Narrative Review on The Impact of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in Shaping Travel Decision among Gen Z

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Abstract

Social media influencers (SMIs) have become significant players due to the exponential growth of digital platforms, especially when it comes to influencing Gen Z's travel preferences and decisions. However, the pervasive influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on Gen Z's travel decisions presents a contemporary challenge for marketers and tourism professionals as this generation seems to be disengaging from traditional advertising, favoring influencer marketing as a more potent means of endorsement that can influence travel decision-making processes. The lack of a comprehensive analysis on how these influencers specifically shape the travel choices of Gen Z's poses a significant problem in navigating the evolving landscape of travel-related content consumption. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on shaping travel decisions among Gen Z's. The approach developed for this study is qualitative content analysis based on secondary data collected from online sources, with a total of 10 articles chosen carefully after going through some selection criteria process. Key findings highlight the pivotal role of authenticity, whereas the positive correlation between perceived authenticity, trust, and engagement among Gen Z. The discussion explores the implications of these findings on Gen Z's travel decision-making, providing insights for marketers, influencers, and researchers.

Keywords: *Travel Decision, Gen Z , Social Media, Social Media Influencers (SMIs), Influencer*

Tinjauan Naratif Mengenai Impak Pempengaruh Media Sosial Terhadap Gen Z Dalam Membuat Keputusan Memilih Destinasi Percutian

Abstrak

Pada era teknologi kini, pempengaruh media sosial memainkan peranan yang sangat penting dalam kalangan Gen Z iaitu generasi yang dikenali sebagai generasi digital. Salah satu pengaruh yang sangat jelas adalah daripada aspek membuat keputusan dalam memilih destinasi percutian. Kesan daripada situasi ini memberikan cabaran kontemporari untuk pemasar dan industri pelancongan kerana generasi ini nampaknya kurang menggunakan pengiklanan tradisional. Tambahan pula Gen Z ini lebih memilih untuk menjadikan pempengaruhi media sosial sebagai rujukan utama dalam memilih destinasi percutian. Oleh itu, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneliti impak pempengaruh media sosial dalam pemilihan destinasi percutian dalam kalangan Gen Z. Pendekatan yang digunakan untuk kajian ini adalah analisis kandungan kualitatif berdasarkan data sekunder yang dikumpul daripada sumber atas talian, dengan sejumlah 10 artikel dipilih setelah melalui beberapa proses kriteria pemilihan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa faktor penting yang mempengaruhi Gen Z dalam memilih destinasi percutian adalah melalui keaslian kandungan dalam media sosial yang dipaparkan oleh pempengaruhi media sosial. selain itu terdapat juga hubungan positif antara keaslian kandungan dalam media sosial, kepercayaan terhadap pempengaruh itu sendiri serta interaksi dalam talian dalam kalangan Gen Z. Kajian ini turut memberikan cerapan untuk pemasar, pempengaruh media sosial serta penyelidik

Kata Kunci: *Pemilihan percutian, Gen Z, Media sosial, Pempengaruh Media Sosial*

Introduction

In today's digital age, the pervasiveness of social media has fundamentally altered how people connect, consume information, and make decisions by providing a platform for instant communication, access to a vast amount of information, and influencing decision-making processes via user-generated content and peer recommendations

(Jovicic, 2019). The projected number of social media users globally in 2023 is 4.89 billion, as reported by Statisca (2023), representing a growth of 6.5% compared to 2022 (Gaubys, 2023). Hence, this demonstrates that social media has emerged as a substantial medium through which individuals can establish worldwide connections, remain informed about current events and trends, and solicit reviews and opinions prior to making purchases. Consequently, these developments have fundamentally transformed consumer behavior, information consumption, and social interactions (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019).

As they were born into the technological age, digital natives, or Gen Z, are a particularly influential demographic cohort among the many navigating this digital landscape (Evans & Robertson, 2020). As a result of their increasing interdependence with the virtual world, the preferences and behaviors of this generation have garnered considerable interest, specifically in regard to travel decision-making. The rising reliance of this generation on the virtual domain has prepared the way for social media influencers (SMIs) to play a crucial role in shaping trends and opinions, notably in the tourism industry. The impact of this shift goes beyond the mere production of content; social media influencers (SMIs) have undergone a transformation from content creators into cultural curators, providing curated insights into ways of life that deeply resonate with the authentic and exclusive demands of Generation Z.

