

## **Young Tourists' Trust in Instagram Travel Influencers and their Intention to Visit Travel Destinations**

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### **Abstract**

This study is particularly interested in investigating how young tourists perceive and trust Instagram travel influencers and examine what aspects of the Instagram travel influencers' posts can successfully spark the intention of their followers to visit a destination promoted/recommended. This study employed a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional study employing a non-probability sampling technique. A total of 366 young tourists responded to the questionnaire. This study computed SEM-PLS analysis using SmartPLS3 to test the model fit of the data and to explain the attributes that influence the intention to visit travel destinations among young tourists. Young tourists' are primarily influenced by the visual appeal, credible content and perceived popularity and engagement from Instagram travel influencers. Instagram travel influencers impact not only the decision-making and motivating travelers, but also on the tourism industry's marketers or business owners in terms of increased travel marketing potential. Destination marketers using Instagram influencers can utilize the findings of this study to strategize the attributes that lead the tourists to have the travel intention. Also, this study makes recommendations for Instagram travel influencers to incorporate important elements in their posts and stories to be more beneficial for their young followers.

**Keywords:** Fresh Graduate, Competency, Job Offer Decisions, Hotel Industry

### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic and the prolonged confinement have halted and restricted travels; however, tourists still crave and desire to travel. As a result, they resort to social media to revisit traveling by following travel influencers to get travel inspirations. Importantly, social media influencers have always played a significant role in social media-induced tourism (Abdul Razak and Mansor, 2021). They are the motivators for social media-induced tourism

to happen. Social media-induced tourism happened when unpopular attractions that are least expected to become travel hotspots (Coffey, 2019) contributed to overtourism (Gretzel, 2019). The unexpected and overwhelming trend and popularity of tourism destinations are induced by social media influencer in across one or more social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat. Due to the large numbers of followers, social media influencers especially on Instagram could influence their followers to trust their expertise and react in a way that is relation to the content posted on social media (Asquith, 2019). More important, followers give Instagram influencers the same degree of trust they have for their friends (Abdul Razak and Mansor, 2021; Swant, 2016; Ting et al., 2015), influence brand awareness and purchase intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Jaya and Prianthara, 2020). They also persuasively influence young travelers choice of destination based on their “Instagrammability” in terms of photo and storytelling (Hayhurst, 2017; Ihsanuddin, & Anuar, 2016).

Instagram in the millennial era is a rising trend. Users spend a considerable amount of their time and energy on Instagram daily. It can often seem contrary to the likes, comments, and notifications that Instagram users post, but they do matter to a great extent (Dickson, 2019). They tap some of the causes, addictions, urges, anxieties, and joys that make users alive. As Instagram expands and becomes popular, more and more tourists digitize and share their travel experiences. Instagram has also played an important role in travelers’ choice of destinations. For travel details, motivation, and encouragement, most travelers use Instagram, this is mostly because it functions as a platform for exchanging visuals and experiences, and an extremely lively visual platform strongly contributing to destination image formation (Volo & Irimias, 2020). Instagram is a web-primarily based platform that allows users to quickly produce and upload quite a few contents in textual content, photographs, audios, and motion pictures without unique technical skills and travel, thoughts, opinions, and recommendations (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). As the population of Instagram is comprised of a majority of young people, this study aims to investigate the young tourists’ trusts towards the Instagram travel influencers and the intention to visit travel destinations induced by Instagram travel influencers.

### **Issues**

The advent of technology and social media in today’s millennial era has changed the traveler’s experience and has been radically different from what it is. Many tourists can no longer rely on expert guides with obsolete information or even paper maps to reach their new destination (Mata el al, 2018). This scenario is just like technology has transformed into a better version. Previously, people tended to get some motivation from sharing postcards, photo albums from their friends, or even by looking to the magazine and newspaper to plan their travel. Furthermore, the content that is posted on travel websites traditionally is sometimes not updated by the organization. Moreover, many tourists also consider that the information given by traditional organizational marketing communications is biased and less trustworthy compared to the information that gets from their known people.

