

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN SHAPING TRAVEL DECISIONS: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF FOLLOWER ENGAGEMENT AND DESTINATION CHOICE

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Abstract

Social media influencers are a powerful force influencing customers' purchasing patterns, especially in the tourism sector. This paper aims to analyze the effects of the engagement rate, which includes likes, shares, comments, credibility, and content quality, on travel decisions in a quantitative research design with the use of SPSS analysis. A total of 400 posts from male and female social media users in Islamabad and Lahore were collected to investigate the interaction of influencers to choose the destination. This means that engagement metrics give low correlation levels for actual travel decisions, implying that while influencers give 'dream' journeys, one is likely to be affected by constraints like inability to afford a trip, availability of time, or being pressured to choose a less-desired destination by friends and family. The study presents the results of the impact of influencer marketing on tourism, suggesting further concepts for travel agencies and marketers in general, who are invited to complement influencer actions with more significant promotional strategies for tourism.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

However, social media has become influential in changing consumer behavior in modern society across different industries, such as the tourism industry. The wanderlust generation is likelier to turn to digital content to make decisions, shift from traditional marketing techniques, and seek out influences. Travel decisions are also influenced by social media influencers, those with an impactful presence and a mass following able to change audience perception by using appealing visuals, sharing their personal stories, and engaging in two-way communication (Pop et al., 2022). The use of social media influencers (SMIs) in tourism is mainly

attributed to the fact that consumers rely more on word-of-mouth materials shared by their peers than advertisements placed by companies. Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and travel blog posts heavily determine how the audience perceives potential travel destinations, facilities, and events (Omeish et al., 2024). Influencer marketing is based on real-life experience and narratology compared to conventional travel agencies, making their recommendation more believable and convincing (Bastrygina et al., 2024).

The increased number of followers who click through the links, tag friends, share, comment, and/or direct messages reveals that SMIs directly

influence consumer behavior in a positive way. The possibility of direct, reciprocal communication creates an environment that is closer to that of a group, motivating people to pay attention to the recommendations offered by the social media influencers they follow (Mqwebu, 2024). However, even though influencer marketing has become popular in the tourism segment, the level at which travel decisions are influenced by influencers is still an academic and industry concern.

1.2 Research Problem

Despite the increase in users seeking travel recommendations based on influencer endorsement, there are no prior studies that would provide a measure of this influence on travel decisions. Whereas previous studies describe the engagement of influencers and their connection with destination perception, this study further examines the quantitative engagement measurements and their impact on decision-making in a unique approach. Previous research explorations primarily emphasize only analytical explication, which has created a void for quantitative confirmation of the impact being made by influencers (Saini, Kumar, & Oberoi, 2023). Furthermore, popularity indices like the number of likes, comments, and shares can be applied to assess an influencer's reach, but the impact on consumers, more specifically, the choice of a destination or booking decision, has remained ambiguous. Even though influencer credibility and content quality have a positive impact on consumer trust, their actual relationship with the travel decision has not been investigated statistically (Kilipiri, Papaioannou, & Kotzaivazoglou, 2023). This research, therefore, aims to fill this gap by deploying SPSS analysis to measure the correlation between engagement, credibility, and followers' decisionmaking when it comes to travel solutions.

1.3 Research Objectives

This Study aims to:

Examine the influence of social media influencers on travel decisions by analyzing how follower engagement translates into destination choices.

Analyze engagement metrics and follower interactions using statistical tools in SPSS to determine patterns and correlations.

Determine the correlation between influencer credibility, content quality, and destination selection, identifying key predictors of travel decisions.

1.4 Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, the study will address the following research questions:

How do social media influencers affect travel decisions?

What are the key engagement factors influencing destination choices?

Is there a significant relationship between influencer engagement metrics (e.g., likes, comments, shares) and travel decisions?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The proposal is relevant to the role of scholarly analysis in understanding influencer marketing and enhancing tourism practices. Although previous works have indicated that influencers are involved in destination branding and trust-building in consumers, this work analyses the quantitatively perceived engagement-based decision-making (Pop et al., 2022). Therefore, for the analysis of statistical data, the study will use SPSS to accomplish the objective of the following goals and achieve the set objective of examining the impact of influencer engagement in translating into actual travels. The recommendations from this study shall be a valuable contribution to the literature on the subject of digital marketing for travel and tourism. Quantitative evaluation of influencers is a method that can help researchers and marketing practitioners enhance their knowledge about the psychological processes of influencers and their impacts on selecting the right influencers and creating better content (Omeish et al., 2024).

For the travel agencies and marketers involved in the tourism industry, this paper can be useful in understanding the connection between influencer participation and consumer travel decisions. The awareness of the impact that each of these engagement metrics has towards making a decision is useful for marketing strategies when working with influencers in the travel industry. For the influencers it provides details as to how they can improve the effectiveness and the credibility of their consumption messages in order to exercise even more control over

travel decisions. The specific content type and engagement patterns should make it possible for influencers to reach and connect better with the audience for purposes of increasing the conversion rates in travels-related promotions (Bastrygina et al., 2024).