Travel promotion and the facilitation of travel-related services have increasingly relied on online platforms in the digital age (Almeida-Santana et al., 2020). In a dynamic marketplace where individuals search for travel-related information, inspiration, and validation, the digital environment has evolved into the virtual environment. As the tourism industry adopts these digital platforms, a novel landscape arises, shaped by the dynamic characteristics of social media and its influence on customer behavior. A comprehensive comprehension of the larger context necessitates an attention to the evolving dynamics of how individuals strategise, encounter, and disseminate information regarding their travel endeavors. Travelers, especially those belonging to the younger Gen Z demographic, have become less dependent on conventional advertising methods and word-of-mouth advertisements. Conversely, they engage actively in online interaction, capitalising on social media platforms to investigate potential destinations, obtain information, and disseminate personal experiences. This change in behaviour not only indicates a deviation from traditional travel

strategising but also emphasises the increasing impact of digital platforms in molding travel narratives.

The impact of social media influencers (SMIs), who have attained authoritative status on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and blogs, is deeply intertwined with the current nature of travel choices made by Gen Z. Gen Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, has relied on social media as their primary source of information, inspiration, and connection, shifting conventional methods of travel decision-making (Gambini, 2023). Furthermore, the tourism industry, which was previously dependent on conventional methods of advertising and decision-making, has experienced an enormous shift as it has adapted to the digital age. The tourism and travel industry has experienced significant shifts in terms of promotion of destinations and experience of travel-related services due to the impact of online platforms and social media's pervasiveness (Mandić & Garbin Praničević, 2019). Consequently, social media influencers (SMIs) emerge as pivotal figures in shaping the decision-making processes of Gen Z as they navigate the digital landscape in search of travel-related information. The extensive availability of social media platforms provides benefits on social media influencers (SMIs), as it offers them exclusive visibility and engagement. This enables social media influencers (SMIs) to disseminate individualised and aesthetically captivating accounts of their travel experiences.

The study delves into the psychological and emotional dimensions of the narratives propagated by social media influencers (SMIs). By employing narrative analysis techniques, this study aims to unpack the narratives woven by social media influencers (SMIs), exploring the narratives' content, emotional resonance, persuasive techniques, and the subsequent impact on the travel preferences and choices of Gen Z. Understanding these nuances is pivotal for stakeholders in the travel industry, including destination marketers, tour operators, and hospitality services, seeking to align their strategies with the evolving preferences of this influential demographic.

This study utilised the Consumer Decision-Making Model proposed by Hoffman and Bateson which is a subsequent modified version of the classical model by Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (EKB) (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019) in order explore the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on Gen Z's travel decisions. The model emphasises crucial phases in the decision-making process, adapting them to correspond with the distinctively digital and social media-focused

behavior exhibited by Gen Z. Stimulus is the initial step in which Gen Z is attributed to recognize an interest or demand for travel through exposure to SMI content that acts as a catalyst. Following this is problem awareness, which occurs when exposure to the content of social media influencers (SMIs) induces the perception of a desire or need for travel. Subsequently, information search takes place, during which Gen Z heavily depends on social media influencers (SMIs) to obtain recommendations, insights, and experiences regarding travel destinations. The evaluation of alternatives emerges as an essential phase, during which Gen Z evaluates a variety of travel options predominately on the basis of the information provided by social media influencers (SMIs). They impact the commitment to a particular travel option, which in turn influences the decision or choice of purchase. During the post-purchase evaluation phase, the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on the overall satisfaction with the travel experience and the decision is subsequently considered. By the implementation of the Consumer Decision-Making Model, this research endeavors to look into the numerous impacts of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) throughout the different phases of the decision-making process for Gen Z travelers. Therefore, using a narrative lens and a conceptual framework adapted from the Consumer Decision-Making model as shown in Figure 1, this study intends to offer a nuanced knowledge of the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on shaping the travel decisions of Gen Z. Therefore, the following is the research objective:

RO: To explore the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on Gen Z travelers' decision-making
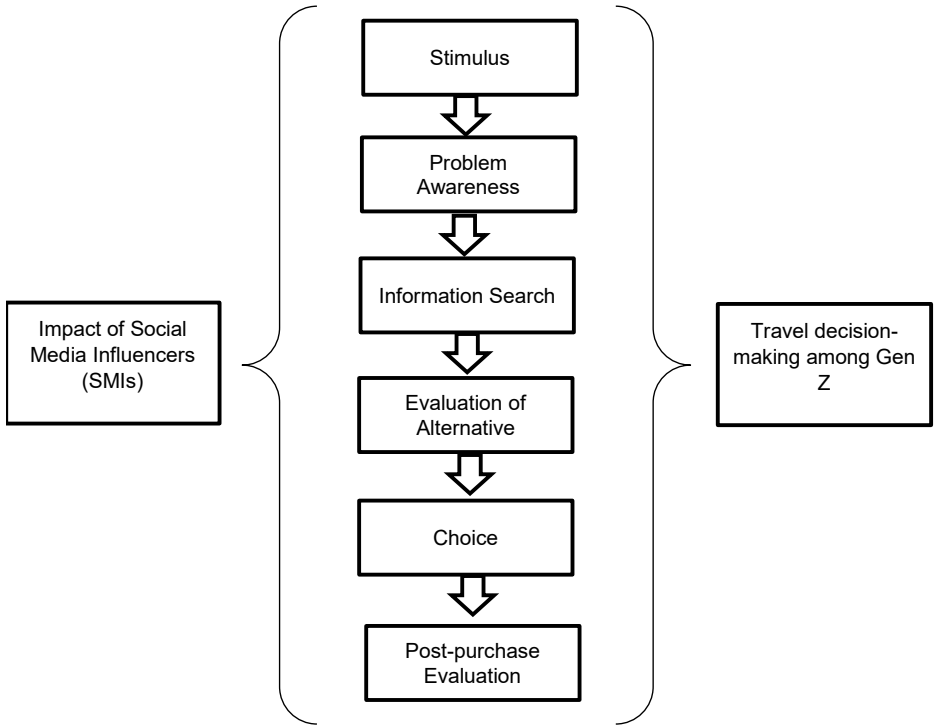
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

Social media influencer (SMI)

The landscape of consumer influence has been profoundly altered by the transformative evolution of digital influencers across different industries. Previously, celebrities were the key brand ambassadors, depending on conventional media to spread the word about goods and services. The influence of their perceived credibility, personal appeal, and knowledge on consumer choices was substantial, prompting businesses to make substantial investments in celebrity endorsements (Yılmazdoğan et al, 2021). A paradigm shift in the nature of influence occurred with the emergence of social media, wherein social media influencers (SMIs) significantly transformed the landscape. Social media platforms have

begun to significantly impact the purchasing decisions, sentiments, and thoughts of individuals (Seibel, 2021). These platforms have supplanted conventional information sources, which were analogous to advice from acquaintances. Regarding the number of followers, Social media influencers (SMIs) are classified as either mega-influencers (comprising a substantial following) or micro-influencers (comprising a smaller follower base). These individuals are acknowledged as credible sources of information. Micro-influencers, who are distinguished by their regular engagements and perceived authenticity, exert a more substantial influence on their followers in contrast to mega-influencers (Avcı & Bilgili, 2020).

The phenomenon of micro-influencers has been observed to demonstrate a high level of proficiency in the strategic cultivation of extensive follower networks, primarily through the utilisation of captivating and interactive content on various social media platforms. This has resulted in their increased recognition and appeal within the context of content creation and dissemination, a trend that has been further facilitated by the expanding opportunities in this domain. The regular engagements between individuals and their followers contribute to the swift dissemination of promotional or sales-oriented content, resulting in a sustained impact. The activities, viewpoints, and day-to-day schedules of social media influencers (SMIs) are closely monitored by their followers across multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter (Arora et al., 2019). Individuals with social media influencers (SMIs), who possess persuasive abilities that surpass the average, have the capacity to exert a significant impact on the emotions, thoughts, and purchasing choices of their actively involved audience.

Furthermore, this profound impact transcends mere product endorsements and affects the field of destination selection and touristic products. Through a variety of marketing platforms and material, such as commercials, social media influencers (SMIs) significantly influence consumer choices pertaining to travel and tourism (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019). Tourists are increasingly turning to opinions, personal experiences, and travel remarks as sources of knowledge due to the rapid production and distribution of information enabled by social media platforms. According to Ki and Kim (2019), the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on potential tourists' decision-making processes is significant. This is achieved through the vivid description and reliving of their travel experiences. The present analysis traces the narrative of digital influencers, examining their evolution from

conventional celebrity endorsements to the contemporary influence exerted by social media influencers (SMIs) across various consumer domains.