Instagram offers ways for tourists to share, update and upload information about a travel destination. Initially, Instagram has begun as a photo-sharing tool and has grown into an influential advertisement, publicity, and promotion tool (Volo & Irimias, 2020). Recently, marketers have discovered the effect and potential for viral growth of Instagram. As a result,

Instagram challenges the imagination of travel partners to promote tourist destinations around the globe. The influencing force of Instagram travel influencers has since begun to be recognized by DMOs. Some of them are now working to promote their respective destinations with Instagram travel influencers, as the promotion of Instagram travel influencers has been shown to have a major effect on the consumer's decision to fly to that destination (Ong and Ito, 2019; Hanifah, 2019). According to Glucksman (2017), Instagram travel marketing influencers have emerged as one of the biggest marketing trends, especially among lifestyle, beauty, and fashion brands. The honest reviews from Instagram travel influencers provide authentic, better engagement, and positive interactions with their followers, which could influence their followers' trust (Pop, et al., 2021). Several studies on Instagram marketing and its effect on tourism have been carried out recently (Abdul Razak and Mansor, 2021; Eken, Okan and Bakioglu, 2021; Gümüş, 2017; Gon, 2021; Grandberg, 2019). Given the relatively recent concept of Instagram travel influencers, there is limited research, especially in the tourism industry and emerging destinations. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify which of the attributes of Instagram travel influencers have the most significant impact on young tourists' trust and how they can influence their followers' intention to visit travel destinations.

### **Literature Review**

Instagram is recognized widely as a modern social networking site for photo-sharing. Rather than other social networking sites, the millennial generation appeals to different cultures. Young people spend more time on Instagram than on Facebook. This is possibly because young users are highly inspired to capture the photos using their smartphones and share them immediately (Volo and Irimias, 2020; Ihsanuddin and Anuar, 2016). Instagram is basically a smartphone app that allows users to take images or videos, use various editing techniques to change the look of photos, and instantly shared with friends. Interaction with friends and larger user groups with common interests has been made more ideal, easy, and interesting by exchanging photos rather than words alone (Ihsanuddin and Anuar, 2016). On the other hand, by connecting the physical and digital worlds, Instagram increases online presence and identity and allows more active interaction not just for personal reasons, but also for business purposes (Appel, et al., 2020).

Instagram travel influencers are described by Freberg et al (2011) as "a different type of impartial third celebrity endorsement that forms the viewer's perceptions across articles, comments, clips or other Instagram usage." These primary key opinion leaders (KOLs) are considered to be better brand endorsers in recent years compared to other marketing strategies, such as marketing with famous celebrities. It has been found reliable as well as cost-effective to use KOLs to demonstrate positive customer persuasion outcomes (Booth and Matic, 2011; Liu et al., 2015). The marketing of influencers is an approach that uses these Instagram travel influencers to sell the product to the business or brands. Besides, young tourists preferred to engage more with Instagram travel influencers (Femenia-Serra and Gretzel, 2020). Therefore, the use of Instagram travel influencers in their marketing strategies allows brands to connect positively with their customers. (Glucksman, 2017). Marketers have begun to understand the strength and use of Instagram travel influencers in the travel and tourism industry to convey the message to customers who follow them (Sigala & Gretzel, 2020) and importantly, Instagram is the most popular platform for young social media users when making decisions prior to a trip (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

According to Cassia and Magno (2019), the power of Instagram travel influencers depends in part on the quality of the data generated by the influencers via their blogs, posts, or videos. Instagram travel influencers create an emotional bond with their followers to gain customer brand loyalty and support. Instagram travel influencers produce meaningful and desirable material to achieve an emotional bond (Turri et al., 2013). Travel influencers' content from Instagram is in line with their audience's desires (Gümüş, 2017). The material presented should at the same time be visually appealing, as well as informative. Influencer content can eventually have an unforgettable, beneficial, or otherwise lasting effect on viewers (Subramanian, 2019; Ki and Kim, 2019).

