

Power of Social Media Influencers in Shaping Omani Tourists Decisions

Raja Tumati • Mustafa Daskin • Engin Yavuz



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Preface

Social media has recently become increasingly popular and is also widely used as a tourism marketing tool. Social media includes many platforms. Businesses now interact with consumers via social media. Many tourism businesses use social media influencers to reach consumers, create brand communities and try to follow consumers closely. In this way, they both learn the feelings and thoughts of consumers and promote themselves. Social media influencers have become the new favourite of businesses in the marketing phase. Businesses that can manage social media well gain an advantage over their competitors. A sense of trust is very important to turn consumers into loyal customers. Social media influencers, shared content and the reliability of businesses are also critical factors for word-of-mouth marketing strategies. Otherwise, social media pages can become a platform for businesses to receive negative comments, causing businesses to lose market share. This book aims to reveal how social media influencers affect Omani consumers' decision to travel and the role of trust in this decision, and to make recommendations to businesses.

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1. Introduction

With the developments in internet technologies, it has become easier and faster to reach consumers. Marketing is a constantly renewing field that focuses on identifying and meeting the needs of consumers. It must adapt itself by being affected by the changes in the world. Increasing the channels used to reach, follow and meet the needs of consumers has also become important today. Especially the increase in the use of digital technologies and social networks changes the strategies of marketing practitioners (Krishen, Dwivedi, Bindu, & Kumar, 2021).

The marketplace is evolving rapidly; each year, a new trend emerges that has a significant impact on markets worldwide (Bonnet & Westerman, 2021). Besides, consumers are becoming more conscious of their needs and expressive of them, and this is evident in their choices (Appel et al., 2020). Many trends occur in response to changes in consumer habits and technical advancements, including the promotion of products and services via social media and influencers (Erol & Ülkü, 2019). Influencers are users of social media with a high number of followers and are taken as examples by their followers (Johnstone & Lindh, 2022). Social media influencers have emerged in recent years, greatly influencing consumers' travel decisions (Nikjoo & Ketabi,

2015). Since followers think that they know a lot about influencers, they feel closer to their influencers. Thanks to this closeness, they can be easily influenced by influencers (Bu et al., 2022). They are currently transforming the tourism and travel industries, as visual appeal is far more effective than any blog, and social media influencers use this insight to deliver the content that their followers want to see (Duh & Thabethe, 2021; Naderer et al., 2021). Followers are more interested in visiting a location where their favorite social media influencers have been and taking images that seem like those of their influencers (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Influencers create new identities by combining photos, videos and various social activities and sharing their individual experiences with their followers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

The tourism and travel industries have expanded significantly on social media channels, and the majority of content creators, influencers, bloggers, entertainers, and travellers use social media to interact with and communicate with their communities (Bonnet & Westerman, 2021). The number of individuals using social media sites has increased with technological usage and technical infrastructure advancement. In response, social media sites are now influencing people's travel choices in a more significant manner (Ilyas et al., 2023). In addition, a significant number of people follow social media influencers (SMI) to seek inspiration for their vacation plans and leisure pursuits (Agostino et al., 2019). Customers typically judge tour packages before travelling, because of their intangible characteristics. As a result, when deciding to purchase travel-related goods, online advice, suggestions, and comments can be used as support (Hudson & Thal, 2013). This would lower the risk of reservations. As a result, the travel industry favors the use of influencer advertising

via social media, which has proven to be a very effective, advantageous, and potent way to engage with a particular target market in a trustworthy and personal style (Barbe & Neuburger, 2021).

A study conducted by Al-Badi et al. (2013) concluded that Omani citizens in Oman usually share films and images of their towns or destinations on Facebook or Instagram, which helps promote the country within and abroad. Oman was home to 4.17 million social media users in January 2023 (Kemp, 2023). However, the Sultanate of Oman’s active social media tool user base has increased from 14,000 in 2012 to 38,000 in 2013 (Al-Badi et al. 2013). Studies have indicated that tourism organizations are still in the early stages of using social media as a marketing strategy (Al-Harrasi & Al-Badi, 2014). On the other hand, Daskin and Tumati’s 2024 study revealed that most Omani Gen Z visitors choose destinations based on recommendations from social media or influencers. Similarly, Alsawafi (2018) found that 88% of respondents used social media to learn about tourist destinations in Oman, with high trustworthiness ratings for this information.

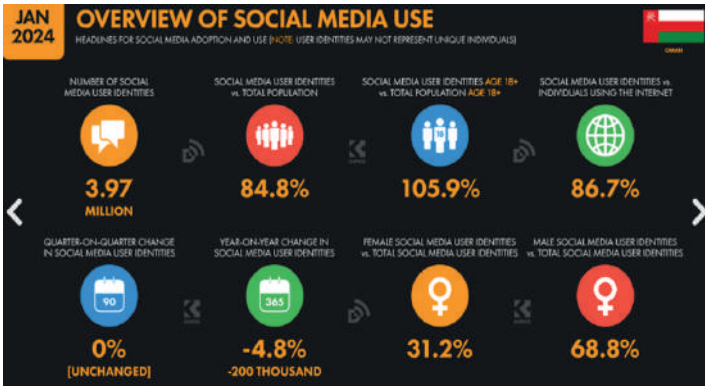


Figure 1. Social media usage in Oman (January 2024)

Source: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-oman>

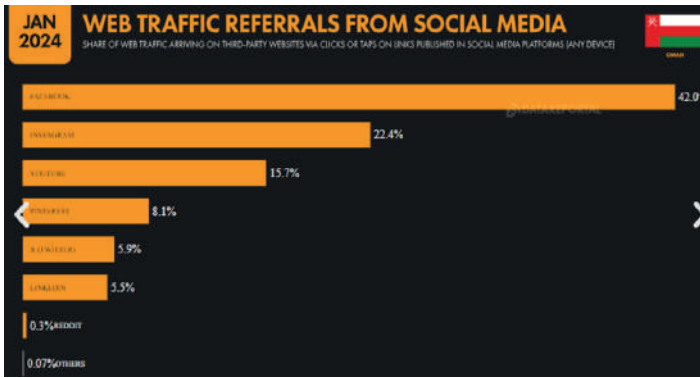


Figure 2. Usage of social media platforms in Oman (January 2024)

Source: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-oman>

Despite numerous advancements in the use of social media influencers globally, scholarly research and publications in Oman have yet to widely adopt them. This reluctance may stem from the belief that social media influencers primarily serve as entertainment and not as a tool for professional research. Therefore, a thorough investigation of the role of SMI in destination selection is required, as few studies are currently available. To date, there has not been a single research book on the role or influence of social media influencers on consumers' travel decision-making; therefore, the current book is critical, and the results of this book can fill the existing literature gap. Additionally, the findings of this book will provide the Ministry of Tourism, tour operators, travel agencies, and advertising organizations practical tips on how to engage SMI to sell their travel and tourism-related products and services to prospective customers. Therefore, the main objective of this book is to determine the degree of influence of social media influencers on tourists' decisions to visit a specific destination.

2.1. Social Media and Consumer Behaviour

Tour and travel-related businesses are rushing to improve their presence on social media to survive and remain competitive because of the world's recent increase in digitalization, which has had an impact on marketing (Bonnet & Westerman, 2021). Social networking sites have gained significance in the current digital era as they are the most widely used form of communication worldwide. Social media platforms allow people to communicate easily and accelerate their interactions with businesses. Social networks enable consumers to peruse shopping websites, communicate with loved ones, and purchase and trade goods and services online (Tham et al., 2020). Online advertising has recently become an increasingly common practise on social media sites. Advertising uses a variety of tactics, such as utilizing influencers to promote corporate brands on their social media pages. The fact that influencers frequently have millions of followers is advantageous. The primary responsibility of an influencer is to capitalise on this by pushing a specific product or service (Marjerison & Gan, 2022).

