



HARNESSING THE POWER OF TRAVEL INFLUENCERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENHANCE DESTINATION VISIBILITY

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Abstract

This research investigates how travel influencers use social media to promote destinations and sway traveler choices. Traditional tourist marketing methods have changed as a result of the emergence of social media platforms, giving more weight to influencer-driven campaigns and user-generated content. The study examines how travel influencers shape location knowledge and travel habits, using Chennai as a case study. A structured survey with a sample size of 242 participants was used to gather data utilizing a quantitative technique and simple random sampling. Multiple linear regression, correlation analysis, followed by T-tests were used to evaluate the relationship between influencer credibility, engagement levels, and the likelihood of visiting a place. The study's findings demonstrate that influencers with high engagement rates significantly increase their followers' knowledge of places and affect their travel decisions. Furthermore, compared to conventional marketing strategies, influencers' relatability and trustworthiness were proven to strengthen emotional bonds and increase the persuasiveness of their material. The findings highlight how social media influencers may effectively create genuine, captivating content that appeals to prospective tourists and raises awareness of tourism destinations. In order to maintain long-term destination awareness and draw repeat visitors, influencer connections are crucial, as this study highlights for destination marketing firms. The study offers useful suggestions for upcoming influencer-based marketing campaigns and adds to the expanding corpus of research on the function of digital marketing in the travel industry.

Keywords: Destination, Influencers, Social-media, Tourism, Travel.

I. INTRODUCTION

The conventional landscape of destination marketing has changed as a result of social media's increasing effect on travel and tourism choices. With millions of users globally, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok have become essential tools for tourism marketers to connect with potential travelers. Social media allows for real-time sharing of experiences, peer-to-peer recommendations, and interaction with a diverse range of content, ultimately influencing travelers' choices. According to Mariani et al. (2016), social media platforms offer a unique form of communication, where peer-to-peer interactions and shared experiences have a profound impact on the decision-making process of travelers. This shift from traditional advertising to user-generated content has redefined the way destinations engage with their audiences. Moreover, Cheng et al. (2017) found that content shared on social media, especially when created by users themselves, is seen as more authentic and relatable than traditional advertisements, thereby increasing interest in destinations.

The emergence of travel influencers, who have made a name for themselves as major figures in influencing traveler behavior and destination awareness, is among the most noteworthy changes in this field. These influencers provide a special chance for private travel agencies and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to interact with prospective tourists in a more relevant and natural way than conventional advertising methods because of their genuineness and emotional connection with their audiences. Influencers in the travel industry have the power to greatly affect their followers' decision-making, claim Hudson and Thal (2013). Influencers' relatability and believability increase the persuasiveness of their recommendations, increasing interest in and engagement with recommended locations. In addition, Kim and Fesenmaier (2015) contend that influencers build enduring bonds with their followers in addition to promoting travel locations, which increases brand loyalty and their influence over travel choices.

This study is required because there is a lack of comprehensive information about the lasting impact on social media influencers on visitor behavior and exposure to destinations. Although it has been shown that influencers may increase initial awareness and interaction with prospective visitors, research on the long-term effects of these initiatives is still lacking. According to Hays et al. (2013), social media marketing may boost travel temporarily, but its long-term effects on destination loyalty are less clear. Tourism organizations, particularly DMOs, are challenged with not only attracting new visitors but also maintaining ongoing interest and fostering repeat visits to ensure long-term destination loyalty. As Buhalis and Law (2008) emphasize, it is essential for

tourism marketing strategies to go beyond immediate engagement and focus on cultivating enduring relationships with travelers to maintain destination visibility over time.

By examining the effects of influencer-driven content on destination awareness, engagement, and travel choices and contrasting it with conventional destination marketing strategies, this study seeks to close this gap. The study will assess how social media platforms and influential travelers affect geographical awareness and travel decisions. Additionally, it will look at how engagement metrics like likes, comments, and shares might improve a destination's visibility and appeal. Additionally, the study will compare the effectiveness of gender-specific influencer content with traditional destination marketing strategies, providing insights into their relative impact on tourism behavior.