Credibility is one of the most frequently used metrics to measure the accuracy of marketing endorsements (Taghipoorreynh and De Run, 2016). A trustworthy source has the ability to influence the attitudes, habits, strategies, and acts of customers (Pop et al, 2021). Instagram influencers who are considered experts and trustworthy, thus, have a greater impact on the perceptions of their followers. Instagram travel influencers can continue resonating with their fans through producing original and authentic content (Hashoff, 2017). Decisions to follow a certain influence on YouTube or Instagram also depend on the credibility of the influence (Piskorski, 2016) as well as authenticity, described as relatable, open, and genuine with its followers by (Glucksman, 2017).

On the other hand, an influencer's popularity is calculated predominantly by the number of followers. This reflects the network size of Instagram travel influencers. As a result, the greater the number of supporters, the greater the scope of the endorsement post (De Vierman et al., 2017). The study carried out by De Vierman et al (2017) found that a large number of supporters produce a positive attitude towards the influencers. Those Instagram travel influencers who are perceived to be powerful are allocated more opinion leadership by followers. According to the Hashoff 2017 annual report, Instagram influencers aim to push rates of engagement ten times those of tweets endorsed by celebrities. In addition, followers' engagement/interactivity is accomplished mainly by soliciting feedback (Glucksman, 2017). It is focused on collaborative collaboration and knowledge sharing. Instagram travel influencers connect mostly through the reviews they send about the content with their supporters. Followers have positive or negative reviews and thoughts and there is a stronger link between them as they see that the influencers of Instagram travel appreciate their constructive criticisms. This contributes to greater influence over the supporters (Wang and Li, 2016).

Trust is built between the two when there is a high degree of interaction or contact between influencers and their followers (Pop et al., 2021). Trust is an assumption of basic limits and requirements and requires constructive trust in other people's intentions (Boon and Holmes, 1991). Trust in the relationship between the influencer and follower is also crucial because Instagram travel influencers can only encourage their followers to listen to their advice if they trust the former (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2013). Although Instagram travel influencers are designed to generate more revenue for a company, consumers tend to trust their views more for the same brand than traditional advertising. Supported by Kasriel-Alexander (2017) study, where with photographs and information shared by fellow tourists seen as more trustworthy than official brand campaigns. Acquiring the confidence of followers is therefore an effective strategy to improve the effect of Instagram travel influencers on their followers' purchase choices (Grin, 2018). Followers trust their influencers, even though it is a supporting material

because it offers them genuine product feedback, positive or negative reviews. Therefore, based on the literatures above, the study posit the following hypothesis:

*H<sup>1</sup>: Attributes of Instagram travel influencers (quality of information, attractiveness of the content, credibility, authenticity and perceived popularity and engagement) have a significant relationship towards trust on Instagram Travel Influencers.*

On a different spectrum, the behavioral objective of a tourists is a predictor of their future purchase activity and can be used as a suitable measure of that behavior (Juvan, Omerzel and Maravić, 2017). The main goal of influencer marketing is to positively affect customer purchase decisions (Che et al., 2017; Lim, et al, 2017). However, the relationship between the intent to purchase and the final purchasing conduct depends on the buyer's choices. Che et al. (2017) also argued that trust has an important impact on the purchasing intentions of customers. In this study, the intention to visit the destination is the outcome behaviour. There must be a congruence between Instagram influencers and the destination being advertised by them, according to Xu and Pratt (2018), to increase the probability of the visit intentions of their followers. Magno and Cassia (2018) found that the intent of followers to accept the suggestions made by Instagram travel influencers depended significantly on the trust and accuracy of the data given by Instagram travel influencers. Therefore, the following hypothesis derived:

*H<sup>2</sup>: Trust in Instagram travel influencers has a significant relationship on young tourists' intention to visit travel destinations.*

### **Research Methodology**

The quantitative approach was employed to pursue this research. The design employed was the cross-sectional analysis, as we collected the data at one particular time. The population of this research is the young tourists who follow Instagram travel influencers and the unit of analysis of this study was individuals who use Instagram. The sample size for this study is calculated by using Raosoft calculator. With a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level, the population size would be 1,310,600 based on the Malaysia's total Instagram users in 2020. Thus, the minimum sample size for this study is 385. We distributed 400 questionnaires using a non-probability sampling technique.

