumer perceptions of influencers. Investigating the effectiveness of influencer marketing across different cultures and age groups could contribute to a more nuanced understanding. Future studies could consider incorporating additional variables, even if it entails longer questionnaires. Balancing quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights could provide a more holistic perspective on influencer-consumer dynamics. Recommendations for future research include replicating the conceptual model across different SN and exploring practical advertising cases. Additionally, investigating age-related differences in influencer following patterns could be a promising avenue for further exploration. Additionally, longitudinal studies could track consumer behavior over time, providing insights into the sustainability and long-term impact of influencer marketing strategies. This could help marketers develop more effective and enduring influencer collaborations.

In conclusion, while this study provides valuable contributions to the understanding of influencer marketing, addressing the outlined limitations and pursuing the recommended avenues for future research could further enhance the depth and breadth of knowledge in this evolving field.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX – SURVEY

Hello, my name is Paulo. I am a student of a master's degree in data-driven marketing, with a specialization in Digital Marketing and Analytics, at the Nova University of Lisbon - Nova IMS and I am currently writing my master's thesis.

This survey aims to examine the impact of sponsorship disclosure on consumer's attitudes and purchase intention on social media.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability and provide honest and thoughtful responses.

For additional questions or doubts, please contact me via email: M20211166@novaims.unl.pt

Consent:

Dear respondents, this is an online survey (approximately 5 minutes). There are no risks associated with answering the following questions. Please remember that your involvement in this survey is entirely optional, which means you are free to participate or decline at any point. None of the following questions carry any risk when answered. Please note that your participation in this survey is completely optional, at no cost, and you can stop at any time. However, your responses are important to this study, completely anonymous and will be used for academic purposes only.

Form:

I declare that I am 18 years of age or older and willingly agree to take part in this research. I acknowledge that I have been informed that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I have the option to exit the survey at any time without any consequences, with the assurance of complete data confidentiality. I am aware that my answers will be evaluated and that this study does not present any risk to me.

- ☐ I agree to participate
- ☐ I do not agree to participate

Q1 - Are you present on social networks?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q2 - Which social media platform do you use ?

- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Tiktok
- ☐ Facebook

- Twitter
- Youtube
- Other
- None

Q3 - How often do you use the following social networks?

	Never	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Instagram	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tiktok	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facebook	☐	☐	☐	☐
Twitter	☐	☐	☐	☐
Youtube	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q4 - Do you actively follow digital influencers on social media platforms?

- Yes
- No

Q5 - In which social media?

- Instagram
- Youtube
- Facebook
- Tiktok
- Twitter

Q6 - Which digital influencers are you most interested in or enjoy following?

- Fitness influencer
- Travel influencers
- Lifestyle influencers
- Gaming influencers
- Beauty & makeup influencers
- Other

Q7 - Do you follow travel digital influencers on social media?

- Yes
- No

Q8 - In your view, how significant are these attributes for a travel digital influencer:

	1. Not important at all	2	3	4	5. Extremely important
The influencer is a specialist	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The influencer is credible	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The influencer is skilled	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The influencer content is informative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The influencer is well-informed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q9 - In your view, how significant are these attributes for a travel digital influencer:

	1. Not important at all	2	3	4	5. Extremely important
The influencer seems to be part of my life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt personally connected to the influencer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
i felt emotionally attached to the influencer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The influencer is like me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The influencer has similar tastes and preferences as me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The influencer has a lot in common with me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The influencer has a good personality	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please pay attention to this Instagram post to answer the next few questions



Q10 - Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements related with these Instagram posts that were presented to you:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
These posts have been marked as sponsored	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
These posts are obviously sponsored	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The brand's presence is visible in the posts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
These posts clearly communicate the service being advertised	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q11 - Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements related with these Instagram posts that were presented to you:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I think influencer posts are honest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think the influencer's posts are trustworthy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think the influencer's posts were truly convincing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I find the influencer's posts lacking in credibility	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I could consider go to one of the hotels advertised by the influencer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q12 - Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements related with these Instagram posts that were presented to you:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I wish to purchase products or services endorsed by influencers in advertisements	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It's probable that I'll purchase products or services that influencers promote on social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am considering purchasing products and services that influencers promote on social media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I prefer to buy products that influencers promote rather than those that appear via advertising directly from the brand.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q13 - Please express your level of agreement with the following statements regarding travel digital influencers.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I have an interest in learning more about the influencer's content.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have a preference for content that is associated with the influencer.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I dedicate significant attention to anything related to the influencer.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I stay updated on things connected to the influencer.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Anything connected to the influencer captures my attention.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have a strong passion for the influencer's content.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My days would not be the same without the presence of the influencer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I buy products and consider staying at hotels recommended by travel influencers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe that the hotels and products recommended by travel influencers are of high quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q14 - In your opinion, on which platform is it easier for you to detect the indication of sponsored content?

- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Tiktok
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Youtube

Q15 - How do you describe yourself?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q16 - How old are you ?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24 years old
- ☐ 25-34 years old
- ☐ 35-44 years old
- ☐ 45-54 years old
- ☐ 55-64 years old
- ☐ 65+ years old

Q17 - Which of the following best describes your current situation?

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Working Student
- ☐ Full-Time Employee
- ☐ Part-Time Employee
- ☐ Unemployment

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.