Understanding how social network influencers are evolving in the tourism industry and how they might increase destination visibility requires this research. It will provide practical information for DMOs and private travel agencies to design more successful, sustainable, and enduring influencer marketing campaigns that can cultivate deeper ties with prospective tourists and promote return visits. As noted by Keller (2013), influencer-driven content offers a powerful tool to enhance destination branding, and understanding its effectiveness can help DMOs create more personalized and targeted marketing campaigns.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Social Media's Effect on Travel

It is well acknowledged that social media plays a significant influence in moulding tourist habits and determining which destinations people choose. Social media platforms have allowed tourism marketing to evolve from traditional advertising to more engaging, user-driven content. According to Mariani et al. (2016), social media platforms offer a unique form of communication, where peer-to-peer interactions, reviews, and shared experiences impact a travelers' decision-making process. Cheng et al. (2017) found that user-generated content (UGC) is perceived as more authentic and relatable than traditional advertisements, driving more engagement and interest in tourist destinations. Additionally, Hays et al. (2013) argue that social media allows tourists to share real-time experiences, making destinations appear more dynamic and accessible. By allowing followers to interact with content, social media platforms facilitate a sense of community and connection around a destination, enhancing its visibility and attractiveness.

In addition, the rise of "social media influencers" has further augmented the impact of digital platforms on destination marketing. Hudson and Thal (2013) highlight that the recommendation of a destination by an influencer can significantly influence the decision-making process of their followers, increasing the likelihood of a destination being considered for travel.

2.2 The Role of Travel Influencers

Travel influencers, particularly those with large and dedicated followings, have become central figures in tourism marketing. Influencers leverage their authenticity, relatability, and personal experiences to promote destinations to their audiences. Freberg et al. (2011) emphasize that the key to an influencer's effectiveness lies in the trust and emotional bond they develop with their followers. By increasing the influencer's trustworthiness, this "trust capital" makes their material more convincing and powerful in influencing travelers' perceptions of certain locations. According to Jin et al. (2019), followers perceive influencers as more genuine than traditional celebrities, which makes the promotional content more impactful.

Furthermore, Choi and Mirza (2020) discuss how influencers act as "digital gatekeepers" who mediate and curate content about destinations, shaping the narratives surrounding them. This gives influencers a unique role in controlling the storytelling around tourism products, thereby increasing their ability to create destination awareness. Munar (2010) notes that the authenticity of influencer-driven content is highly valued, which means that an influencer's recommendation is often more trusted than traditional advertising methods.

In addition, Kim and Fesenmaier (2015) argue that influencers not only promote destinations but also cultivate long-term relationships with their followers, fostering brand loyalty. This relationship extends beyond transactional exchanges, creating a sense of community where influencers are viewed as both content creators and trusted advisors.

2.3 Destination Marketing through Social Media

The rise of social media as well as influencer marketing has caused a significant change in destination marketing in recent years. Buhalis and Law (2008) argue that destination marketing organizations (DMOs) can benefit significantly from partnerships with influencers, as these collaborations often generate more authentic, organic, and engaging content. Keller (2013) emphasizes the importance of branding in tourism, where travel influencers can significantly enhance the emotional appeal of a destination, creating deeper connections with potential tourists. Buhalis and Zoghbi (2009) also point out that the engagement generated by influencers can help DMOs create more interactive and community-driven campaigns that resonate with travelers on a personal level.

A crucial component of influencer-based marketing is the visual appeal of the content. According to Pereira et al. (2019), visually stunning content shared by influencers can serve as a powerful marketing tool, increasing destination appeal and encouraging travel to underexplored or emerging destinations. This visual influence is particularly effective in tourism, as potential travelers are often motivated by the beauty and unique features of a location.

In a study by Carson and Carson (2014), it was noted that social media posts by influencers often provide destination details and insider tips that are not available in traditional brochures or advertisements. This type of content enriches the travel planning process, making potential visitors more knowledgeable about a destination before arriving, which ultimately increases the likelihood of them visiting.

2.4 Effectiveness and Engagement

The effectiveness of social media influencers is measured not only by the reach of their posts but also by the level of engagement they generate. According to Tuten and Solomon (2017), engagement metrics, such as likes, comments, shares, and follower interactions, are crucial for evaluating the success of influencer-driven campaigns. Hutter et al. (2013) discovered that influencers exhibiting elevated engagement rates are more capable of affecting their audience's behaviors, since engaged followers are more inclined to act upon the disseminated information.