A total of 366 young tourists responded to the questionnaire. The criteria for the selection as the participants are that the age is within the range of 18 to 30 years old and follow at least one Instagram travel influencer in Malaysia/Worldwide. The descriptive and frequency analyses were performed to analyze the profile of the data. The result showed the female (61%) outnumbered the male (39%) respondents. To analyze the data, we performed SEM-PLS analysis to test the model fit of the data and explain the influential factors for young tourists' intention to visit travel destinations.

### **Findings And Analysis**

Testing a PLS-SEM model on the data, we followed the two-step of assessment procedure suggested by Chin (2010). Firstly, the study evaluated the measurement model's assessment criteria, which include the reliability and validity of the constructs in the model. Secondly, we examined the structural model and the significance of the relationships between the factors. Figure 1 below presents the model tested for this study.

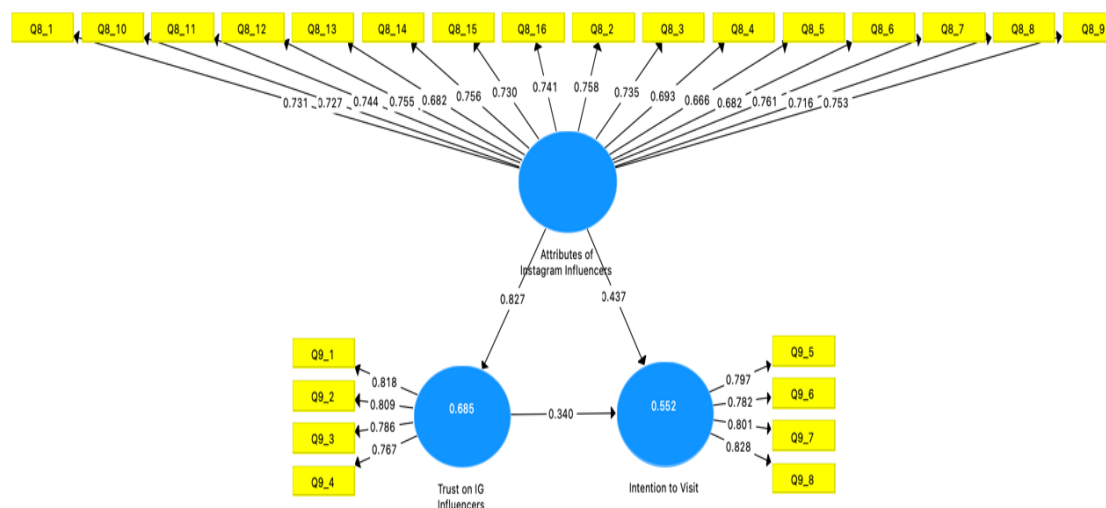


Figure 1. The PLS-SEM Model of Instagram Travel Influencer

### Assessing the Measurement Model

To assess the reflective measurement model, we first evaluate the indicator loadings. Each indicator's value for all constructs is above 0.708 (a benchmark of an acceptable indicator loading recommended by Hair et al., (2019)). The loadings above the benchmark value indicate that the construct explains more than 50% of the variance within an indicator, thus indicating acceptable item reliability. See Table 1 for all indicator loadings of the model. For this model, all factor loading values are larger than 0.708. Assessing the reliability aspect in PLS-SEM requires that we evaluate the composite reliability (CR) and Rho A. It is suggested that a higher value indicates better reliability, and the values should be between 0.70 and 0.90 to be regarded as good (Hair et al., 2019). In our model, all CR values are between 0.70 and 0.95. Additionally, this study analyzed the Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency reliability. Hair et al. (2010) suggested that Cronbach's alphas need to be larger than the CR.