Kim et al. (2010: 218-221) stated the general features of social media platforms as follows:

- Creating a personal profile

- Creating online connections
- Participating in groups online
- Providing online connections and communicating with users
 - Sharing content shared by users with other users
 - Commenting on the content created
 - Obtaining information about the content
 - Keeping users on the site for a longer period

Social media users, which are effective, are a sector that endeavours to promote them and increase brand awareness by producing content related to the product/service (Carter, 2016: 2). However, influencer marketing is a tactic used by companies to advertise a product or service or boost brand recognition through content shared by social media users who are seen as notable and have large followings (Freberg et al., 2011). Besides, Jaya & Priantara (2020) described an influencer as someone who draws followers by publishing pictures, videos, and verbal narratives of their daily lives on blogs and other social media platforms. Depending on their influence, these individuals may eventually be regarded as celebrities. Additionally, McNair (2021) claims that SMIs have changed how people make plans, decide where to travel, and decide what to eat because of their well-known social media and influences.

Influencer marketing is a prevalent practice by which many businesses attempt to sway their clients' purchasing decisions (Hughes et al., 2019). Social media influencers are passionate, persistent, and strongly marketed online celebrities who "exert power over a broad group of potential clients. (Liu et al., 2015). In addition, Freberg et al. (2011) stated that these influencers are a new generation of authority

figures and brand advocates with the ability to influence their audiences. Traditionally, social media influencers have been prominent people who are involved in advertising and act as product ambassadors (Lokithasan et al., 2019). These influencers typically develop the destination image of a tourist area by promoting a potential customer's purchase or travel intention in the context of choosing a local travel destination (Xu & Pratt, 2018).

The way people plan and use travel-related items has drastically transformed in the past couple of years owing to social media (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Owing to the extraordinary access that influencer marketing through social media has given businesses to consumers over the past ten years, it has become increasingly popular (McNair, 2021). Travel firms consider collaborations with SMIs as a strategy to attract customers, boost sales revenue, and increase their brand image. According to Zeng & Gerritsen (2014), most tourists rely on testimonials, postings, podcasts, suggestions, and other materials made by SMI to make decisions regarding their trip destinations, activities, and lodging. Consequently, social media influencer popularity has transformed into a new type of digital currency that businesses can buy, exchange, and employ in their marketing.

2.2. Oman Tourism

With its windswept dunes, rugged mountains, and endless beaches, Oman is one of the friendliest and most tranquil nations in the Middle East. Oman transitioned from a geographically remote kingdom with only five kilometers of paved roads to a tranquil, advanced society under Sultan Qaboos' leadership (1970–2020). It is now a Sultanate where a traditional, hospitable Bedouin culture coexists with a modern way of life. Over 3.5 million tourists

visited in 2019, marking a doubling of visitor visits over the previous ten years (Wikipedia).

Oman boasts expansive, untamed landscapes. Its rugged mountains go up to 3,000 meters in altitude. The “Empty Quarter,” or Rub’ al Khali, is a 650,000 square kilometer desert of rolling red-gold dunes. You may drive down endless beaches in some parts of Oman’s coastline and pull over to camp on an empty stretch of sand. Across these stretches, people go on 4WD adventures, camel rides, and even cycling excursions (Wikipedia).

Luxurious accommodations abound in the nation as well, ranging from five-star desert resorts to mountain hotels with peaks facing infinity pools. The Musandam Peninsula, known as the “Norway of Arabia” because of its striking limestone mountains and deep glassy fjords, is home to a large portion of this lodging. The culture of the nation is equally fascinating. Muscat, the capital, is home to a vibrant souq, a few fascinating museums, and the Sultan Qaboos Mosque, which is a magnificent example of modernist Islamic architecture. Ancient defensive forts are scattered over the rugged terrain (see picture 1) (Wikipedia).



Figure 3. Sultan Qaboos Mosque

Nizwa Fort, which was constructed in the ninth century and features an impressive cylindrical tower, a maze of passageways and apartments, and views of the mountains from the ramparts, is among the most well-known. Oman offers a fascinating fusion of modern and traditional elements terrain (see picture 2) (Wikipedia).



Figure 4. Nizwa Fort

2.3. Social media influencers

Social media influencers are people who have reached a certain number of followers, are trusted by their followers and try to increase the number of followers by creating content in certain areas. Influencers can have an impact that can move societies with the content they produce (Alişarlı & Eken, 2018: 158). Influencers, who attract the attention of followers and increase the number of followers thanks to the communication opportunities provided by social media and the content created, have a very important place in the field of marketing through social media platforms such as Youtube, Instagram, X and Facebook, which provide both reliability and ease of sharing (Aydın & Uzturk, 2018: 182).

Barbe & Neuburger (2021) stated that influencers are skilled at creating elegant and high-quality content, and because of their expertise in videography, photography, editing, and storytelling, they can draw viewers and differentiate their work from other social media materials. In addition, Appel et al. (2020) described that influencers are familiar with social media network analytics and understand how to use functions, hashtags, and trends to broaden their audiences and boost engagement. Additionally, they keep up with platform improvements and modify their posts, as necessary. Similarly, Lokithasan et al. (2019) mentioned that influencers are skilled communicators who can persuade others using their words and ideas. They offer knowledge, inspire, amuse, and inspire audiences through their platforms. Additionally, Masuda et al. (2022) indicated that influencers have a potent personal brand that captures their principles, passions, and distinctive fashion sense. Their social media channels share a similar look, tone, and messaging, which aids in spreading awareness and sets them apart from their competitors. Further, Jin et al. (2019) noted that influencers frequently have a pulse on current

events, issues in society, and the latest developments. They keep up with current trends and utilise their channels to address pressing problems, spread awareness, and encourage discussions among their followers. Moreover, Marjerison & Gan (2022) reported that influencers on social media leverage the power of different sites such as Snapchat, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter to connect with audiences worldwide. These platforms provide a broad audience and opportunities to interact with individuals from various racial and geographic groups. Alternatively, Ki & Kim (2019) found that many influencers specialize in particular markets or sectors, such as tourism, events, and sports, allowing them to position themselves as competent authorities in those fields. Their recommendations and counsel are highly regarded by their followers because of their extensive expertise and experience in certain subjects (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014).

2.4. Influence of SMIs on customers decisions to visit a destination

Global organizations now use influencer advertising as a promotional technique to connect with their target audiences more successfully (Memon et al., 2015). Maduda et al. (2022) added that social media influencers may incorporate their personalities into the design of their goods or services in order to further communicate them to their target market. In contrast, Caraka et al. (2022) investigated the impact of advertising and found that destinations are less likely to use this strategy than international hotels. In addition, Barbe and Neuburger (2021) asserted that social media influencers can give tourist attractions a new opportunity to boost their appeal by utilizing the potential of social media and engaging more customers than usual,

notably millennials and Generation Z, who are more influenced by social media.

It is important for businesses operating in the field of tourism to have a continuously changing structure to meet the demands and needs of consumers who form the basis of tourism. Influencer marketing, which is one of the influencer marketing strategies that are becoming more important day by day, has caused some changes in the consumer's purchasing intention. Consumers now make decisions according to the effects and directions of social media while travelling or staying. Therefore, the implementation of influencer marketing strategy is very important for sustainable tourism (Kılıç & Seçilmiş, 2022: 2930).