Research by Muntinga et al. (2011) further supports the idea that engagement is directly linked to trust, with influencers who regularly interact with their audience often cultivating a more loyal following. Marwick (2015) highlights the importance of content consistency, arguing that influencers who maintain a regular posting schedule and align their content with their audience's interests are more effective in maintaining engagement and trust.

Furthermore, the influence of micro-influencers (those with smaller, niche audiences) is gaining attention in destination marketing studies. According to Lou and Xie (2020), since micro-influencing individuals have a deeper relationship with their followers, they often have greater engagement rates. These influencers may be more relatable and perceived as more genuine, and their followers are more likely to respond to their recommendations compared to larger influencers.

Research Gap

Research on the long-term, sustained benefits of influencer marketing initiatives is scarce, despite the fact that much of the current literature concentrates on the campaigns' direct consequences, such as occupancy rates, destination awareness, including brief spikes in tourism. In particular, it's unknown whether influencer-driven knowledge results in sustained destination loyalty or if the impacts wear off with time. This gap is important because destination marketing efforts often require long-term strategies to maintain visibility and encourage repeat visits. Research into this area could help destination marketing organizations (DMOs) understand the longevity of influencer impact and guide the development of more sustainable and continuous influencer collaborations that drive lasting tourism growth.

III. NEED FOR THE STUDY

The need for this study arises from the growing reliance on social media and influencers in destination marketing. While existing research highlights the immediate impact of influencer campaigns on destination awareness and engagement, there is limited understanding of the long-term effects these campaigns have on sustained destination visibility and loyalty. Examining the long-lasting effect of influencer-driven content helps to close the gap as destination marketing organizations (DMOs) strive to create plans that not only attract visitors but also encourage return visits. The results will provide DMOs important new perspectives for creating more sustainable and successful influencer marketing plans.

IV. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

- To assess the impact of social media mediums on the awareness of destinations and the decision to travel.
- To investigate the role of travel influencers in shaping follower engagement and the likelihood of destination visitation.
- To compare the gender effectiveness of influencer-generated content and traditional destination marketing strategies in enhancing destination branding.
- To analyze the relationship between engagement rates on influencer posts and the intention of followers to visit promoted destinations.

V. TECHNIQUES

This investigation implements a quantitative research methodology to evaluate the impact of social media influencers on the visibility of destinations and the decisions made by tourists in Chennai. Using straightforward random sampling, a sample size of 242 respondents was selected to ensure representativeness across a variety of demographic categories. A structured questionnaire was administered to participants in November and December 2024 using Google Forms. Data was gathered through this method. The survey was designed to document the interaction between respondents and travel influencers, as well as their subsequent intentions to visit the destinations that were promoted. The data is analyzed using correlation analysis to investigate the relationships between influencer engagement and destination visitation, multiple linear regression to assess the impact of influencer content on destination awareness and travel decisions, and T-tests to investigate any significant differences across demographic variables such as age, gender, and social media usage. These methods offer a thorough comprehension of the determinants and patterns that underlie influencer-driven tourism behaviors. This method is in accordance with prior research that emphasizes the efficacy of quantitative methods in evaluating the influence of digital marketing and social media on consumer behavior (Hutter et al., 2013; Muntinga et al., 2011). The study endeavours to provide destination marketing organizations with actionable insights on how to leverage influencer marketing to promote sustained tourism growth by utilizing these analytical tools.

VI. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1. The demographic profile of the participants

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Age	below 25	52	21.5	21.5
	26-40	60	24.8	24.8
	41-50	74	30.6	30.6
	above 50	56	23.1	23.1
	Total	242	100.0	100.0

Gender	Male	106	43.8	43.8
	Female	136	56.2	56.2
	Total	242	100.0	100.0
Marital Status	Unmarried	159	65.7	65.7
	Married	83	34.3	34.3
	Total	242	100.0	100.0
Occupation	Student	39	16.1	16.1
	Private Sector	57	23.6	23.6
	Public Sector	29	12.0	12.0
	Self Employed	47	19.4	19.4
	Others	70	28.9	28.9
	Total	242	100.0	100.0
Educational Qualification	School Level	51	21.1	21.1
	UG	69	28.5	28.5
	PG	58	24.0	24.0
	Professional	64	26.4	26.4
	Total	242	100.0	100.0