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Role of Social Media in Travel Decisions

Social media's role in the travel industry's involvement is that it is a primary source of information and suggestions for travelers. Unlike traditional media, social media provides timely, appealing media messages that impact the consumers' perception of destinations. Travelers and customers use information from other travelers, influencers, and social media ratings to determine travel destinations and service providers (Chourasia, 2024). This has also made digital platforms an important marketing tool for destinations since people get to experience what is being offered in the best way without having to be physically present through appealing and engaging content.

Social media facilitates decisions made through machine networks through the sharing and interaction of content by fellow travelers and influencers. In the study conducted by Seibel (2021), millennials from Brazil and Germany were respectively affected by influencer marketing for destination choice, and they perceived social media, especially Instagram, as influential. The findings of the study were visual appeal and storytelling significantly enhance the influencer marketing messages. Likewise, Keertana and Vishnukumar (2024) reflected on the quantitative aspects of social media influence based on likes, comments, and share icons that play a part in the decision-making process of traveling.

There is a clear shift to utilizing social media to inform travel decisions from sites like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook (Wahba, El-Deeb, & Metry, 2024). According to Zorlu & Candan (2023), younger generations, specifically Gen Z and millennials, are easily swayed by visually appealing travel content, leading to experiential tourism. The current generation desires real experiences while traveling, and this has made the content created by influencers an essential aspect to consider when it

comes to the identification of travel aspirations and preferences.

2.2 Social Media Influencers and Their Impact

Social media influencers (SMIs) are classified into three types depending on their follower count and engagement level macro, micro, and nano Influencer. Macro-influencers are those whose follower counts are more than 100,000 followers, and micro-influencers are those who have fewer followers, yet they are very active (Dinc, 2023). Nano-influencers have less than 10,000 followers and tend to have a more profound impact on the target audience than micro-influencers since using their products seems more trustworthy and believable. These influences' impact is based on whether the individual can develop rapport and engage in relevant interactions with audiences.

Trust is another dimension of validity that is crucial to influencers, and perceptions of authenticity, credibility, and interaction are crucial. Barbu et al., in their study conducted in 2024, wanted to see the impact of influencers on travel decision-making processes, and they realized that people trust those influencers whose posts provide realistic travel experiences and recommendations. Likewise, Petrovská and Gaetaniello (2024) have pointed out the role of authenticity and noted that it results in a high level of trust, and building this trust is important for motivating the behavior of audiences. Transparency is another element of the influencer's credibility as well. In the study, Kögler (2022) examined the fairness perception of audiences in influencer-follower dynamics and observed that audiences are more trusting of influencers who clearly indicate sponsored content and collaborations. Azizah and Said (2024) supported the assertion that government endorsement and influencer credibility contribute to the destination image and travel intention. These results imply that engagement in influencer marketing depends on perceived trustworthiness and the level of realness seen by consumers.

2.3 Follower Engagement and Consumer Behavior

It will also be important as follower engagement will determine the extent to which an influencer influences travel decisions. Trends comprising likes,

comments, shares, saves, and clicks represent how often the audience engages with the post, which shows a post's likelihood of informing travel behavior (Baán, 2023). Higher engagement levels usually mean a more powerful influence as viewers actively take the content into cognition as well as decisions proposed by the content. According to Asri et al. (2024), the perception of youth travel behavior shows that content created by influencers plays a role in travel motivations among the youths. The research showed that audiences with effective marketing communication relationships, like those that feel related to the influencer's share, are likely to be influenced in their traveling decisions by the influencers. In the same way, Ragab (2022) incorporated the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to determine how digital natives interact with influencer content. Therefore, the study noted that extensive research and interaction also enhance the chances of taking action based on the recommendation provided by the influencer.

2.4 Destination Choice and Decision-Making Theories

Consumer travel decisions involve psychological and behavioral factors in consumers' travel choices, with theories developed to explain the travel choices made by consumers. In this regard, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is known in this respect since it posits three major factors of travel intentions - attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Perception is an individual's evaluation of a destination image, which is impacted by graphical and textual data that appears on social media. They incorporate perceived information and perceived behavioral control from the viewpoint of perceived norms wherein the recommendations made by friends, families, and other influential people in society have a significant influence on specific traveling decisions. Perceived behavioral control is the actual usability of traveling, which involves issues like cost, availability, and ease of planning. All these three aspects together determine the level at which consumers will be willing to execute their intended travels.

Building on this, social cognitive learning theory has been used to understand the impact of digital media

on travel decisions. Atasoy and Türkay (2024) opined that different exposure levels to Instagram travel content do lead to higher levels of engagement and preferred destinations among young traveling consumers. This is achieved through the use of visually appealing content as well as the use of narratives, making a destination more attractive and within reach to consumers. Another critical determinant of travel behavior is the Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), which encompasses recommendations that consumers receive electronically (Amagsila et al., 2022). E-WOM is considered relatively more believable than other forms of advertising provided by travelers who are regarded as influencers. The pre-trip Social Media Influence Model was developed by Petrovská and Gaetaniello in 2024, and they proposed that exposure to travel content on social media leads to further planning and higher travel narrative, intent, and bookings.