Potential customers may use and depend on opinions shared on social media when choosing tour packages (Tham et al., 2020). Consequently, social media offers influencers a powerful and extensive channel through which they can communicate their travel stories among their followers, which may have an impact on future tourists' decisions (Xu & Pratt., 2018). Ilyas et al. (2023) stated that positive SMI online comments, reviews, or feedback may stimulate followers' enthusiasm for the vacation. Therefore, social media influencers' online recommendations and remarks about tour products and services can improve their perceptions of the destination and their intentions to visit (Ye et al., 2021). Nevertheless, although social media and SMIs are effective tools for engaging clients in various ways, they could also be detrimental to the reputation of travel agencies. Unfavourable feedback from dissatisfied or irate customers might defeat tourism industry goals and decrease traveller interest (Jaya & Prianthara, 2020).

2.5. Trust in SMI

Credibility is a perceived assessment of a communicator's trustworthiness and can also be defined as a quality that allows one to trust or believe (Saima & Khan, 2020). When employing social media marketing, genuineness, perceived experience, and trustworthiness typically contribute to anticipating positive results (Masuda et al., 2022). Credibility can be defined as the degree of trust and reliability of a source (Saima & Khan, 2020). Social media influencers offer more credibility and trust than do other forms of media. They are bold and open in their conversations (Weismueller et al., 2020). Numerous studies have demonstrated trust as a crucial aspect of influence. According to a study by AlFarraj et al. (2021), if a consumer has faith in an influencer and the influencer recommends a good or service, the consumer will like the suggestion made. Similarly, Pradhan (2022) finds that consumers' trustworthiness is correlated with their confidence in influencers' capacity to disseminate the information they regard as the most reliable. Credibility, rather than expertise, has a greater impact on clients (Singh et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, a follower's trust in an influencer is advantageous for both the business and the client, as well as the relationship between the influencer and the customers (Masuda et al., 2022; Alsawafi, 2018). Brands want to utilise the power and guidance potential of influencers they find trustworthy. Followers sometimes trust influencers more than their relatives and friends (Kim & Kim, 2021, p. 223). Further, McNair (2021) stated that consumers' trust in SMIs greatly affects their travel intentions. In contrast, Albayrak et al. (2020) found that SMIs have a far greater influence on consumers' buying intentions than do conventional media marketing strategies. The trustworthiness of influencers can enable consumers to evaluate products and services positively and perform

purchasing behaviour (Tsen & Cheng, 2021). One of the most important characteristics that explains why followers adhere to SMI is trustworthiness (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Influencer marketing is also important in terms of real-time communication. Influencer marketing strategies can be utilised in making consumers loyal customers and establishing continuous communication with consumers. As a result of this interaction, if the business is successful, an environment of trust is created between consumers and increases the number of permanent customers. Here, the trust and communication of the influencer and the business are very important (Singh & Diamo, 2017: 381).

2.6. Quality of the content

According to Alkan & Ulaş (2022), “influencer content” on social media refers to posts, such as images, video content, audio content, or written material, which influence social media followers. In addition, Marjerison & Gan (2022) described how the quality of the content determines the value assigned to it by the followers. Content quality is determined by the importance of the information, as well as whether it is trustworthy, relevant, correct, and dependable. Further, Lee & Kim (2020) mentioned that the calibre of the content has a significant impact on how a follower interacts with an influencer and serves as a conduit between a business, an influencer, and a consumer. In addition, Jaya & Prianthara (2020) claimed that genuine, honest, and realistic content performs best. Similarly, McNair (2021) specified that the quality of content directly influences people’s inclination to travel. Influencers attract the attention of followers because they are generally experts on a particular subject. Since influencers focus on topics such as fashion, food, sports, and travelling, they can produce quality content and fascinate their followers. As a result,

influencers can increase their influence on their followers (Koslow, 2017). Deegan (2021) stated that using SMIs to advertise travel and tourism-related goods and services can be successful. The study found that SMIs that exhibit traits such as reliability, high-quality content, and brand partnership can have a beneficial impact on followers' purchase inclinations. Because followers desire to emulate a particular lifestyle and social image, this study found that SMI marketing is crucial for companies' success.

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1 Procedure

This book adopted a qualitative research approach. According to Bansal and Corley (2011), qualitative research enables us to explore questions regarding human experiences that are difficult to quantify. Furthermore, Silverman (2016) noted that qualitative research is superior because the results are communicated in a narrative style with quotes and scenarios, allowing people to relate to the story on a more personal level. Studying the entire Oman population would require many resources; therefore, the choice of the sample is crucial. Bansal & Corley (2011) stated that there are no hard or fast rules regarding the sample size required to achieve data saturation for qualitative research. Henceforth, the fundamental criteria for determining sample size are theoretical and informational saturation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In addition, depending on the desired level of saturation, saturation typically ranges from 8 to 16 interviews (Saunders et al. 2019).

3.1.2. Sampling and Data Collection

A purposive sampling approach was used to select the interviewees. Purposive sampling is an effective method for conducting research on people with unique characteristics

(Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This book followed Creswell's (2003) advice and employed a purposive sampling method, in which potential participants were contacted before the interview to secure their agreement.

In-depth face-to-face interviews with participants were used to gather data from Muscat. Interviews were conducted over a three-month period between January and March 2024. The first round of interviews took place in the first month of 2024, whereas the second and third rounds, which took place in February and April 2024, respectively, covered the following three months. Through generic inquiries centered on the social media influencers in the Sultanate of Oman, the respondents were led to other subject areas related to social media influencers. Using the interview guide method, the researcher can choose the main topic and sequence of the questions during the interview, resulting in uniformity (Silverman, 2016).

3.1.3. Research Instrument

The relevance of social media influencers to consumers' travel choices in the Sultanate of Oman was raised with the respondents through a broad range of questions (Malhotra et al., 2017). The interview guide strategy provided consistency by allowing the researcher to identify the main topic and order of questions to be asked throughout the interview session (Silverman, 2016).

Only five interviews were conducted during the first month (January 2024) because of certain participants' reluctance to participate or their other commitments. Seventeen questions concerning social media influencers were posed to the people being interviewed. The interviewees were urged to feel free to voice and defend their perspectives. The interviewer requested additional

clarifications from the participants when they provided unclear replies. Notes and recordings were made during the interviews that were taking place. In some interviews, an assistant wrote the entire dialogue while the interviewer and interviewee spoke. Each interview lasted between 15 and 20 minutes, and some were recorded with the participants' consent. To ensure that the information acquired was fresh in the researcher's mind, all interview data were quickly documented after the interviews (Saunders et al. 2019). The researchers checked for consistency by comparing the interview notes and recordings.

To avoid bias, the researchers performed, translated, and interpreted each interview in a controlled setting, while asking each participant the same questions. The recorded scripts were read from start to finish several times to gain an overarching understanding of them, and they were then sorted into primary themes, sub-themes, and characteristics related to the descriptive themes to conduct the analysis (Saunders et al. 2019). Each participant received a pseudonym used in the data analysis to safeguard the interviewees' identities (Malhotra et al., 2017). For the analysis, a number was assigned to each group member. For instance, Employee 1 and Self-employed 2 in that order. A total of 25 individuals were interviewed, including those working in both the public and private sectors, running various small businesses, and looking for work. Some of these people had prior employment, while others had difficulty finding employment after graduation. Finally, recent graduates were also included, some with graduation and some with postgraduate education. Participation was optional and did not result in any compensation.