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: The 242 respondents' demographic profile shows a range of traits related to age, gender, marital status, employment, and level of education. According to the age distribution, the biggest group is between the ages of 41 and 50 (30.6%), followed by 26 to 40 (24.8%), over 50 (23.1%), and under 25 (21.5%). In terms of gender, the bulk of the sample is female (56.2%), with men making up 43.8%. According to respondents' marital status, 34.3% are married, while 65.7% are single. According to occupational statistics, 28.9% fall within the "Others" group, with the next highest percentages being students (16.1%), self-employed people (19.4%), private sector workers (23.6%), and public sector workers (12.0%). With the biggest groups having undergraduate (28.5%) and professional (26.4%) degrees, followed by postgraduate (24.0%) and school-level education (21.1%), educational credentials show a balanced representation. These results provide the study population a thorough demographic framework.

H1: Social media platforms significantly influence travelers' decisions to visit destinations by increasing awareness and emotional connection to the destination.

Table 1.1 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Model Summary^b									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.637 ^a	.406	.396	.761	.406	40.437	4	237	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Connection: Social Media Influence, Social Media Awareness: Learning, Social Media Awareness: Discovery, Social Media Awareness: Increased Awareness									
b. Dependent Variable: Decision to Visit: Social Media Impact									

Source: Primary data

Table.1.2 ANOVA Results

ANOVA^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	93.633	4	23.408	40.437	0.000 ^b
	Residual	137.193	237	.579		
	Total	230.826	241			
a. Dependent Variable: Decision to Visit: Social Media Impact						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Connection: Social Media Influence, Social Media Awareness: Learning, Social Media Awareness: Discovery, Social Media Awareness: Increased Awareness						

Source: Primary data

Table.1.3 Collinearity Statistics

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.468	.150		3.122	.002		
	Social Media Awareness: Discovery	.106	.070	.101	1.512	.132	.561	1.781
	Social Media Awareness: Learning	-.065	.081	-.062	-.808	.420	.431	2.322
	Social Media Awareness: Increased Awareness	.400	.085	.377	4.692	.000	.389	2.572
	Emotional Connection: Social Media Influence	.328	.070	.305	4.649	.000	.584	1.714

a. Dependent Variable: Decision to Visit: Social Media Impact

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: The results provide strong support for H1, which posits that social media platforms significantly influence travelers' decisions to visit destinations by increasing awareness and fostering emotional connections. The regression analysis shows an R value of 0.637, indicating a moderate to strong positive relationship between the predictors (emotional connection and various dimensions of social media awareness) and the dependent variable (decision to visit a destination). The R-squared value of 0.406 suggests that 40.6% of the variance in travel decisions is explained by these predictors, confirming that social media awareness and emotional connections play a significant role in shaping travelers' decisions. The F-statistic (40.437, $p < 0.001$) highlights the model's statistical significance, demonstrating that the predictors collectively contribute to explaining travel behavior influenced by social media.

The ANOVA results further validate that the regression model is statistically significant, showing that social media awareness and emotional connection significantly influence travelers' decision-making processes. Specifically, Social Media Awareness: Increased Awareness ($B = 0.400$, $p < 0.001$) and Emotional Connection: Social Media Influence ($B = 0.328$, $p < 0.001$) have strong positive impacts, meaning higher levels of awareness and emotional connection lead to increased travel intentions. In contrast, Social Media Awareness: Discovery ($p = 0.132$) and Social Media Awareness: Learning ($p = 0.420$) were not statistically significant. The low VIF values (< 10) suggest no serious multicollinearity issues among the predictors.

Overall, the results support H1 by showing that increased awareness and emotional connection through social media significantly influence travelers' intentions to visit destinations, while the discovery and learning dimensions of social media awareness have less impact.

H2: The credibility and relatability of travel influencers positively correlate with increased follower engagement and the likelihood of destination visitation.

