

Social Media Travel Influencers' Attributes and Tourists' Travel Intention: The Role of Source Credibility

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Abstract

Social media influencer marketing is redefining the marketing strategies and has become a powerful tool therein. Social media travel influencers are common people who have social media channels or pages through which they shape their followers' perceptions. This research study attempts to analyse the credibility traits of social media travel influencers and the travel intent of tourists in Delhi and the National Capital Region. A structured questionnaire was designed and shared online to collect data. A total of 166 responses were received and only 100 are valid. This study utilised quota sampling for the selection of the sample, and data is analysed with the help of SmartPLS3 for measurement and structural model evaluation. The results disclose that expertise, intimate self-disclosures (ISDs), and trustworthiness have a significant effect on influencers' credibility, while credibility and intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) have a significant direct effect on tourists' travel intention. Moreover, trustworthiness also showed a significant indirect effect on tourists' travel intention. These findings establish the importance of credibility traits and the mediating role of credibility between the traits and tourists' travel intention. Marketers should consider the influencer's expertise and credibility to select a travel influencer whose content is perceived as intimate and credible.

Keywords:

Credibility, Influencer Marketing, Social Media Influencer, Tourism, Tourists' Travel Intention

1 Introduction

Nowadays, people are surrounded by digital devices, and we are progressing towards a digital era. Social media can be considered one of the biggest inventions that have changed

the communication process. It has also changed the way through which tourists acquire information and utilize it (Xiang et al., 2015). Social media has become a habit for people, and they spend hours on it for several reasons, such as information, entertainment, chatting, etc. Thus, it is no surprise that social media has turned into one of the most influential promotion and marketing platforms today. It also has the power to shape perceptions, feelings, and experiences (Luo & Zhong, 2015) and plays a crucial role in travel decision-making, especially as a source of information (Dabija et al., 2018; Fotis et al., 2012; Usui et al., 2018). Many social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, are extremely popular in India and the world. The popularity can be explained by the fact that there were 518 million and 3.6 billion social media users in India and the world in 2020, and the number of users is predicted to increase to 1.4 billion in 2040 and 4.41 billion in 2025, respectively (Basuroy, 2020; Statista Research Department, 2022).

Social media has become a vital part of people's lives, which coupled with the tech-savvy generation presented an opportunity for companies to advertise their commodities on social media. Social media has changed the arena of marketing and the latest form of marketing popularly known as 'Social Media Influencer Marketing' has appeared (Cox et al., 2009). Radwan et al. (2021) defined social media influencers 'are individuals or celebrities who have amassed large numbers of followers on their accounts as they post attractive content, videos, and photos that highlight their lifestyle, preferences, and merchandise preferences'. A brand hiring a person to advertise its products and services is not a new phenomenon. In traditional advertising channels, brands employ famous figures or celebrities to endorse their brands, but a social media influencer is generally a common individual who becomes famous on social media for his expertise and knowledge on a particular subject such as travel, food, fashion, music, sports, etc. (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Companies utilize their services when they have made a name for themselves in their area of expertise and acquired the ability to shape their followers' perceptions as they are recognised as opinion leaders (Jalilvand, 2017; Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014; Wu et al., 2021). They consistently provide information to their followers via their social media channels. Thus, after hiring them, it becomes easy to promote the products and services through them because they have already built a relationship with their followers and their followers trust the information provided by them. This form of marketing is cost-effective for companies compared to traditional celebrity marketing in addition to being rich in content (Borowski et al., 2020; Seeler et al., 2019), thereby becoming popular as a substitute for celebrity endorsement.

Travel/destination companies are partnering with travel influencers and modifying their traditional working agreements for influencers to harness influencer and follower relationships to enlarge their target market and retain them for the long term (Wellman et al., 2020). Today, social media is full of influencers, who have expertise and experience in various fields, and therefore, using their services for promotion has become an efficient and profitable means for the companies (Duffy & Kang, 2019; Femenia-Serra et al., 2022).

In this digital age, online marketing, including influencer marketing, has become the most sought-after tool for diverse promotional needs of a company, but tourists have also become fastidious. They do not rely only on information provided by companies on their social media pages as they are considered commercial advertisements (Mariani et al., 2021). Instead they gather information from eclectic sources and one of them is the influencer they follow. Moreover, the tag of commercial advertisement also starts to fade away when information comes from an influencer, and people might pay attention to the posts.