The following conditions were used to choose participants: participants had to be at least 18 years old, have social media profiles, and must have travelled to a

tourist attraction within the last six months to a year. A pilot study with a group of Omani residents was undertaken to gather input on the clarity and suitability of the research instrument. Some changes were made based on a pilot study to ensure that participants could grasp the research instrument's questions more clearly (Creswell, 2003).

CHAPTER 3

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Demographic Profile

The interview characteristics are listed in Table 1. Males constituted 52% of the interviews, while females constituted the remaining 48%. All the interviews were conducted in Muscat, the capital city of the Sultanate of Oman.

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents

No	Gender	Designation
1	Male	Employee 1
2	Female	Employee 2
3	Male	Employee 3
4	Male	Employee 4
5	Female	Employee 5
6	Male	Employee 6
7	Female	Employee 7
8	Male	Employee 8
9	Male	Self-employed 1
10	Male	Self-employed 2
11	Female	Self-employed 3
12	Female	Self-employed 4
13	Female	Unemployed 1
14	Male	Unemployed 2
15	Female	Unemployed 3
16	Female	Unemployed 4
17	Female	Unemployed 5
18	Male	Unemployed 6

19	Male	Unemployed 7
20	Female	Graduate 1
21	Female	Graduate 2
22	Male	Graduate 3
23	Male	Graduate 4
24	Female	Graduate 5
25	Male	Graduate 6

4.1.2. Research Questions

Themes drawn from the book's framework: As shown in Table 2, 17 themes were identified in the data. Each subject was discussed and identified in the form of participant statements, which were used as evidence to support the findings that have been drawn.

Table 2. Themes

No	Description	Theme (Short Form)
1	Where do you look for information when selecting a destination?	Information Source.
2	Who strongly influences you in choosing a tourist destination? Are your social media influencers, friends, family, social media, or someone else?	Strong Influence.
3	How many social media influencers do you follow?	No. of Influencers.
4	Which social media platforms do you follow?	Social media type.
5	What are your primary motivations to follow social media influencers?	Motivation.
6	Do you trust the information shared by social media influencers?	Trust.
7	When choosing a tourist destination, do you consider the information shared by social media influencers before finalising the trip?	Consideration of influencer content.
8	Would you be motivated to visit a specific tourist destination if your influencer provided travel recommendations?	The influencers provided travel recommendations.

9	If your influencers suggested a place to visit, would you ask others for advice before going there?	Further advice from others.
10	Do you share travel recommendations from your influencers with others, like your friends, cousins, and family members?	Share content with friends and family.
11	Would you consider travelling to a place if your influencer had a negative opinion about it?	Negative opinions.
12	Do you believe that your influencer offers reliable and unbiased information about tourist attractions?	Reliable and unbiased information.
13	Do you believe that your social media influencer's content is current and of high quality?	Information is up to date.
14	Do you plan to visit the tourist destinations recommended by influencers in the future?	Future recommendations.
15	Do you ask your social media influencers about your travel advice? Will they respond to your comment?	Travel advice.
16	What makes you unfollow your favourite social media influencer?	Unfollow influencers.
17	Overall, what are your opinions on social media influencers?	Overall response.

4.1.3. Findings for Selecting a Destination

Consumers often make decisions based on recommendations when making travel plans. Especially with the development of social media, consumers attach importance to recommendations through social media.

1. Where do you look for information when selecting a destination?

"...When choosing a place to visit, my initial research involved browsing through social media channels for relevant details..."
(Employee 7)

“...Before deciding on a vacation spot, I seek advice from my friends and subsequently verify the recommendations from influencers on social media...” (Unemployed 4)

“...When selecting a holiday destination, my initial step is to browse the video content shared by my preferred social media influencer. Subsequently, I explored other social media channels...” (Graduate 6)

“...To decide on a vacation spot, I commonly turn to my social media influencers...” (Self-employed 1)

“...To ensure that I make a wise choice, I often browse various travel blogs and follow renowned influencers’ social media pages...” (Unemployed 6) *“...Before finalising a tourist spot, I examine tour-booking sites and then check information on social media platforms...” (Self-employed 4)*

Followers of SMI value their opinions, focus on their posts, and regard them as trustworthy providers of honest and accurate information (Brown & Fiorella, 2013). Besides, Albayrak et al. (2020) specified that SMIs provide a trustworthy source of information for prospective tourists and followers by sharing their prior experiences with locations, leisure centres, hotels, restaurants, and numerous touristic activities. Followers and tourists will read comments and watch photos or videos related to SMIs’ posts (Duh & Thabethe, 2021; Lee & Kim, 2020). SMIs, like the advice of people you know, can influence individuals’ purchase decisions, mood, and attitudes (Saima & Khan, 2020). As previously stated, they are regarded as credible sources of information (Martínez-López, 2020). Furthermore, Nikjoo & Ketab (2015) pointed out that social networking has an immense effect on the tourism industry because content generated by users is more important than any official information most of the time. Social media has replaced traditional news outlets as the main news provider.

Consequently, it has the potential to alter the impression of a place's image (Alsawafi, 2018; Ilyas et al., 2023).

4.1.4. Influences in Choosing a Tourist Destination

Consumers can benefit from some sources when making travel plans and determining where to go. These sources are very important for selection.

2. Who strongly influences you in choosing a tourist destination? Are your friends, family, social media sites, social media influencers, or someone else?

"...My decision to visit a vacation spot was greatly influenced by my social media influencers..." (Graduate 4)

"...Social media has had a significant impact on my choice to explore popular destinations..." (Employee 8)

"...When it comes to selecting a destination for tourism, the opinions of my friends and the information available on various social media platforms play a significant role in my decision-making..." (Unemployed 5)

"...The main factor that shapes my judgement in deciding where to go on vacation is the impact of social media influencers and the multitude of social media platforms that I have access to..." (Graduate 1)

"...Choosing where to travel is typically influenced by family and social networking sites..." (Employee 5)

"...I often seek recommendations from friends, influencers, and social media platforms when deciding where to go on vacation..." (Self-employed 3)

The results demonstrate that participants' decisions to travel are significantly influenced by social media platforms, influencers, friends, and family. Wong et al. (2020) stated that SMIs can influence their followers' emotions, thoughts,

and purchasing decisions through social media applications, and can have an above-average effect on their ability to persuade people. Additionally, Martínez-López (2020) asserted that SMIs can affect people's purchase decisions, feelings, and thoughts by replacing conventional information sources, such as recommendations of friends and family. Moreover, Jin et al. (2019) stated that tourism marketers are becoming increasingly interested in using SMIs to sway tourists' purchasing decisions. Additionally, SMI can influence consumers' purchase decisions by fostering followers' confidence in the products and services provided by tourism marketers (Liu et al., 2015). Furthermore, SMIs are regarded as having a vital role in tourism promotion when it pertains to introducing visitors to specific areas and their influence on travel decisions (Pop et al., 2021).

4.1.5. Social Media Influencers Follow

The number of social media influencers is increasing day by day. Therefore, the number of influencers that followers follow also increases in relation to their interests.