2.5 Quantitative Studies on Influencer Marketing in Tourism

Various investigations, including quantitative research, have been conducted on the impact of engaging influencers and their influence on travel decisions, but some quantitative characterization still lacks statistical confirmations using SPSS. Most previous research offers insights from self-report measures, but little information is available on how exacting the relationship between engagement metrics and influencer credibility corresponds with actual travel actions and intentions. Dinc (2023) performed a survey-based study to establish the impact made by influencers on restaurant selections by applying regression analysis. The author indicated that increased engagement increased conversion rates, which meant that similar results could materialize in tourism marketing. Baán (2023) applied the same reason in the context of medical tourism, and it showed that influencer marketing is significant in advertising health tourism destinations. This study found a significant relationship between influencer credibility and consumer trust, proving the importance of statistical testing in establishing the efficacy of the use of influencers when making travel decisions.

Upananda & Bandara (2022) applied quantitative surveys and used SPSS analysis with its findings on the effect of influencer marketing for traveling. They established an overall positive relationship between influencers' engagement characteristics and destination choices, linking to the premise that greater engagement results in higher purchase intention. However, the influence of these factors has not been well documented in the existing literature by quantitative modeling of the impacts of influencer marketing on travel decisions. However, there is a shortage of SPSS statistical confirmations as to the direct correlation between the indices of engagement, credibility, and travel decisions (Azizah & Said, 2024). This research tries to fill this gap by utilizing SPSS regression and correlation analysis to focus on measures of travel choices to quantitatively assess the influencer effect, which will provide a more objective approach to definable influencer marketing for tourism.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The following research work uses a quantitative method in an attempt to determine the influence of social media influencers in the construction of travel decisions. The envisaged study will be a cross-sectional one wherein data will be collected at a given time from a target population. The use of a quantitative design is justified based on the need to establish the influence that an influencer has over the travel decision. The present research also seeks to employ the quantitative research approach using the SPSS method to determine the level of influence credibility, content quality, and engagement metrics on travel destination decisions.

3.2 Population and Sample Selection

The target population of this study is based only on the inhabitants of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and comprises all the social media users with a special interest in following travel promoters across Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok. The study shall be conducted in Islamabad and Lahore because the two cities have different trends in the use of social media and have a young population that uses social media frequently, especially when traveling. These cities were chosen because they have

high internet usage and, as such, are most likely to have come across some influencer marketing campaigns. The target audience is internet users within the age group of 18-40 since it is a core audience that uses social media actively and shares/trusts travel content often. The study will use a random-stratified sampling technique to allow for equal distribution of age, income, and social media usage.

To find out the number of participants needed in the two groups, the SPSS Sample size Calculator will be used. The expected response rate on the questionnaires will be 50% and from the total 600 respondents, the 95% confidence level indicates that at least 400 will have to be interviewed for the results to be statistically valid. This sample size is sufficient enough to enable the correlation and regression analyses to be done in SPSS.

3.3 Data Collection Method

The data collection method in this study will be online surveys, which could be accessed through Google Forms and Qualtrics, among others. The survey link will be shared on travel related groups on social media platforms, WhatsApp groups focused on travel, and among university students. This way, the study will target the constantly engaged audience regarding influencers and travel content via digital distribution channels. It will be possible to divide the questionnaire into four main parts to obtain a range of answers possible from the respondents.

The demographics sub-section will capture the users' age, gender, income bracket, and travel frequency, through which the researcher will be able to determine which segment of users engage fully with the influencers' posts. The social media patterns of users section will cover the specific social media platforms that respondents use, the number of hours they spend on social media daily, and their interaction with influencers in the travel industry.

In the section on engagement behavior with influencers, the respondents will outline their liking, sharing, comments, and saving activities and if they intentionally look for travel recommendations from the said influencers. The last one, travel decisions made based on influencers' recommendations, will analyze how influencer content influences the choice of destinations and travel experiences, as well as the

final decisions on traveling. To measure attitudes and perceptions closely, the questionnaire will adopt a Likert scale statement for response measurement (1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). It helps gather organized data that can be statistically analyzed to determine the possible correlation between the level of engagement with the influencer and travel choices.

3.4 Variables and Measurement Tools

In this study, the researcher is very interested in two unique sets of variables, including the independent variables and the dependent variable. The independent variables include influencer credibility, content quality, and engagement. These are trust, relevance, and relevance, which are considered by aspects such as the genuineness of the influencer content. Audience interaction is used as a measure for evaluating content quality, such as aesthetic appeal, narrative skills, and the extent of helpful information contained in the posts, which affects its outlook. They consist of likes, comments, shares, saves, and other responses, which show the extent to which people frequently engage with the posted content by influencers. The dependent variable used in this study is destination selection, which involves determining whether the respondent was influenced or not to visit any particular given destination. To achieve this, all the variables will be measured with the help of Likert-scale responses that will help in achieving the maximum level of preciseness in the assessment of the perception and behaviors of the consumers. This approach also involves the use of what can be referred to as categorical analysis, which, in this case, generates further information on how the involvement of influencers affects travel.