There have been studies that examined the effect of social media travel influencers' on travel decision-making and are concluded to affect followers' travel intentions (Magno & Cassia, 2018), increasing the chances in favour of a specific destination (Xu & Pratt, 2018), being a source of information (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Y.-S. Lin & Huang, 2006). With regards to the tourism industry, previous studies have investigated the social media influencers' influence on travel intentions through the variables of trust (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017; Pop et al., 2021), information quality and trustworthiness (Magno & Cassia, 2018), customer journey (Guerreiro et al., 2019; Pop et al., 2021), and attractiveness (Caraka et al., 2022). Furthermore, previous studies have also revealed that social media impacts communication of tourism experience (Wong et al., 2020) and attitude and tourists' attitudes (Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2020; Y. Wang et al., 2021).

However, there are only a few studies conducted to investigate how social media travel influencer marketing affects tourists' travel intention (Archer et al., 2021; Asan, 2021; Belanche et al., 2021; Kapoor et al., 2022; Szymkowiak et al., 2021; Xu (Rinka) & Pratt, 2018). However, in the context of social media travel influencers, the studies have failed to take into account the significance of credibility as a mediating factor (Caraka et al., 2022; Guerreiro et al., 2019; Magno & Cassia, 2018; Pop et al., 2021). Therefore, the study aims to examine the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing in the Indian tourism sector. This study attempts to (1) investigate the impact of a travel influencer (on selected online platforms) traits on his/her credibility in the context of tourism, and (2) to identify the significance of credibility as a mediating factor between these traits and the travel intent of tourists.

According to Statista (2022), India had 448 million YouTube users, 410 million Facebook users, 210 million Instagram users, and 17.5 million Twitter users. Hence, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were selected to investigate social media travel influencer marketing phenomenon for this study.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Review of Credibility and Attractiveness Models

Credibility and attractiveness models were used for designing the conceptual framework for this study. The credibility model has been suggested by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) and suggested that trustworthiness and expertise are two key factors of source credibility. Later, McGuire (1985) introduced the source attractiveness model and mentioned the attractiveness of a source as an additional driver of source credibility. According to Ohanian (1990), source credibility is a three-part construct consisting of trustworthiness, expertise, and likability in the context of celebrity endorsements. These models are crucial for understanding the impact of endorsements on consumer behaviour. Previous studies have been conducted to apply the source credibility and source attractiveness framework concerning conventional methods like TV, Radio, Newspapers, Magazines, etc., and social media travel influencers and disclosed a favourable influence on purchase intent (Kumar, 2011; Leite & Baptista, 2021; Saima & Khan, 2020; Singh & Banerjee, 2018) and travel intention (Caraka et al., 2022; Magno & Cassia, 2018), respectively. Additionally, Intimate self-disclosures (ISD) influence the credibility and consumers' purchase intention (Leite & Baptista, 2021). Based on the above discussion, we can say that attractiveness, trustworthiness,

expertise, and intimate self-disclosure will have a positive significant effect on travel influencers' credibility and the travel intent of tourists.

Previous studies also disclosed that credibility mediates the relationship between these traits and consumer buying intent and consumer attitude towards the brand (Nafees et al., 2020; Saima & Khan, 2020; Zia et al., 2021). Although, these studies discuss credibility as a mediating factor in conventional promotion by celebrities and generic social media influencer marketing context. Hence, it can be argued that the credibility of a social media travel influencer mediates the influence of attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and Intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) on tourists' travel intentions. As a result, Figure 1 shows the proposed framework:

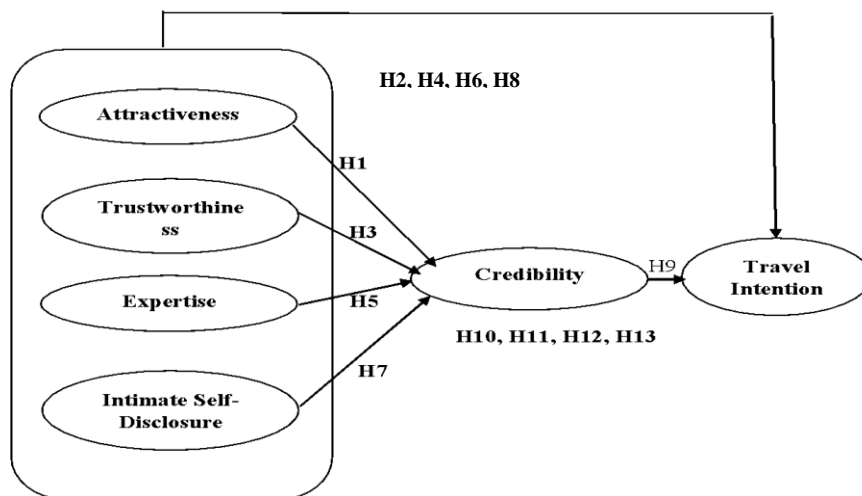


Figure 1: Proposed Model

2.2 Hypotheses Development

Attractiveness refers to the consumer perceptions of physical appearance and ease of approachability of the endorser (Leite & Baptista, 2021). Moreover, attractiveness catches the attention of users and makes them spend an extra minute watching or reading the content. The attractiveness of an influencer impacts credibility, trust, and tourists' travel intention (Caraka et al., 2022; Erdogan, 1999; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Hypothesis1: There is a significant positive effect of the attractiveness of a travel influencer on his/her credibility.