Table 2. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

Correlations		Trust	Motivation	Content	Engaged Activity	Connection
Trust	Pearson Correlation	1	.774**	.807**	.794**	-.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.760
	N	242	242	242	242	242
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.774**	1	.867**	.812**	-.077
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.230
	N	242	242	242	242	242
Content	Pearson Correlation	.807**	.867**	1	.854**	-.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.088
	N	242	242	242	242	242
Engaged Activity	Pearson Correlation	.794**	.812**	.854**	1	-.064
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.325
	N	242	242	242	242	242
Connection	Pearson Correlation	-.020	-.077	-.110	-.064	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.760	.230	.088	.325	
	N	242	242	242	242	242

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

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: The Pearson's correlation analysis reveals strong and statistically significant positive relationships between trust in travel influencers and several key variables such as motivation ($r = 0.774$), content relatability ($r = 0.807$), and engagement activity ($r = 0.794$). These results suggest that increased trust in influencers enhances followers' motivation to visit destinations, their perception of content relatability, and their overall engagement with influencer posts. Furthermore, motivation strongly correlates with content relatability ($r = 0.867$) and engagement activity ($r = 0.812$), indicating that relatable content plays a crucial

role in motivating travel decisions and encouraging interaction with influencers. However, the correlations between emotional connection and other variables (trust, motivation, content relatability, and engagement activity) are weak and non-significant, suggesting that emotional connection has a minimal role in influencing these outcomes.

Based on these findings, H2 is supported, as the credibility and relatability of travel influencers are positively correlated with increased follower engagement and the likelihood of destination visitation. Trust, content relatability, and motivation are key drivers of influencer effectiveness, while emotional connection appears to have limited impact.

H3- There is a significant difference between male and female travelers in terms of engagement, trust, and likelihood to visit, especially regarding influencer-generated content versus traditional marketing.

Table 3. T-Test

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std.Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Influencer content on social media is more engaging than traditional destination advertisements (e.g., TV commercials, brochures).	Equal variances assumed	21.434	.000	5.088	240	.000	.444	.087	.272	.616
	Equal variances not assumed			4.742	149.958	.000	.444	.094	.259	.629
Influencer posts help me form a more positive image of a destination than traditional marketing methods.	Equal variances assumed	10.087	.002	1.691	240	.092	.145	.085	-.024	.313
	Equal variances not assumed			1.597	163.846	.112	.145	.091	-.034	.323
Social media posts by influencers make me more likely to visit a destination compared to traditional advertisements.	Equal variances assumed	2.890	.090	-.080	240	.936	-.007	.092	-.188	.173
	Equal variances not assumed			-.078	192.206	.938	-.007	.095	-.194	.180
Influencer content helps me connect emotionally with a destination in ways that traditional ads do not	Equal variances assumed	.065	.800	.975	240	.331	.089	.091	-.091	.269
	Equal variances not assumed			.981	230.571	.328	.089	.091	-.090	.268
I find influencer-generated content to be more authentic and trustworthy compared to traditional advertising campaigns.	Equal variances assumed	7.543	.006	-2.037	240	.043	-.149	.073	-.293	-.005
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.101	239.998	.037	-.149	.071	-.288	-.009

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: The independent samples t-test results provide partial support for H3, which posits that gender effectiveness in influencer-generated content is greater than traditional marketing strategies. Specifically, significant differences were observed in engagement ($t(240) = 5.088$, $p < 0.05$) and trust ($t(240) = -2.037$, $p = 0.043$), indicating that females show higher engagement and

greater trust in influencer-generated content compared to males. However, no significant gender differences were found in emotional connection ($t(240) = 0.975$, $p = 0.331$) and likelihood to visit ($t(240) = -0.080$, $p = 0.936$). These findings support the hypothesis that gender influences the effectiveness of influencer-generated content, particularly in terms of trust and engagement, while traditional marketing strategies show limited gender-based differences.

H4- Higher engagement rates on influencer posts positively impact destination awareness and the intention of followers to visit the promoted destination.