3. How many social media influencers do you follow?

"...I generally follow approximately 30 social media influencers..." (Unemployed 2)

"...I follow roughly 40 to 50 social media influencers on different online platforms..." (Self-employed 1)

"...At present, my social media network consists of approximately 15 individuals I closely follow..." (Unemployed 7)

"...I keep up with approximately 100 social media influencers..." (Self-employed 4)

"...I closely monitored approximately 20 people who had a considerable impact on social media..." (Graduate 5)

“...I ensure that my followers do not surpass ten in number because it becomes difficult to comprehend their messages when there are more...” (Employee 6)

Based on the findings, participants followed between 10 and 100 social media influencers. Alkan & Ulaş (2022) reported that 97.4% of the participants said that Instagram was their favorite social media network. Facebook and WhatsApp came second and third, respectively, behind Instagram.

4.1.6. Social Media Platforms

Consumers’ interest in social media platforms is increasing day by day. It is known that some followers follow more than one social media platform. Some of these social media platforms are Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Tik-Tok, YouTube, etc.

4. Which social media platforms do you follow?

“...I follow the Instagram influencers...” (Employee 4)

“...I keep track of social media influencers on Instagram and Snapchat...” (Graduate 2)

“...I am a subscriber to Instagram and Tok-tok influencers...” (Self-employed 3)

“...I am a fan of social media influencers on Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube...” (Unemployed 7)

“...I keep up with social media influencers by following them on Instagram and Twitter...” (Self-employed 2)

“...On Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram, I follow influencers...” (Graduate 5)

Participants followed social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter. It is

worth noting that none of the participants selected Facebook. SMIs have an emotional impact on followers' behaviors (Jaya & Prianthara, 2020). Besides, Wong et al. (2020) detailed that Instagram was the most popular social media network, while Facebook and WhatsApp were the next most popular social media sites, respectively. In addition, Freberg et al. (2011) found that the Instagram platform was the participant's top preference. Moreover, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook were the three most popular social networking sites among the participants. Additionally, Nizami (2024) found that the participants most favourite social media platform was Instagram, which they utilised regularly in their daily lives. Similarly, Konstantopoulou et al. (2019) detailed that the three social media platforms that participants used the most were Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Furthermore, Nizami (2024) specified that Instagram came out on top as a platform that participants favoured and viewed the most. By contrast, Tham et al. (2020), YouTube came first, followed by Instagram, which came in second.

4.1.7. Motivations to Follow Social Media Influencers

There are many reasons why followers follow social media influencers, which vary from person to person. The number of social media influencers is constantly increasing, with topics that almost every follower can relate to.

5. What are your primary motivations to follow social media influencers?

“...The main reason that I follow social media influencers is that I admire their way of life and want to adopt it in the future...” (Graduate 2)

“...I follow social media influencers, because they are knowledgeable about tourism sites and services...” (Unemployed 3)

“...The main reasons for following social media influencers are their captivating personalities and strong communication abilities...” (Self-employed 3)

“...I primarily follow social media influencers, because they are fashionable and up to date with trends...” (Employee 8)

“...The fact that social media influencers are knowledgeable and discuss current issues is the main reason for following them...” (Graduate 6)

“...My main motivation for following social media influencers is that they are funny and clever...” (Employee 3)

“...Because they are friendly, relatable, and generally polite, influencers are those I choose to follow...” (Extra 1)

“...To gain insight into a specific industry, destination, attraction, or product. We, can then determine which looks best for ourselves...” (Extra 2)

Jin et al. (2019) noted that people who regard themselves as being more comparable to the influencers they follow, considering they are “more like us,” are more likely to communicate with followers and more trusted. Besides, Cholprasertsuk et al. (2020) specified that one of the primary reasons individuals follow influencers is to see photographs and videos of the areas they want to visit before making decisions. Additionally, Alkan & Ulaş (2022) reveal that influencers have an enormous effect on customer decisions because of their expertise, influence, connection to their followers, reputation, and social standing. Their jobs entail a variety of responsibilities, including regular posting of photos, video clips, comments, and stories. In contrast, Schouten et al. (2019) argued that an influencer’s appealing

personality alone is insufficient to market a product or service; product quality is also crucial. Consequently, an effective promotional effort requires the integration of these two elements: a high-quality product and a trustworthy influencer.

4.1.8. Trust in Social Media Influencers

The reliability of social media influencers is one of the most important issues for followers. Because followers trust social media influencers in many aspects, from making purchasing decisions to planning a trip somewhere.

6. Do you trust the information shared by social media influencers?

“...If it pertains to a tourism destination, I trust the information provided by social media influencers; if it relates to retail products, I do not trust it...” (Employee 7)

“...If social media influencers have a proven track record, I trust the information that they provide...” (Self-employed 4)

“...I trust the information that social media influencers post. I did, however, occasionally double-check with other people...” (Unemployed 7)

“...I believe what social media influencers say because they have been truthful and have taught me the right things...” (Graduate 3)

“...Although I consider social media influencers’ perspectives on tourist destinations as trustworthy, I am sceptical about their evaluations of retail goods and beauty products. Businesses pay to advertise their products...” (Employee 1)

“...I do not believe everything that social media stars say because, occasionally, their information is twisted...” (Unemployed 4)

According to the findings, participants trusted social media influencers when selecting a tourist destination. However, they have different perspectives on retail and cosmetic products. Agostino et al. (2019) stated that influencers are active social media users who are trusted by their followers. In addition, Lou & Yuan (2019) indicated that followers generally trust influencer posts, which has a beneficial impact on their readiness to purchase. Moreover, Martínez-López et al. (2020) observed that trust can increase interest in influencers' posts and persuade followers to acquire products or services. Additionally, Xiao et al. (2018) found that trust improves the legitimacy of information and may result in a good image of the brand. Similarly, Konstantopoulou et al. (2019) discovered that previous positive experiences with SMI increase trust, which appears to be a significant predictor of positive eWOM. Furthermore, Cholprasertsuk et al. (2020) described that the younger generation trusts to obtain travel details from tourism influencers who are knowledgeable and experienced to prevent possible risks when travelling. Contrary to these findings, according to Singh et al. (2020), certain products may profit more from influencer marketing than others. Social media influencers are most effective in promoting apparel, shoes, cosmetics, and other services. Nonetheless, the authors believe that when purchasing food, jewellery, and technology, people rely heavily on other forms of marketing, such as celebrity endorsements, but not on influencer marketing.

4.1.9. Choosing a Tourist Destination

When making travel plans, consumers often look to social media influencers for their opinions. Especially when faced with multiple options, social media influencers can be a deciding factor.

7. When choosing a tourist destination, do you consider the information shared by social media influencers before finalising the trip?

“...Yes, I consider my social media influencers’ recommendations when choosing travel destinations...”
(Graduate 1)

“...Before deciding where to go on vacation, I would like to listen to what my social media influencers suggested. However, the places they visited were only briefly described in their posts, which provided me with a limited amount of information...”
(Employee 4)

“...Before choosing where to go for my vacation, I always look at the information that my favourite bloggers or social media personalities share since their opinions matter to me...”
(Unemployed 5)

“...Prior to selecting a destination, I will consult the recommendations of my preferred social media influencers. However, they do not share many videos of the places I want to visit...” (Employee 8)

“...I often refer to the input from my influencers when deciding on a vacation spot, because it is valuable and precise...”
(Self-employed 2)

“...I consider the opinions of my social influencers when choosing a destination for a holiday. I do, however, also consider information posted on social media and by my friends...”
(Unemployed 1)

The findings show that when selecting a tourist destination, all participants explored the information offered by social media influencers before finalizing their trip. According to Pop et al. (2021), followers view SMIs as credible sources of accurate and information. Additionally, SMIs share their travel experiences on social media, and

many visitors choose content that would be of help to them and intend to replicate other travellers' experiences (Ki & Kim, 2019). Tourists utilize social media to find reliable information and learn more; they also found a substantial correlation between social media use and destination choice (Ye et al., 2021). SMI transmissions of data on social networking sites and other networks include images and location information that will be trusted by followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). People's curiosity about various destinations is stimulated by information shared by SMIs (Memon et al., 2015). Moreover, Cholprasertsuk et al. (2020) state that influencers have grown in popularity as a source of knowledge for those looking to plan their travel and experiences based on their posts, reviews, blogs, tales, and videos.