In this model, all Cronbach's alpha values are smaller than the CR values. To confirm the reliability, Dijkstra and Henseler (2015) suggested to evaluate the Rho A, which value usually lies between Cronbrach's alpha and the CR. All Rho A values for this model are acceptable. We conclude that the measurement model has met the acceptable reliability. The convergent validity of each construct is also analyzed in the measurement, reflected by the AVE values. The acceptable value is 0.50 or higher. The results showed that all AVE values were larger than .500, indicating that each construct explains at least 50% variance of its items.



Table 1.

*The Factor Loadings*

	Attributes of Instagram	Intention to Visit	Trust
I get detailed and accurate information about a particular destination.	0.731		
I find them genuine.	0.727		
I feel a sense of similarity between our personalities.	0.744		
I feel they do their job morally and ethically.	0.755		
They have a huge number of followers.	0.709		
They frequently interact with their followers on Instagram.	0.756		
They are warm and welcoming towards their followers.	0.730		
They listen to their followers' feedback and make improvements.	0.741		
They help me get an insight into the culture and lifestyle of the people.	0.758		
I find their content reliable in helping me to plan my travel.	0.735		
I can easily access the information provided by them.	0.733		
I like their appearance and presentation on Instagram.	0.766		
Their Instagram content is visually appealing.	0.762		
I get honest information from them.	0.761		
They have the expertise in this field.	0.716		
I find them trustworthy.	0.753		
I believe that the information provided by the influencers is true.			0.818
I believe their recommendations are reliable.			0.809
Based on their posts and updates on Instagram, I believe they are honest in their work.			0.786
I believe my favorite Instagram travel influencers care about their followers' interests while posting their content online.			0.767
Browsing through Instagram, makes me want to travel.		0.797	
It is likely that I would visit the destination based on the Instagram travel influencers recommendation.		0.782	
It is likely that I would visit the same locations and follow a similar itinerary as recommended by the Instagram travel influencer.		0.801	
It is likely that I would keep in mind some of the tips recommended by the Instagram travel influencers when I visit the destination.		0.828	

Henseler et al (2015) recommended that the discriminant validity was assessed by analyzing the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratios. The values for HTMT should be between 0.85 to 0.90. The results showed that the correlation ratios in this model met the suggested range. The ratio for each construct was calculated by computing the mean of the average correlations for the items measuring the same construct. The results of AVE and HTMT indicated that this model achieved the validity.

Table 2.

*The Measurement Model Results*

	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho A	CR	AVE	HTMT
Attributes	0.940	0.941	0.947	0.661	0.820
Intention to Visit	0.815	0.816	0.878	0.699	0.864
Trust	0.806	0.808	0.873	0.629	0.847

**Assessing the Structural Model**

The next analysis is to assess the structural model (or path model). The evaluation criteria of a structural model include assessments of R<sup>2</sup>, the statistical significance, the path coefficients and the confidence intervals. Before looking at the criteria, the collinearity VIF values need to be computed. The VIF value should be close to 3 and lower. In this model, the VIF values were smaller than 3, indicating that collinearity is not an issue.

The results showed that the coefficient of determination value (R<sup>2</sup>) for this model was 55.2 per cent. Hair et al. (2011) and Henseler et al. (2009) suggested a guideline to interpret the R<sup>2</sup> that the values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 can be considered substantial, moderate and weak. The R<sup>2</sup> value of 55.2 per cent in intention to visit the destinations showed a moderate predictive power of the model. The R<sup>2</sup> value of trust on Instagram influencer was also moderate (R<sup>2</sup> = 68.5%).