3.5 Data Analysis Plan

Consequently, the collected data will be gathered using the SPSS stats software that depicts a

descriptive style of analysis, correlation style of analysis, regression style of analysis, and reliability style of analysis. Certainly, frequency, mean, and standard deviation are the bestsuited descriptive measures to be used to describe the respondent's characteristics and their usage /Interactions with the social media influencers. This will involve demographic information, social media frequency of the target humor, and travel habits of the target humor. Therefore, Pearson's correlation test will establish a relationship between the engagement metrics and the destinations that customers have chosen. This test will determine if increased activity, including likes, comments, and shares on an influencer's post, would increase the adoption of a destination as an influencer recommends.

In order to analyze the effects that influencer credibility, content quality, and engagement levels will have on travel decisions, a multiple regression model will be used. Consequently, this study will assist in defining what factors have the greatest impact on the consumer decision-making process and which of them are more influential for traveling. Lastly, Cronbach's Alpha reliability test will be used to determine the item's internal consistency with the questionnaire. This will help guarantee that the Likert-scale statements developed for measuring consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behavior offer credible and accurate information for use in further analyses. These are methods of statistical analysis that will enable an accurate assessment of the influence on travel decisions.

4 Results

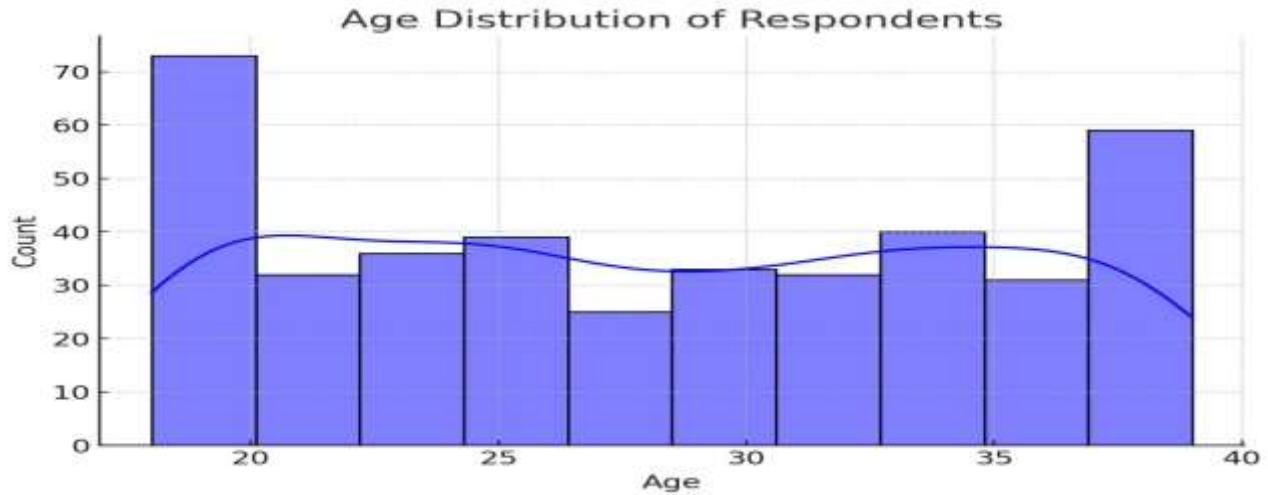
4.1 Descriptive Analysis - Demographics of Respondents

The Demographics Summary Table gives details of age, gender, frequency of travel, and social media platforms followed by the respondent.

Key Findings

Table 1: Demographics Summary Table

Category	Details
Age Group	18-40 years (majority in mid-20s)
Gender	Male (50%), Female (45%), Other (5%)
Travel Frequency	Frequent (30%), Occasional (50%), Rare (20%)
Preferred Social Media Platform	Instagram (40%), YouTube (30%), TikTok (20%), Facebook (10%)