4.2.1. Motivation by Influencer Provided Travel Recommendations

Sometimes, even though the idea of traveling is not included in our plans, someone's positive thoughts about the destination can put the idea of traveling in our minds. Social media influencers can also lead the way in the formation of the idea of travel because they can reach many people through social media.

8. Would you be motivated to visit a specific tourist destination if your influencer provided travel recommendations?

"...If my social media influencer makes travel suggestions, I will be motivated to visit a particular tourist attraction..." (Self-employed 3)

"...Whenever my social media influencers recommended a tourist spot, I felt inclined to visit it. However, I can only go if it is not too expensive..." (Unemployed 6)

“...When my social media influencer suggests a place to visit, I feel excited. However, I will also obtain more information about this place through various sources...” (Graduate 4)

“...I am more inclined to visit a tourist attraction if I have heard of it before and have heard positive things about it from an influencer...” (Employee 5)

“...I would feel compelled to go to a tourist spot where one of my influencers is highly recommended...” (Self-employed 1)

“...If one of my influencers suggests visiting a particular tourist spot, I will place it on my bucket list and, if I can, make a trip...” (Employee 6)

According to Daskin & Tumati (2024), Omani Gen Z tourists visited a destination as it was suggested by social media and influencers. In addition, AlFarraj et al. (2021) indicated that if a consumer has trust in an influencer and the influencer likes a brand, the consumer likes the brand as well. In addition, Cholprasertsuk et al. (2020) found that SMIs influenced 92.3% of the participants' trip decision-making. Moreover, influencer marketing has increased audience engagement compared with traditional advertising methods, and reputable influencers (e.g., comedians, bloggers, storytellers, artists, and other social media users who consider their followers to be fans) have favourable opinions about the organization's products (Chu & Kamal, 2013). Furthermore, many travel marketers are increasingly turning to influencer marketing, as these endorsers have been found to be more effective in steering tourists' destination choices (Cholprasertsuk et al., 2020). Many advertisers believe that influencer marketing provides a greater return on investment (ROI) than conventional marketing strategies, such as email campaigns, advertisements on various websites, and celebrity endorsements (Liu et al., 2015).

4.2.2. Influencers Suggest Visiting a Place

As much as social media influencers are trusted, sometimes we can also consult trusted people to confirm our decision before making the final decision regarding travel.

9. If your influencers suggested a place to visit, would you ask others for advice before going there?

“...I trust my influencers, so if I decided to go somewhere based on their recommendations, I would not consider asking anyone else for advice before I visit...” (Graduate 2)

“...If I were taking my family on vacation and my influencers recommended a place, I would have wanted a second opinion before going there. Because I am travelling with my family, I do not want to take any chance; therefore, I will seek advice from additional sources, such as travel blogs, friends, and travel websites...” (Employee 8)

“...Before travelling to a tourist attraction that my influencers recommend, I would look up more information about it. Possibly from friends, family, and colleagues. Although I believe in my influence, more information is always preferable...” (Self-employed 2)

“...If one of my influencers suggested a destination, I would not seek additional opinions before visiting it. My influencers always provided me with sound and useful advice...” (Unemployed 3)

“...If my influencers recommended that a destination in a known country, I would not consult anyone else before travelling. However, I would definitely look into additional details of the tourist destination in a nation that I had not yet visited...” (Graduate 4)

“...If I were travelling with friends and my influencers suggested a destination, I would not consult anyone else before

going there. However, if I travel with my family, I check information with others...” (Unemployed 2)

Magno and Cassia (2018) proposed that when influencers recommend a destination, followers frequently go with their advice and do not seek more information because they have complete trust in them. Moreover, Kim and Song (2016) described social media influencers as new celebrities, and when they offer advice or endorse a product or service, their followers take it seriously. However, Weismueller et al. (2020) claim that social media influencers’ authenticity is important to their followers. If influencers have earned followers’ confidence in their earlier advice, they are more likely to listen and follow them.

4.2.3. Sharing Travel Recommendations from Influencers

We may sometimes want to share travel advice we receive from social media influencers with our loved ones. We may do this because we want our loved ones to accompany us on our trip, or because we like destinations or see them as opportunities.

10. Do you share travel recommendations from your influencers with your friends, cousins, family members, and others?

“...Whenever someone I follow suggests a good place to travel, I tell my friends about it...” (Unemployed 7)

“...I inform my cousins and family about the places to visit, as recommended by my social media influencers...” (Employee 8)

“...I let my friends, cousins, and family know the travel suggestions from my influencers...” (Graduate 5)

“...Since I always travel with my friends, cousins, or family, I ensure that they are aware of the travel advice from my influencers so that we can plan our trips...” (Unemployed 1)

“...If I think that my influencer’s recommended destination is worthwhile, I can suggest it to my friends, cousins, and family members. If not, I will not...” (Employee 2)

“...My influencers’ travel advice is shared only with my friends. However, I do not share my cousins or my family members. My friends would not mind it if the advice was incorrect...” (Unemployed 4)

Generation Z social media users are likely to enjoy hearing influencers’ tips and ideas, but also want to be cautious and follow the counsel of more trustworthy individuals (Chu & Kamal, 2013). Millennials usually share the information that they receive from their influencers with their relatives or close associates who have some familiarity with the subject (Choudhary & Walia, 2021). In addition, Hughes et al. (2019) stated that the younger generation generally shares information received from social media influencers with their connections, such as friends and family, and solicits feedback.

4.2.4. Influencer Negative Opinion About Travelling

Social media influencers may share destinations they have a positive opinion of, as well as negative opinions about, with their followers, which can affect their travel plans.

11. Would you consider travelling to a place if your influencer had a negative opinion about it?

“...If my influencer had an unfavourable opinion of the destination, I would not have thought of visiting it...” (Unemployed 1)

“...I would not consider visiting a destination if my influencer had a negative impression of it, because that suggests there is a problem there...” (Graduate 3)

“...I confirm the influencer’s negative review of a destination with my friends and other social media sites. If the comments are accurate, I will not go there...” (Employee 5)

“...Whenever my influencer expressed an adverse view of a destination, I would not think of going there because I respected his expertise and judgement...” (Self-employed 3)

“...If one of my influences thinks poorly about a place, I will keep it in mind. I will not go to that location if I will later overhear other people expressing the same thing...” (Employee 4)

“...If one of my influencers has a negative view of the destination, I will research that location further and consult my peers before making decisions...” (Unemployed 5)

According to AlFarraj et al. (2021), if an influencer has an unfavourable view of a product or service, their followers will not consider it because they trust the influencer’s perspective and knowledge. Moreover, Saima and Khan (2020) acknowledge that followers generally rely on and accept their influencers’ guidelines because they regard their influencers as experts in their field and perceive a sense of connectedness and shared interest. However, according to Singh et al. (2020), whether they adhere to influencers entirely is determined by their credibility and information veracity. Their followers occasionally listen to them, but not always; they all depend on their state of mind. Moreover, Pradhan (2022) claims that followers may not subscribe to influencers because they are overwhelmed by information and, at other times, conflicting information between different influencers.