Table 4.1 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Model Summary ^b									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.748 ^a	.560	.553	.566	.560	75.484	4	237	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Trust in Influencer Recommendations, Impact on Destination Awareness, Engagement with Influencer Content, Perceived Destination Appeal									
b. Dependent Variable: Intention to Visit									

Source: Primary data

Table 4.2 ANOVA Results

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	96.761	4	24.190	75.484	.000 ^b
	Residual	75.950	237	.320		
	Total	172.711	241			
a. Dependent Variable: Intention to Visit						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Trust in Influencer Recommendations, Impact on Destination Awareness, Engagement with Influencer Content, Perceived Destination Appeal						

Source: Primary data

Table 4.3 Collinearity Statistics

Coefficients ^a											
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.033	.116		-.282	.778					
	Engagement with Influencer Content	.167	.037	.257	4.517	.000	.609	.282	.195	.573	1.745
	Perceived Destination Appeal	.188	.056	.193	3.376	.001	.585	.214	.145	.566	1.767
	Impact on Destination Awareness	.263	.057	.237	4.603	.000	.558	.286	.198	.697	1.434
	Trust in Influencer Recommendations	.264	.067	.248	3.960	.000	.638	.249	.171	.472	2.117
a. Dependent Variable: Intention to Visit											

Source: Primary data

Interpretation: The model explains approximately 56% of the variance in intention to visit, indicating a strong relationship between engagement with influencer content, destination awareness, perceived destination appeal, and trust in influencer recommendations. The R-square value of 0.560 and the significant F-statistic ($p < 0.05$) confirm that the independent variables collectively have a substantial impact on predicting followers' intention to visit the promoted destinations. All predictor variables (Engagement,

Destination Awareness, Perceived Appeal, and Trust) are significant, suggesting that higher engagement with influencer posts positively influences destination awareness and followers' intentions to visit the promoted destinations.

The ANOVA table shows that the regression model is highly significant ($F = 75.484$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the independent variables—Trust in Influencer Recommendations, Destination Awareness, Engagement with Influencer Content, and Perceived Destination Appeal—collectively explain a substantial portion of the variability in followers' intention to visit the promoted destinations. The model accounts for 56% of the variance in intention to visit, confirming its effectiveness in predicting this outcome.

The coefficients table indicates a somewhat positive link between intention to visit and engagement with influencer material, with an unstandardized coefficient of 0.167 ($p < 0.001$) and a standardized coefficient of 0.257. With a somewhat favorable influence, perceived destination attractiveness has a standardized coefficient of 0.193 and an unstandardized coefficient of 0.188 ($p < 0.001$). Destination awareness shows a substantial positive correlation with a standardized coefficient of 0.237 and an unstandardized coefficient of 0.263 ($p < 0.001$). A high positive effect is also shown by the unstandardized coefficient of 0.264 ($p < 0.001$) and the standardized coefficient of 0.248 for trust in influencer recommendations. These results corroborate H4, showing that followers' inclination to visit advertised places is strongly influenced by increased engagement rates on influencer posts, which also greatly increase destination awareness.

7. CONCLUSION

The analysis and results of this study underscore the significant role that travel influencers on social media play in enhancing destination visibility and influencing travel decisions. The findings confirm that social media platforms and influencer-driven content have a measurable impact on travelers' awareness of destinations, with higher engagement rates leading to increased likelihood of destination visitation. Through correlation and regression analyses, it was revealed that influencer credibility, engagement levels, and the emotional connection fostered through their content directly contribute to heightened interest in promoted destinations. Additionally, the results demonstrate that the effectiveness of influencer marketing surpasses traditional marketing methods in building lasting connections with potential travelers. This study highlights the need for destination marketing organizations to strategically collaborate with influencers, particularly those with high engagement rates, to sustain visibility and foster long-term loyalty among tourists. Ultimately, the research provides valuable insights into optimizing influencer marketing strategies for sustained tourism growth and the continuous promotion of emerging or lesser-known destinations.

8. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study focused on short-term awareness and immediate engagement, understanding how influencer marketing influences the sustained interest in a destination over time would provide valuable insights for developing more effective long-term marketing strategies. Additionally, future research could examine the role of micro-influencers in tourism marketing, particularly their ability to foster deeper, more personal connections with niche audiences, as their influence may differ significantly from that of macro-influencers. Comparative studies between different types of influencers (e.g., celebrities vs. everyday influencers) could also shed light on the varying levels of trust and engagement across different follower demographics. Finally, research into the ethical considerations surrounding influencer marketing, such as transparency and authenticity, could provide guidelines for ensuring that influencer partnerships remain responsible and beneficial for both tourism brands and their audiences.

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