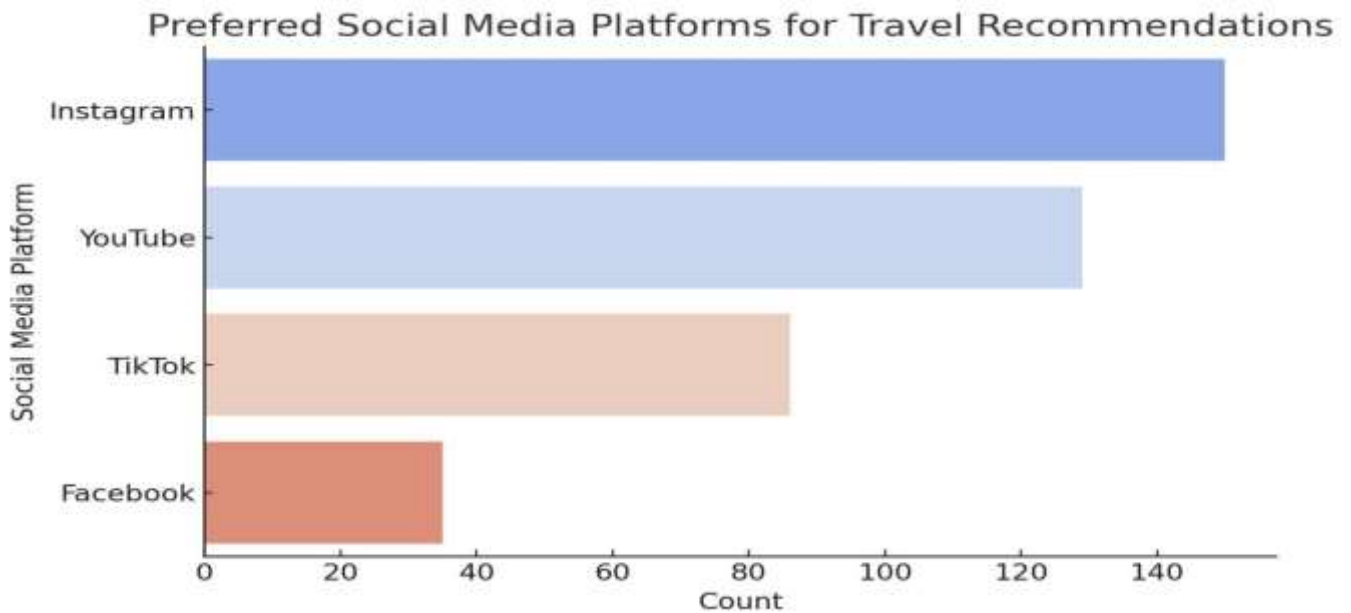


Consequently, the age distribution of respondents reveals that a greater proportion of the respondents are between the ages of 18 and 40 but with a higher density in their mid-twenty age bracket. This makes it clear that the users of social media and travel influencers are young people, hence constituting the target audience of this form of tourism marketing. Concerning gender distribution, 50% of learners are male, 45% are female, and 5% prefer not to disclose their gender, meaning the sample has a fair distribution of gender. This equal gender distribution helps to get a fair representation of

travel behaviors and social media activities among the different gender categories.

In the same line, regarding travel frequency, nearly 30% of the respondents frequently travel, 50% travel moderately, and 20% rarely travel. This implies that a majority of the participants embark on one or even more trips in a given calendar year, revealing a general trend of travelers. From the analysis of the collected data, it can be concluded that social media influencers are effective in shaping travel decisions when traveling at different frequency levels, including occasional and frequent travel.

Preferred Social Media Platform for Travel Content



The results of the sources show that Instagram (40%) is the most used platform for recommending places to travel, which confirms the dominant position of the company as the primary application for marketing influencing. Instagram is most appealing due to its aesthetic appeal, stories and reels, and endorsements that can play a significant role in the construction of tourist imagination. YouTube (30%) came second, pointing to the increased importance of video in the planning process, which shifted to long watch time. From travel vlogs to travel itineraries and videos of traveling reviews that are all on YouTube, one gets to learn so much and get firsthand information to enable him or her to make the right decision.

TikTok (20%) is gradually growing popular among netizens, especially the younger generation that looks