Gen Z and Travel Decision-Making

Pop (2020) indicates that the trust that members of Gen Z setting in social media influencer has a significant effect on their travel choices. Therefore, Gen z shows their trust on Social media influencers (SMIs) on travel-decision compared to the influence of word-of-mouth recommendations from relatives and friends. A substantial percentage of Gen Z (52%) places greater trust in influencer information compared to conventional advertising and mainstream media (Fontein 2019). This generation, surprisingly, likes to see influencers in advertisements beyond celebrities. Gen Z appears unconcerned or indifferent to this commercialization, in contrast to the increasing trend of influencers leveraging their persuasive skills for financial gain via brand partnerships and social media monetization. According to Faisal & Dhasia (2022), it has been observed that social media influencers (SMIs) possess the ability to rapidly establish a genuine and meaningful connection with individuals belonging to Gen Z. The pivotal factor resides in the level of trust that the current generation bestows upon individuals perceived as 'real people,' thereby establishing digital influencers as essential instruments for the endorsement of products and services. The establishment of trust among Gen Z towards digital influencers is primarily based on the factors of credibility, authenticity and trustworthiness, as highlighted by Han and Chen (2021). This trust serves as the foundation for digital influencers to achieve a level of fame akin to that of celebrities within this demographic.

The efficacy of social media influencer is substantiated by the pre-existing and robust rapport that Gen Z has established with influencers, as they highly esteem and place trust in their viewpoints. Moreover, it has been observed that individuals belonging to Gen Z display a notable inclination towards experiencing a fear of missing out (FOMO) and actively strive to participate in endeavors that align with the behaviors and interests of their online counterparts. The reciprocal nature of the connection between Gen Z and digital media extends beyond a unidirectional relationship, as individuals belonging to this cohort are not solely passive consumers, but also active contributors in terms of generating content. The utilization of internet-based tools for content creation allows individuals to harness their technological proficiency, thereby transforming them into influential figures within the digital field. In

the realm of social media, it has been observed that individuals belonging to Gen Z exhibit a tendency to gravitate towards individuals whom they can relate to or those who share similar characteristics with themselves. This inclination often leads them to prefer digital influencers over conventional celebrities such as actors, musicians, or athletes. In the domain of hospitality and tourism marketing, it is of utmost importance for marketers to acknowledge the significance of Gen Z's inclination towards niche influencers, individuals whom they can identify with and regard as trustworthy. The preference for influencers over traditional celebrities highlights the distinct dynamics of influencer engagement within the present generation.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design and focused on a narrative literature review incorporating internet-based research ranging the years 2019 to 2023. This process included performing specific searches on databases incorporating predetermined keywords, including "social media influencers," "SMIs". "generation Z," "gen Z," and "travel decision," which were relevant to the research objective. Both English and Malay were used to submit the keywords. The Emerald Insight and Google Scholar databases contained the journals and contributions that fulfilled the selection criteria.

Initially, records that were identified via the databases search and possessed titles that corresponded to the subject matter of interest were chosen. A subsequent stage involved conducting a search for additional records in the references of the chosen records, meta-analyses, and reviews pertaining to the subject matter. The abstracts of the chosen records were evaluated in the third stage and excluded if they failed to fulfill the selection criteria. The final step involved determining the eligibility of the full-text articles. Based on the titles and abstracts, it appeared that a total of 15 papers met the criteria required for the study. After examining the content of these articles, 5 of them were deemed unsuitable for inclusion. This was performed in several instances because of an indication that the articles did not share a significant amount of similarities with the subject matter. Only articles that met the following selection criteria were included in the review:

(a) The study assessed the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on Gen Z's travel decisions-making

(b) All of the articles pertain to the comprehension of the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on Gen Z's travel decisions-making

(c) The study included research findings, statistics, and an experiment.

(d) A peer-reviewed journal published that study.