The path coefficients in Table 3 below showed all relationships between the constructs estimated were statistically significant: p values are smaller than 0.05, and all confident interval values do not cross 0. Specifically, the result revealed that the attributes of Instagram influencers significantly influenced the intention to visit ( $\beta = 0.437$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and trust on Instagram influencers ( $\beta = 0.827$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This result indicates that the better the attributes of the Instagram influencers, the more likely the followers will intend to visit the destinations featured by the Instagram influencers. The more likely the followers will trust the Instagram influencers that they follow about the destinations they feature their Instagram page.



Table 3

*The Path Coefficients*

	Path Coefficients	M	SD	T	p	CI	
						2.5%	5%
Attributes of Instagram Influencers -> Intention to Visit	0.437	0.456	0.103	4.232	0.000	0.259	0.662
Attributes of Instagram Influencers -> Trust on Instagram Influencers	0.827	0.823	0.054	15.418	0.000	0.688	0.903
Trust on Instagram Influencers -> Intention to Visit	0.340	0.322	0.105	3.244	0.001	0.121	0.517

Importantly, the linkage between trust in Instagram influencers and intention to visit the destinations among the followers was statistically significant and positive ( $\beta = 0.340$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). This result suggests that the followers' trust in the Instagram influencers positively influences their intention to visit the destinations featured by the Instagram influencers. In other words, the more the followers trust the Instagram influencers about the destinations they share on the Instagram platform, the more likely the followers will visit the destinations.

**Discussion**

The results of the study above yielded strong, significant links of all the direct effects in the model. First, the study found, Instagram travel influencers attributes had significant influence towards trust. As explained in the literature review section, the attributes include the attractiveness of the posts, the quality, authenticity and credibility of the information, and the interactivity of the influencers. The followers' trust towards an influencer is influenced by these attributes. A similar finding was concluded by Piskorski (2016) who documented that followers build trusts towards the influencers they follow on Instagram because they provided reviews and feedback about a destination (i.e., the influencers communicate and disseminate information to the followers).

Secondly, the study found moderate influence of the attributes towards the intention to visit travel destinations. When hiring the Instagram travel influencers, a DMO expects that viewing the reviews or contents created by the influencer on their Instagram can influence their followers to have an intention to visit the destinations featured. The intention, this study found, is associated with the features of the posts that the influencers create on the destinations. This finding is in line with previous study suggesting that the followers' intention to accept the suggestions of Instagram influencers is explained by the accuracy of the information shared by the influencers (Magno & Cassia, 2018).

Thirdly, we documented moderate influence of trust towards the intention to visit the featured travel destinations. Numerous studies have suggested a similar finding that trust is an influential factor to contribute to the consumers' intention to purchase a product (Che et al., 2017; Magno & Cassia, 2018). The finding of this study further emphasized the importance role of trust toward a response of a customers. In this case, trust towards the information

shared by the Instagram influencers can build confidence among the followers to have the intention to visit the destinations.

Finally, this study estimated the mediating effect of trust between the attributes and the intention to visit the destinations. However, we traced a non-significant role of trust as the mediator. This could be the presence of strong direct linkages between attributes and the intention to visit which can be interpreted that, exclusively, the attributes of the posts shared by the Instagram influencers are keys for the followers to have the intention to visit the places.

### **Conclusions**

From the discussions above, we conclude that the attributes of the posts shared by the Instagram influencers and the followers' trusts towards the influencers influence the followers' intention to visit the places featured by the influencers. DMOs can utilize this finding to identify the influencers suitable for their brand ambassadors. Future research is then recommended to look into the categorization of the influential attributes. Using the attributes, DMOs can re-strategize their methods of Instagram influencer selection to promote their products or destinations. Trust of the followers is also essential to stimulate a response of the intention to visit among the followers. Therefore, we suggest that the Instagram travel influencers need to work on ensuring that the information they feature is of good quality, authentic and credible in the eyes of their followers. The influencers can also interact with the followers and give honest feedback to them in order to gain their trust. With this strategy, Instagram travel influencers impact not only the decision-making and motivating travelers, but also on the tourism industry's marketers or business owners in terms of increased travel marketing potential.

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