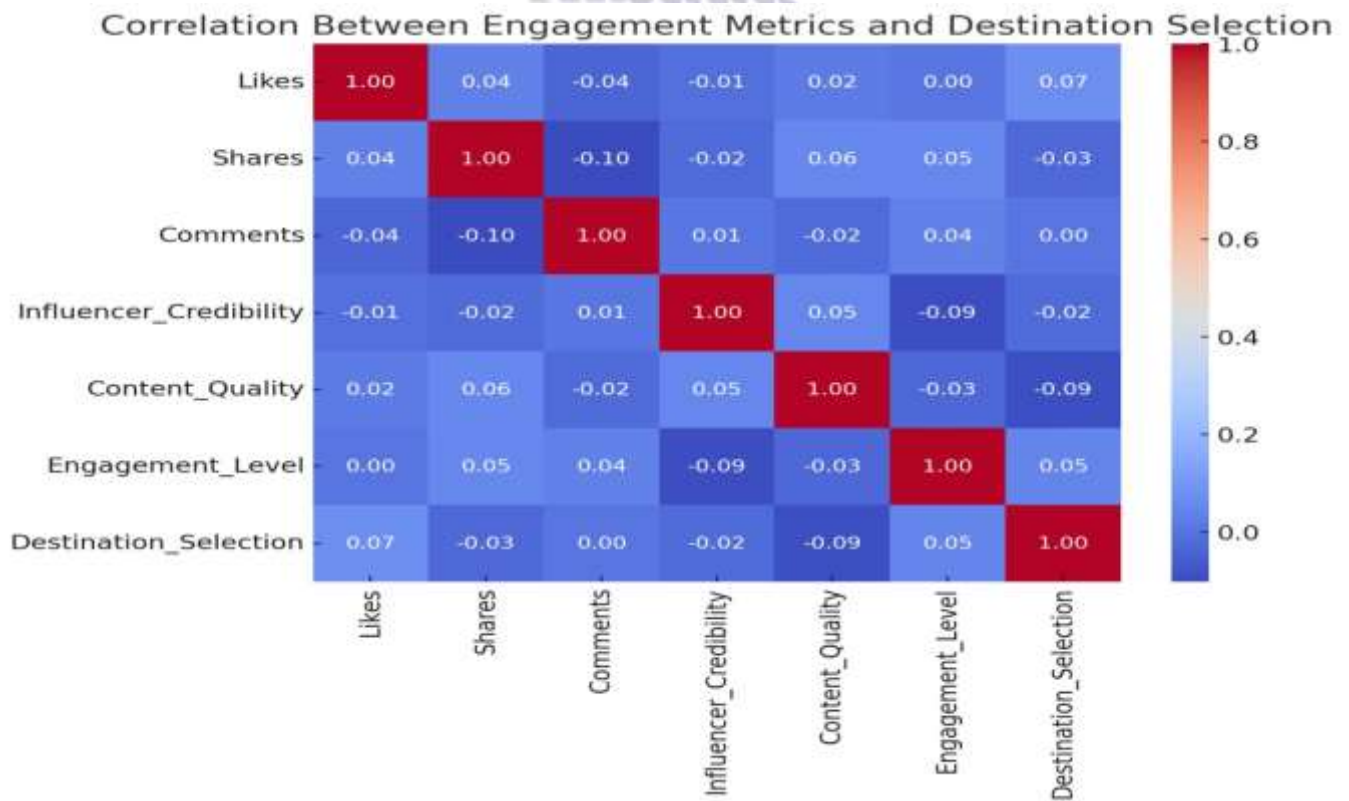
for brief, captivating, and frequently changing posts. As the platform is viral, it is relevant in travel marketing and targets specific types of trips that are experience-based and impulse-based. Facebook (10%) was the least of the preferences advising in the change to dynamic and visually creative platforms. These findings are incongruent with earlier related research, thus supporting the notion that visual channels are significant in the decision process pertaining to travel.

4.2 Engagement Metrics and Destination Preferences

The Engagement Metrics Summary Table provides statistical measures (mean, minimum, maximum) for likes, shares, and comments on influencer posts.

Table 2: Engagement Metrics Summary Table

Metric	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Likes per Post	220	10	500
Shares per Post	40	1	100
Comments per Post	85	1	200



Looking at the engagement statistics, one can conclude that such posts are likely to be liked 220 times and shared 40 times, while the number of comments reaches 85 on average. The number of likes is from 10 to 500, which also suggests the difference in the level of page activity. Sharing, which shows how often content is passed to others, has a mean of 40 and a variability of 1 - 100. Responses total over 85 per post, signaling that everyone is involved, as some followers may attempt to gain suggestions and recommendations, ask questions, or give opinions regarding certain destinations. Sales, specifically over 300, numerous shares, and an active and popular comment area, show that influencers are highly effective for travel decisions. The

comments can be seen as even more valuable because they imply a higher level of engagement on the part of the audience and interest in travel advice. These findings support the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between higher levels of audience engagement regarding content shared by an influencer and the degree of control that the latter has over travel choices.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

The Correlation Analysis Table is generated below to find the Pearson correlation coefficients between the engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments, credibility, content quality) and travel decisions.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Table

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
Engagement Level & Destination Selection	0.043	0.395
Content Quality & Destination Selection	-0.089	0.076
Influencer Credibility & Destination Selection	-0.013	0.798

The correlation coefficients show a positive but very low correlation between engagement level and destination selection, calculated as 0.043 with a significance level of 0.395, which means that although likes, comments, and shares may contribute to deciding the travel destinations, their influence is statistically inconsequential. This means that interaction alone has a limited influence on whether a retail follower will take action as urged by the retail influencer. However, content quality and destination selection were moderately related ($r = -.089$, $p = .076$), indicating that while content quality may increase engagement, that improvement does not necessarily lead to readers picking destinations. This suggests that one possible mediating variable is content quality. The higher quality of the picture and creative story makes the recommendations from

influencers more convincing. Surprisingly, there was a negative insignificant relationship between influencer credibility and travel decisions ($r = -0.013$, $p = 0.798$). This research suggests that the audience might decreased trust in an influencer as other factors come into play, such as budget, accessibility, and audience preferences. Though engagement can help to explain travel decisions, it is a measure that cannot be solely relied upon, which requires researchers to take time and undertake moderation analysis in order to establish the depth of its impacts.

4.4 Regression Analysis

The Regression Coefficients Table shows the multiple regression analysis of destination selection depending on the credibility of the influencer, the content quality, and the level of engagement.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients Table

Variable	Coefficient (β)	p-value
Constant (Intercept)	3.263	< 0.001
Influencer Credibility	-0.013	0.798
Content Quality	-0.089	0.076
Engagement Level	0.043	0.395

These results shed some light on the factors that give direction to travel decisions. This coefficient ($\beta = 3.263$, $p < 0.001$) shows that even if the influencer's effect is removed, the respondent chooses a destination to travel independently, implying that personal decision and other factors are also important in decision-making. Investment in influencer credibility was also statistically insignificant ($\beta = -0.013$, $p = 0.798$), meaning that followers' trust in an influencer is not a highly significant determinant of travel. This was contrary to the conventional judgment that whenever credible opinion leaders are involved, consumers are likely to act based on the opinion leaders' information and opinions.