Finding and Discussion

The journals selected for the study are journals that are related to a research objective which is to explore the impact of social media influencers on shaping travel decision-making among Gen Z. The 10 journals selected are as follows:

Table 1: Description of selected studies

NO	AUTHOR	TITLE	METHOD	FINDING
1	Yılmazdoğan et al., (2021)	The impact of the source credibility of Instagram influencers on travel intention: The mediating role of para-social interaction	Quantitative	Findings show that the trustworthiness and expertise sub-dimensions of source credibility exert a considerable impact on travel intention. These factors play a significant mediating role between the trustworthiness and expertise sub-dimensions of parasocial interaction and travel intention.
2	Zorlu & Candan, (2023)	The impact of social media influencers on destination preferences: a cross-generation comparison	Quantitative	The study shows that people from different generations have varying opinions about social media influencers, and these influencers play a crucial role in shaping destination preferences. The study highlights that the influence of social media influencers on

			destination preferences varies among the X, Y, and Z generations.
3	Joyce & Chen, (2021)	Millennial social media users' intention to travel: the moderating role of social media influencer following behavior	Quantitative	The findings show that social media influencers have a positive impact on Millennials' attitudes and intentions to travel. The credibility of influencers plays a key role in influencing these attitudes and intentions, especially for users who follow influencers.
4	Kimilli, (2023)	The impact of instagram travel influencers on Gen Z's tourism consumption	Mixed-method	The study shows that Instagram is a widely used platform for influencer marketing because of its wide audience and engagement benefits. Influencers, by sharing genuine content and personal experiences, create trust with their followers, resulting in higher brand awareness, website visits, and sales. Moreover, Gen Z prioritizes experiences over possessions, values authenticity, and emphasizes sustainability when making travel decisions.
5	Ragab, (2022)	How do social media influencers affect digital natives 2.0 to travel inside Egypt? Integrating the theory of planned behavior and	Quantitative	The study found that argument quality, SMIs attractiveness, and SMIs credibility positively influenced attitude towards tourism SMIs among Digital Natives 2.0. Additionally, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control had significant

		elaboration likelihood model		positive influences on behavioral intention to travel domestically to destinations endorsed by SMIs
6	Faisal & Dhusia, (2022)	Social Media Travel Influencers' Attributes and Tourists' Travel Intention: The Role of Source Credibility	Qualitative	The study shows that Social media travel influencers have a significant impact on tourists' travel intentions by influencing their perceptions and decisions regarding travel destinations. The trustworthiness, expertise, and intimate self-disclosures of travel influencers play a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions and intentions to visit specific destinations
7	Pop, (2020)	The impact of trust in social media influencers on the travel decisions of Generations Y and Z	Quantitative	The results indicate that the trust that generations Y and Z have in SMIs has a positive impact on the first stage of their travel decision-making and that there are significant differences between Generation Y and Generation Z regarding the roles of SMIs in travel decisions.
8	Dimitriou & AbouElgheit (2019)	Understanding generation z's social decision-making in travel	Qualitative	The study shows that social Media Influencers (SMIs) have a significant impact on Generation Z's social decision-making process when shopping for travel and tourism services. Gen Zers are highly influenced by SMIs' recommendations and content, often trusting them more than traditional advertising. SMIs play a crucial role

				in shaping Gen Zers' perceptions, preferences, and choices in the travel industry, making them a powerful marketing tool for businesses targeting this demographic
9	Mchavu et al., (2022)	How Perceptions of Travel Influencers on Instagram Affect Visit Intention? A Research on Generation Z from Zanzibar	Quantitative	The findings of the study show that there is a significant relationship between self-disclosure, self-expressive influencers, attitude toward posts, and visit intention among Generation Z residents in Zanzibar. Additionally, the study found that travel influencers on Instagram have a direct impact on Gen Z's intentions to visit local tourism sites
10	Mahdzar et al., (2022)	Trustworthiness of Travel Information Sources on Instagram and Intentions to Visit Gopeng Perak	Quantitative	The study shows that influencers play a crucial role in promoting travel destinations by leveraging their social media platforms to showcase destinations, share personal experiences, and provide recommendations to their followers. Their authentic and relatable content can inspire and influence followers' travel decisions, making them valuable assets for destination marketing.

The findings of this narrative analysis make a substantial scholarly contribution to the knowledge of the social media influencers (SMIs) impact the travel choices of Gen Z. The intricate relationships between SMIs and this demographic's decision-making processes are highlighted

by every significant study area. The study indicates a major connection between Gen Z travellers' choice of travel destinations and the content of social media influencers (SMIs) (Zorlu & Candan, 2023). The study emphasises the diverse ways in which social media influencers (SMIs) influence perceptions and preferences of Gen Z by identifying specific content categories, including destination reviews, vlogs, and storytelling, which direct them towards particular travel destinations. It also implies that social media influencers' (SMIs) portrayals and discussions about destinations in their content have a significant impact on Gen Z travellers' decision-making, which in turn shapes their tastes and influences the places they decide to visit.In addition to this, the significance of perceived authenticity becomes prominent when exploring the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on the travel choices of Gen Z.