4.2.5. Influencer Offers About Tourist Attractions

Social media influencers can really convey their own thoughts in their posts, and sometimes they can share for advertising purposes. Therefore, trust in influencers can affect the decision of followers.

12. Do you believe that your influencer offers reliable and unbiased information about tourist attractions?

“...Yes, I am confident that the information provided by my influencer regarding tourist locations is accurate and fair...” (Employee 7)

“...So far, the details regarding tourism places that I have acquired from my influencer have been reliable...” (Unemployed 4)

“...I believe that, whenever they discuss tourist sites, my influencers always provide accurate and unbiased information...” (Employee 3)

“...Sometimes, the information that is shared by my influencers about places to visit is wrong and confuses me, but mostly their information is reliable...” (Graduate 2)

“...On some occasions, I get the impression that my influencers do not provide all the details regarding the tourist spot. They were either unaware of it or purposely chose not to bring it up. This could lead to misinformation...” (Employee 1)

“...Some of the information that my influencers have posted about tourist destinations is incorrect, but I would not blame them; perhaps, the organisers misguided them...” (Unemployed 6)

SIMs are recognized as reliable sources of up-to-date truthful and accurate information (Pop et al., 2021). Besides, Konstantopoulou et al. (2019) reported that previous positive interactions with SIM increase trust, and

trust appears to be a significant predictor of eWOM. From a consumer standpoint, SMIs appear to be more credible than celebrities, followers connect more closely with them, and SMIs have a greater influence on customer buying inclinations (Schouten et al., 2019). In contrast, Wellman et al. (2020) argue that SMIs frequently conceal their viewpoints or the items they endorse.

4.2.6. Social Media Influencer’s Content Quality

While followers follow social media influencers that interest them, they may sometimes unfollow social media influencers who constantly share the same posts, do not update themselves, and cannot follow developments closely.

13. Do you believe that your social media influencer’s content is current and of high quality?

“...My impression is that the content generated by my social media influencers is worthwhile and current...” (Graduate 4)

“...The content from my favourite social media influencers is novel and highly impressive...” (Unemployed 3)

“...Influencers on social media share clear, accurate, education-in-nature, and simple-to-follow information...” (Unemployed 1)

“...I am drawn to social media influencers’ posts because their content is visually appealing, vibrant, and innovative...” (Employee 6)

“...I like the posts that my social media influencers make because they talk about things that matter to me, and their content is always new and remains current...” (Graduate 1)

“...I like posts from social media influencers because their content seems like something I can relate to, and it looks good and even better than traditional news sources...” (Employee 2)

Kim & Song (2016) define content quality as the degree to which customers perceive information as valuable, good, relevant, accurate, and reliable. It is worth noting that beautiful images are not the only indicator of content quality; the overall connection between the business, influencer, and consumer works best when the content is natural. In addition, Wellman et al. (2020) claimed that followers feel that their influencers' content is current and of good quality because they are always genuine and respect the brand they represent and their audience.

4.2.7. Influencers Future Recommendations

Some travel plans can be longer term. Routes shared by social media influencers can be included in future travel plans.

14. Do you plan to visit the tourist destinations recommended by influencers in the future?

"...In the future, I want to go to places that my influencers suggest, because they are really cool and amazing..."
(Unemployed 6)

"...In the future, I would like to go to places recommended by my influencers. In the event of safety concerns or other issues arising, I forego the plan..." (Employee 3)

"...I want to visit locations recommended by my influencers in the future. Nevertheless, further details from other sources will be pursued. I will travel if all go well; if not, I will rearrange..."
(Employee 5)

"...The vacation travel attractions recommended by my influencers are fantastic, but I am not sure if I will visit them soon. However, I will continue to add this information to my vacation wish list..." (Employee 1)

“...In the future, I will consider visiting tourist locations suggested by my influencers. However, I will conduct my own research and if the location sounds appealing, I will go...”
(Unemployed 3)

“...I aim to explore the places recommended by social media influencers as I have faith in the value of their recommendations...”
(Graduate 3)

According to Caraka et al. (2022), followers always consider visiting tourism destinations that are highlighted by influencers in their videos or posts. SMIs influence followers’ travel intentions (Magno & Cassia, 2018), increase the likelihood of choosing a specific destination (Xu & Pratt, 2018), and serve as sources of information (Hudson & Thal, 2013). Regarding visit intentions, young females have slightly higher positive intentions regarding influencer ads than do males (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Lokithasan et al. (2019) stated that males prefer ads that allow them to receive direct information and become aware of the pros and cons of products or services, and they are observed to make more impulsive decisions than women. However, both genders prefer excellent-quality content, images, and videos in addition to detailed plans for their vacations (Choudhary & Walia, 2021).

4.2.8. Social Media Influencers Travel Advice

Travel plans can sometimes develop spontaneously or on the advice of loved ones. In this case, getting advice from social media influencers can help us travel more safely.

15. Do you ask your social media influencers about your travel advice? Will they respond to your comment?

“...On my vacation, I asked my influencer about Arabic food in Bosnia and Herzegovina: He told me where to find

restaurants, and I went to eat at those places, and the food was delicious...” (Self-employed 1)

“...During my vacation, I asked my influencer for advice on where to find inexpensive car rentals in Georgia. He provided me with information on renting a car. I chose one of the cheaper and trustworthy companies that he suggested and booked the car...” (Employee 6)

“...I asked some of my social media influencers for vacation tips, but they did not respond...” (Unemployed 2)

“...My social media influencers never react when I ask them for vacation advice, in part because I do not think it is possible for them to reply to every follower, given that they have thousands of followers...” (Employee 1)

“...I asked influencers several questions about tourist spots, but they never responded...” (Graduate 5)

“...I have not yet contacted any social media influencers about tourism destinations, because I am aware that they will never respond...” (Self-employed 4)

According to Duh & Thabethe (2021), social media influencers (SMIs) can affect consumers' purchase decisions, feelings, and ideas, like the influence of their personal friends and family. In addition, Erol & Ülkü (2019) asserted that influencers can boost their followers' attention and credibility by answering queries, sharing their views and opinions about various things, and providing additional information about products and services. Marketers frequently use influencers with large followings to achieve a high degree of reach (Appel et al., 2020). However, the engagement and activity levels must also be considered. A deeper level of influence is indicated by a higher number of followers an influencer has in addition to their activity level (Jin et al., 2019).

4.2.9. Unfollowing Social Media Influencer

Sometimes we may stop following influencers that we follow on social media platforms. There may be many reasons for this, depending on the person. It could be the loss of trust in the influencer, the posts no longer attracting attention, or any other reason.