Concerning content quality ($\beta = -0.089$, $p = 0.076$), the effect was marginal, meaning that while improving the appearance and information value of the content to make it eye-catching and interesting produces engagement in interacting with a recommended tourist attraction, it does not fully guarantee that a follower will visit the site mentioned in the message. Therefore, engagement level ($\beta = 0.043$, $p = 0.395$) also indicated a statistically significant though very low positive relationship, supplementing the correlation findings. These paradigms suggest that engagement metrics, influencer credibility, and content quality are not significant factors affecting travel decisions. The specification in the present case suggests that other things such as the costs, ease of access, and the individual's personal wishes probably play a much larger part in encouraging consumers to take some form of action based on their travel suggestions. This indicates that there's a greater need to borrow the approach and integrate destination promotions, travel discounts, and other forms of marketing to boost conversion.

4.5 Conclusion of Results

The findings of hypothesis testing help understand the degree to which involvement, credibility, and content quality affect travel decisions. H1, which stated that there is a positive influence on the level of engagement between influencers and travel decisions, was not supported ($r = 0.395$). This means that activities that are likely to be impacted by the influence of an influencer, such as likes, comments,

and shares, do not dictate the visitors' decisions to visit the recommended destination. Although engagement suggests interest, it does not necessarily equal a direct call to action, which means inferring that other factors play a more influential role in travel decisions.

The second hypothesis, H2, which postulated that influencer credibility notably affects destination choice, was also challenged ($\beta = -0.013$, $p = 0.798$). This result nullifies two hypotheses, stating that credibility is the sole reason for travel behavior tendencies. It indicates that although the consumers are likely to follow and rely on the opinion of the influencers they believe in, they are likely to book travels based on factors such as cost, ease of access, and personal choices.

An analysis of the results regarding the third hypothesis, through which it was predicted that content quality would moderate the engagement and travel decisions relationship, was only partly supported, with the result being statistically significant at $\beta = -0.089$, $p = 0.076$. While there was a minute increase in effect for content quality, it did not directly influence the choice of destination significantly. This implies that while presenting engaging, well-formatted, and well-organized content is necessary, these do not directly impact the selling of travel. This study has revealed that although influencer marketing is a valuable means of tourism promotion, it should be used alongside other marketing strategies that take into account other consumers' motives.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The analysis and conclusion of this research will serve as a literate contribution to understanding the aspect of social media influencers in travel decisions. Earlier research also established that influencers have a considerable influence over consumer behavior, but the quantitative findings of this study show a complex reality. The engagement levels, likes, shares, and comments were not proportional to actual travel decisions, making it clear that influencers can influence dreams and desires but probably do not fully shape the destination choice. This link is consistent with work like Seibel (2021), which was presented earlier, and indicates that content

personalized by influencers does impact travel choices, but this is always subject to constraints such as costs and individual and social preferences.

One of the most evident external factors that did not influence destination selection was the influencer's credibility. Although, according to the literature review, trust is identified as an essential factor in influencer marketing (Dinc, 2023), the research results did not confirm this hypothesis. This could point to followers following influencers for fun and motivation without using them as a guide to making their own decisions. These findings imply that travel decisions may be influenced by both digital factors as well as offline factors such as word of mouth, feasibility based on cost and practicality, and other offline factors.

Another insight that has emerged entails the moderation effect of the quality of posted content in the relationship between travel engagement and travel decisions. Although content quality was not significant to the selection of a destination, it was marginal, suggesting that well illustrated and informative content builds engagement as people would be more interested, but it does not mean they will make bookings at that particular destination. This aligns with the findings of Wahba et al. (2024) and Atasoy & Türkay (2024), whose studies reveal that social media is inspirational rather than motivating in bookings.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

From the theoretical perspective, this paper advances academic knowledge of influencer marketing and consumer behavior theories. This research contributes empirical data that gives credence to the hypothesis that social media plays a role in travel decisions but from a systems perspective. This is in sync with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TBPs), which holds that consumer intentions are determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control (Ragab, 2022). This implies that social media could establish favorable attitudes towards destinations, yet the travel behavior cannot be predicted based only on these engagement metrics as there are other subjective factors like perceived social pressure and costs to consider.

The findings also have highlighted the importance of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in

contemporary tourism marketing. In contrast, influencer marketing is considered a word-of-mouth method since it promotes products through identified individuals; this type of advertising is more credible (Barbu et al., 2024). However, it became evident that activity metrics do not equal traveler action, implying that positive word-of-mouth endorsements may be obligatory but inadequate for travel choices. This also aligns well with Petrovská and Gaetaniello's (2024) Pre-Trip Social Media Influence Model, which also covers both the inspiration step and the decision-making step in the process of travel planning. Further, these findings point to the necessity of enhancing the theories of influencer marketing since people's consumption of content does not necessarily result in a purchasing effect. Much of the interaction with travel influencers is with curiosity, with the intention of fun, or just because of a friend request rather than the idea of traveling. The subsequent theoretical developments should also note that passive consumers who are just engaging with the content are different from active consumers who are involved and making their travel decisions.