According to the study, trust and engagement among this demographic are considerably increased through the use of authenticity in content creation (Kimilli, 2023). The increasing importance of authenticity as a catalyst for influence drives social media influencers (SMIs) to emphasise the value of genuine and transparent communication in their content. Perceived authenticity pertains to the extent to which the content produced by influencers appears genuine and authentic in the perspective of their followers. Consequently, establishing trust and engagement is greatly impacted when social media influencers (SMIs) emphasise authenticity in their content creation, particularly with Gen Z (Erwin et al., 2023). Thus, Gen Z are more inclined to trust and engage with social media influencer (SMIs) content if they perceive it is authentic. Moreover, as authenticity becomes a significant generator of influence, social media influencers (SMIs) should communicate honestly and transparently. therefore, to establish credibility and interest among their audience, Gen Z travel decisions can be significantly impacted by influencers who produce content that is perceived as genuine, honest, and transparent (Pop et al., 2022).

Understanding the impact of social media influencers' (SMIs) content is significantly enhanced through the review of engagement metrics and decision-making processes. "Engagement metrics" pertain to measurable data, including likes, shares, and comments, which indicate the degree to which an audience engages with a particular piece of content in an active and positive manner. Additionally, the study indicates that these engagement measures and Gen Z travellers' decision-making processes are positively correlated (Zaib Abbasi et al., 2023). Specifically, the travel decisions of Gen Z are influenced and

impacted to a greater extent when content originating from social media influencers (SMIs) attracts a greater number of likes, shares, and remarks (Barbe & Neuburger, 2021). Furthermore, the findings suggest that increased involvement on social media platforms is associated with improved trust and influence over Gen Z travel decisions. In essence, the extent to which an audience positively and actively engages with the content determines the magnitude of its influence on their travel decisions. This emphasises the importance of quantitative interaction as a key measure of social media influencers' (SMIs) content's ability to reach and influence Gen Z travellers.

Another key area to explore pertains to how travel preferences are established. Additionally, certain types of influencers are identified as more effective in influencing specific travel preferences, providing strategic insights for businesses seeking to collaborate with influencers to target specific market segments. The results show that social media influencers (SMIs) have an impact on traveller preferences for destinations as well as on the details of the trip. This could involve the kind of lodging selected, the means of transportation employed, and the itinerary's scheduled activities (Ragab, 2022). social media influencers (SMIs) are essentially able to mould and modify the preferences of their audience with regard to the more practical aspects of travel. Additionally, certain influencers are more successful than others at influencing particular travel choices. This information is helpful for companies who want to work with influencers because it implies that various influencers might be more knowledgeable or have a bigger impact in particular travel-related niches or sectors. Utilising this information, companies may select influencers more carefully who fit into their target market groups, resulting in more productive partnerships and focused changes to customer preferences.

Furthermore, the study suggests that the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) creates a dynamic environment in which conventional decision-making procedures are experiencing significant transformations. In other word, Gen Z travelers appear to be relying more and more on the advice and content offered by social media influencers (SMIs), suggesting that the conventional ways of obtaining information and making decisions about travel are changing (Ana & Istudor, 2019). Moreover, social media influencers (SMIs), are not only affecting some travel behaviours but are also fundamentally altering the way Gen Z travelers' approach and choose for a purchase when travelling. Therefore, this study shows that social media influencers (SMIs) are not only influencing specific travel preferences but are also

playing a transformative role in reshaping how Gen Z travelers' approach and make decisions regarding their travel-related purchases.