16. What makes you unfollow your favourite social media influencer?

“...I unfollowed a social media influencer since their posts started advertising restaurants, shops, and other products instead of travel destinations...” (Employee 4)

“...I unfollow influencers who post low-quality videos, provide false information, or do not offer anything new...” (Unemployed 5)

“...I unfollow influencers who post fewer videos, less material, or out-of-date information...” (Employee 3)

“...I unfollowed my social media influencer since there was no novelty, the content was redundant, and they consistently pushed the same travel places...” (Graduate 1)

“...Recently, most of the posts from my influencers have been about politics or religion, and I do not want to be associated with any of them. I first followed him to learn more about the tourist attractions, but I had to unfollow him because his viewpoint had changed...” (Graduate 6)

“...My influencers started sharing content that was not necessarily of their own. They are posting videos from third parties, which I do not like. Additionally, I found that the featured travel spots were slightly obnoxious...” (Unemployed 1)

Zhang et al. (2019) argued that followers continually check whether the information offered by social media influencers will benefit them, and if not, they will not follow

the influencers. In addition, Gan et al. (2023) claimed that an excessive amount of information or too many posts in a short period can overwhelm followers and cause them to unfollow social media influencers. Moreover, Xiao et al. (2018) alleged that credibility, societal influence, and perceived reliability of information are important variables in influencing followers to stick with social media influencers, and when these criteria are neglected or breached, followers swiftly follow them. Additionally, Naderer et al. (2021) claim that there are doubts regarding the reliability of influencers and their advertisements because they occasionally promote subpar goods, leaving consumers feeling duped. Hughes et al. (2019) stated that industry experts believe that the influencer marketing industry is a temporary phenomenon that will eventually crash. In addition, Ki & Kim (2019) argued that influencers charge exorbitant fees, so businesses are increasingly looking for alternate promotions. Moreover, according to Hughes et al. (2019), for businesses, the total number of views, followers, and responses is frequently a false metric.

4.3.1. Opinions on Social Media Influencers

Following social media influencers can provide some advantages as well as disadvantages for people. It can be useful content, saving time, following trends, gaining information, etc. It can also be disadvantageous as it increases personal expenses, misdirection, loss of trust, etc.

17. Overall, what are your opinions on social media influencers?

“...Social media influencers serve as intermediaries in informing individuals about current trends and cultures, thus leading to positive outcomes. Their personalities are like those of their followers...” (Employee 7)

“...Social media influencers help to promote travel destinations and share helpful information. They help promote tourism and events by openly discussing them and sharing honest personal opinions...” (Graduate 6)

“...Influencers offer beneficial guidance, disseminate valuable information, and consistently advocate charitable initiatives to uplift societies...” (Self-employed 2)

“...We find joy in following social media influencers, as they provide information about local events, current affairs, sports, and interesting destinations. Their thoughts generally coincided with those of their followers...” (Graduate 3)

“...Social media influencers primarily focus on safeguarding their reputation, making money, and projecting a generous persona, without paying much attention to other causes...” (Employee 2)

“...Social media influencers assist many people. They help their followers, tourist destinations, community, and their own well-being...” (Unemployed 2)

Caraka et al. (2022) detailed that Generations Y and Z value the experience of social media influencers when selecting a tourism destination. Besides, Magno & Cassia (2018) described that the level of quality and professionalism of SMI posts boosts travellers' interest in following SMI travel recommendations. On the other hand, Ki & Kim (2019) claim that there is no doubt that companies will profit from closer interaction with influencers, which will provide new opportunities; however, this pattern may shift as not all influencers have been proven successful.

5.1. Conclusion

According to the results, social media influencers are a type of marketing tool that needs to be developed to increase tourist preference for a destination and brand recognition. Social media influences have a significant impact on how tourist destinations are perceived. Their interactions with followers regarding travel can have a significant impact on their perceptions and decisions. They have the capacity to engage a large audience through their personal social media channels. Influencers can successfully market a place and its offerings by disseminating information on the features associated with tourist offerings, including attractions, accessibility, facilities, packages, activities, and other amenities. Their favourable online comments, feedback, and reviews can positively impact how potential customers perceive travel products and enhance the reputation of the place.

Influencers frequently produce materials with the goal of establishing a brand for a tourist area and influencing the purchasing decisions of their followers. Their support and recommendations can foster a favourable link with a location, increasing its appeal to new tourists. In conclusion, social media influencers help shape the view of tourist destinations by disseminating knowledge, offering supportive criticism, and influencing the opinions and choices of the people who

follow them through their individual social media platforms. It is realistic to believe that social media influencers can improve the reputation of tourist destinations, support their financial situation, and collaborate with other tourism stakeholders to advance these destinations.

Influencer marketing helps destination marketing succeeds by offering a tactical tool for connecting with target audiences and establishing a real presence in niche groups. Influencers may help destinations promote their locations by utilizing their sizable fan bases and attentive audiences. Influencers encourage their followers to book vacations to marketed locations, driving interest and raising visibility. Using this marketing strategy, destinations can achieve their marketing goals better by distributing strategic messages to targeted markets. Influencer marketing generally provides locations with better outcomes than many other marketing strategies do.

5.2. Recommendations

- As SMIs are professionals instilling a positive attitude toward tourists, they should be used to promote tourism destinations.
- Tour companies should collaborate with SMIs to establish a positive opinion of their tourist attractions, which will have a beneficial effect on a destination's image.
- Consumers will have a higher likelihood of purchasing a tourist attraction with which they are acquainted; consequently, tour companies, destinations should engage with SMIs to raise awareness and positive intent about their destination.
- Influencers and their followers are encouraged to create user-generated content by sharing experiences and

using targeted hashtags. This indicates that posting reviews and thoughts about a destination on social media sites can help to raise the destination's profile among prospective visitors.

- Work with influencers who are part of a larger influencer network or community. This can increase the reach and impact of campaigns as influencers in the network can cross-promote each other's content.
- Regularly monitor the effectiveness and impact of influencer campaigns. Track metrics such as engagement, reach, website traffic, and bookings generated through influencer engagement. These data can help evaluate the effectiveness of strategies and make the necessary adjustments.
- Considering trust is the most important aspect for followers, work with influencers that have a reputation for being credible. By effectively using social media influencers, tourism managers can use their influence to increase destination awareness and image and attract more tourists.

5.3. Limitations of the Research Book

Interviews with 25 participants were used to gather quantitative data for this book. However, future research could be conducted using quantitative techniques and a wider spectrum of respondents. The book was conducted in Muscat, the capital city of Oman; however, future studies can be conducted outside Muscat and include a more diverse background of the respondents. Future research might also consider a certain social media application that influencers use, such as Instagram, the app that is most frequently used in Oman for advertising. It is also possible to consider the likelihood of cultural variations within a country, which

may help uncover additional effects. Moreover, future studies should focus on the effects of social media influencer advertising and compare them with other advertising tools in greater detail. For instance, researchers can classify influencer types, construct subgroups depending on the services or goods connected to the influencers and undertake data categorization based on customer demographic data. Moreover, the book suggests that future research should examine the effectiveness of marketing based on cultural background differences between consumers and influencers. Finally, the lack of clarity regarding the effect of micro and macro influencers on destination promotion necessitates additional research to be conducted in the future.

5.4. Implications for tour managers

The following strategies can be used by tourist attractions or tour managers to effectively leverage social media influencers to boost their reputation and attract more visitors: First, to reach their target audience, tourist attractions must identify social media influencers in the travel industry with sizable followings and active audiences. Second, it is critical to establish reliable connections with influencers, comment on their posts, and share content with them. Making real partnerships with influencers can lead to long-term business relationships. Third, collaborate with influencers to produce interesting and genuine content that highlights the location's distinctive qualities, attractions, and experiences. Encourage them to provide personal stories and advice that their followers will find valuable. Fourth, arrange a familiarization tour for influencers to visit the area. This enables them to produce genuine and captivating materials that draw from their personal observations, which can significantly alter how followers view a location. Fifth, destinations should incorporate influencer advertising

into their overall marketing plans to support strategic goals. Finally, destinations should consider elements such as audience demographics, follower base, relevancy and quality of content, and interactions among the influencer's audience when selecting the perfect influencer to collaborate with. This guarantees that the influencer's audience is like the intended audience of the destination.

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Power of Social Media Influencers in Shaping Omani Tourists Decisions

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