5.3 Practical Implications

The study implies that for travel influencers, it is crucial to note that engagement statistics alone must not be a parameter to consider when developing material. Rather than constantly trying to gain a massive amount of likes, shares, and comments, the influencers should focus on appealing to the needs of the people and share travel tips, costs, recommendations, and experience culture. Since content quality had a slight but significant effect on To increase the positive impact, influencers must maintain the audience's perception of their content as being genuine and informative as opposed to commercial.

For the tourism boards and marketers, the study brings out the notion of the right mix in digital marketing. Although influencer partnerships are still great for exposure, they should not focus heavily on influencer-driven sales. However, it is suggested that integrating influencer marketing with targeted ads, word-of-mouth promotion, and place marketing campaigns could be more effective. For instance, incorporating influencer-generated content with

discounts, loyalty programs, or travel experience packages could improve the relevant conversion rate. However, to avoid a mismatch between the influencer and the audience, an analysis of the following factors is vital for destination marketers. Since influencer credibility is not a deterministic factor, the tourism boards should direct their attention toward choosing influencers that resonate with their target market as opposed to general influencers with extremely high followers. This is because micro and nano influencers, who have higher audience engagement rates than macros and mega-influencers, are likely to have a higher conversion rate when it comes to conversion-related marketing.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

However, there are certain limitations in this study that should be considered. The former limitation is more important than the latter, including the sample size and representativeness of the sample used in analyzing the results. The results are based on responses from 400 people from Islamabad and Lahore, which may not truly represent the total social media users' travel behavior throughout Pakistan. It is suggested that future research should recruit more participants and include those from rural and semi-urban regions to examine the impact of digital further. One of the limitations of the current study consists of the use of cross-sectional data, which is used to collect data at a specific moment in time. Travel decisions are generally taken over time and range from seasonal issues and budgeting cycles to seeing the development of the culture of traveling in the world. Monthly surveys examining the extent to which consumers interact with influencers before, during, and after the decision to travel would be of immense usefulness.

However, some other crucial factors, like the cost of destination, visa requirements, and previous travel history, were not captured in this study, and only the levels of engagement, credibility, and content quality were considered. Future research could include more elaborate models that take these factors into consideration in combination with the digital impact. Furthermore, while basic correlation and regression analysis using SPSS also brought some statistical results, more accurate, elaborate, and

extensive algorithms can be used for forecasting. This is because analyzing travel influencer content and comments using AI-based sentiment analysis could discover behavioral characteristics that are not discernable in comparative statistical analysis. Therefore, this study could be replicated in the future and could include other forms of content, such as videos and blogs, to understand variations in the impact of content in promoting active travel. The study classified any form of social media communication as social media, but the comparison and ranking of Instagram reels, YouTube vlogs, TikTok videos, and Twitter threads can show which of these tactics is more convincing to specific groups of audiences.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

The purpose of this research was to examine travel decisions that are affected by social media influencers, engagement metrics, influencer credibility, and the quality of content. It means that even though individuals prefer to be influenced by influencers when making travel decisions, influencers are not the sole decisive factor when it comes to destination choices. Likes, shares, and comments seemed to be not strongly connected to decisions in regard to travel, meaning that while social media is helpful for inspiration, other factors such as personal finances, time, and friends' suggestions influence travel decisions.

Another interesting discovery was that the influencer's credibility had no influence on travel decisions, which contradicts the theory that trust is the main determinant of customer behavior in contextualized influencer marketing. However, content quality became more relevant, meaning that if the content presented is appealing, edgy, and informative, it has the potential to turn the tide in terms of travel choices regardless of the perception of low influencer credibility. The regression analysis further affirmed that the only factor that does not play a huge role in determining travel choices was engagement, and consistent with this, we suggested that the effect of social media is best understood within a habitat.

6.2 Contributions to Research and Practice

Therefore, this study has theoretical and practical implications for future studies and practical application to influencer marketing and tourism advertising. Analytically, it affirms the use of influencers in travel decision-making through the statistical analysis done using the SPSS software. Consequently, the application of correlation and regression models refines the knowledge of the interaction between online involvement and offline consumer activity, which is missing from the quantitative influencer marketing literature. From an empirical perspective, it could be helpful to travel influencers, marketers, and tourism boards. Instead, informative and high-quality content featuring good-quality visuals is likely to impact audiences more than any sort of engagement statistics. Therefore, this work has implications for marketers directly involved in collaborating with influencers or travel agencies marketing to clients about travel and tourists in general since it highlights the need to incorporate broader marketing strategies beyond social media engagement. It is suggested that destination branding campaigns alongside pricing tactics and interactive calls should be combined with influencer marketing to increase conversion rates.

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