Trust is identified as a fundamental element that influences the credibility and effectiveness of social media influencers (SMIs) in shaping travel decisions. This study emphasises the recurring theme of trust in the context of social media influencers (SMIs) and their recommendations, particularly among Gen Z travelers. The analysis emphasises on exploring the factors that contribute to the trustworthiness of social media influencers (SMIs), shedding light on elements crucial for building and maintaining trust among their audience. The identified factors include transparency, disclosure of partnerships, and consistent content (Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021: Faisal & Dhusia, 2022). Transparency refers to the openness and honesty of social media influencers (SMIs) in their communication with their audience. Disclosing partnerships means being clear about any collaborations or sponsorships that might influence the content. Consistent content implies that the reliability and coherence of the information shared by social media influencers (SMIs) contribute to building trust over time. The study underscores the importance of trust as a fundamental element influencing the credibility and effectiveness of social media influencers (SMIs) in shaping travel decisions. In other words, when Gen Z travelers trust the recommendations and content provided by social media influencers (SMIs), they are more likely to consider and act upon those suggestions when making their travel-related decisions. This insight into the significance of trust emphasises that, for social media influencers (SMIs) to have a meaningful impact on the travel decisions of Gen Z individuals, they need to prioritise transparent communication, disclose any potential biases, and maintain a consistent and reliable presence in their content (Pop, 2020). Building and maintaining trust are key components for social media influencers (SMIs) to be credible and effective influencers in the realm of travel.

The implications of these findings for the travel industry are profound. The study indicates that the travel industry stands to benefit significantly from strategic collaborations with social media influencers (SMIs). Understanding the preferences and behaviors of Gen Z, as illuminated by the study, opens up opportunities for targeted marketing strategies. Leveraging the authenticity, engagement, and trust associated with influencer content, businesses in the travel sector can enhance their appeal to this tech-savvy and socially conscious demographic. Adjustments in marketing strategies to align with the dynamics of SMI influence may prove instrumental in staying relevant and appealing to the evolving tastes of Gen Z travelers.

Addressing the challenges associated with ethical considerations and potential drawbacks of SMI influence is imperative. While social media influencers (SMIs) wield significant power in shaping travel decisions, ethical concerns, such as undisclosed partnerships or misleading content, can erode trust. Recognising these challenges presents an opportunity for the travel industry to foster authenticity and transparency in influencer collaborations. Businesses and influencers alike can navigate this landscape by adhering to ethical guidelines, ensuring transparent communication, and aligning with the values of Gen Z, thereby mitigating potential drawbacks and fostering trust in influencer collaborations.

In conclusion, this research significantly contributes to understanding of how social media influencers (SMIs) impact the travel decisions of Gen Z. The synthesis of findings reveals the intricate ways in which social media influencers (SMIs) influence preferences and decisions, emphasising their multifaceted and dynamic role. The implications for the travel industry suggest a need for strategic adjustments to capitalise on the opportunities presented by influencer collaborations. Recognising the evolving role of social media influencers (SMIs) as long-term influencers and addressing associated challenges with authenticity and ethics are crucial steps for businesses looking to navigate and leverage the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) in shaping the travel decisions of Gen Z. This study, therefore, stands as a valuable resource in guiding the industry towards effective and ethical practices in influencer marketing within the dynamic landscape of Gen Z travel behavior

Conclusion

The study aims to explore the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on Gen Z travelers' decision-making. The findings of this research emphasising the pivotal role of authenticity, the positive correlation between perceived authenticity, trust, and engagement among Gen Z. Engagement metrics further demonstrate the influence of social media influencers (SMIs), with likes, shares, and comments playing a crucial role in influencing travel decisions. The travel industry should recognise these attributes as key drivers and integrate them into marketing strategies. Collaborative efforts with social media influencers (SMIs) who embody these qualities can enhance the industry's appeal to the discerning preferences of Gen Z. For social media influencers (SMIs), maintaining and emphasising these qualities in their content is crucial for

sustained influence. Marketers should align their strategies with the authenticity and expertise demonstrated by social media influencers (SMIs). Policymakers may find value in supporting initiatives that promote honest and reliable content, contributing to a transparent and trustworthy digital landscape. Together, these recommendations foster an environment where content creators, marketers, and policymakers collectively contribute to responsible and impactful digital influence.

Building upon the identified factors, future research can delve deeper into understanding how authenticity, trust, reliability, and other content attributes interact with specific travel preferences of Gen Z. Investigating the interplay between these qualities and the effectiveness of various content formats or collaboration strategies could provide additional insights. Furthermore, exploring how these factors evolve over time and adapt to emerging digital trends is crucial for staying ahead in this dynamic landscape.

In conclusion, the research not only underscores the evolving landscape of travel decision-making in the digital age but also emphasises the enduring significance of credibility, trust, and other content attributes. As Gen Z continues to be influenced by these factors, it necessitates a collective effort from the travel industry, social media influencers (SMIs), marketers, and policymakers to navigate and thrive in this dynamic digital ecosystem.

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