Hypothesis2: There is a significant positive effect of the attractiveness of a travel influencer on the travel intent of tourists.

Source credibility is a multidimensional construct, but trustworthiness and expertise are two primary dimensions (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Caldwell & Clapham (2003) described trustworthiness as 'the antecedent accumulated perceptual experiences that lead one to trust'. Filieri (2016) suggested that the trustworthiness of online tourism reviews may increase the chances of persuasion, and the source of reviews might affect trustworthiness (Pop et al., 2021). Furthermore, trustworthiness influences the perceived credibility of information, improves the marketing plan performance (Tsai & Bui, 2021), and affects tourists' travel intention (Magno & Cassia, 2018).

Hypothesis3: There is a significant positive effect of the trustworthiness of a travel influencer on his/her credibility.

Hypothesis4: There is a significant positive effect of the trustworthiness of a travel influencer on the travel intent of tourists.

Expertise means that a communicator has a high level of skills or knowledge in a specific field acquired through training or practice. La Ferle & Choi (2005) defined expertise as ‘the extent to which a person is perceived to possess knowledge, skills, or experience and thereby is considered to provide accurate information’, and it includes familiarity, understanding, and experience of the communicator (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). They are generally perceived as experts because they devote full time to a particular domain creating the idea that the communicators have expertise in their field (Freberg et al., 2011; Schouten et al., 2020) and how the audience perceives a communicator’s expertise is directly associated with subsequent purchase intention (Pop et al., 2021). Moreover, Generation Y and Z consider the expertise of social media influencers important when choosing a tourist destination (Caraka et al., 2022).

Hypothesis5: There is a significant positive effect of the expertise of a travel influencer on his/her credibility.

Hypothesis6: There is a significant positive effect of the expertise of a travel influencer on the travel intent of tourists.

Intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) are a means of communication for individuals to share intimate personal information with others (Kim & Song, 2016). Intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) allow social media influencers to develop a connection and closeness with their followers (R. Lin & Utz, 2017; Utz, 2015), and they intentionally reveal intimate personal information (Bickart et al., 2015). How social media influencers talk to their followers is pivotal to their success, and Intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) may positively influence credibility and behavioural intention (Leite & Baptista, 2021). As a result, it is argued that Intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) influence credibility and travel intention.

Hypothesis7: There is a significant positive effect of the intimate self-disclosure of a travel influencer on his/her credibility.

Hypothesis8: There is a significant positive effect of the intimate self-disclosure of a travel influencer on the travel intent of tourists.

Xiao et al. (2018) defined source credibility as ‘a characteristic that influences individuals’ perception of the persuasiveness of the speaker’. According to Li and Yin (2018), source credibility is ‘the endorser’s positive characteristic which can increase the level of acceptance and persuasion in the process of advertising’. The credibility of endorsers and social media influencers positively affects the brand image and purchase intention (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Leite & Baptista, 2021; Saima & Khan, 2020).

Hypothesis9: There is a significant positive effect of the credibility of a travel influencer on the travel intent of tourists.

With regard to traditional celebrity endorsement and social media influencers, the credibility of endorsers and social media influencers showed significant mediation between their attributes and customers’ buying intent (Saima & Khan, 2020; S. W. Wang et al., 2017).

Therefore, it is likely that the credibility of a social media travel influencer also mediates the relationship between his/her attributes and tourists' travel intentions.

Hypothesis10: There is significant positive mediation between attractiveness and travel intent of tourists through credibility.

Hypothesis11: There is significant positive mediation between trustworthiness and travel intent of tourists through credibility.

Hypothesis12: There is significant positive mediation between expertise and travel intent of tourists through credibility.

Hypothesis13: There is significant positive mediation between intimate self-disclosure and travel intent of tourists through credibility.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Instrument Development

Previous studies were explored for developing the questionnaire for this study. This study adapted previously developed scales. The following scales were adapted:

Table 1: Scale Items, Constructs, and Sources

Item	Construct	Source
I think, Influencer is expert.	Expertise (EXP)	Caraka et al. (2022)
I think, Influencer is experienced.		
I think, Influencer is knowledgeable.		
I think, Influencer is qualified.		
I think, Influencer is skilled.		
In my opinion, Influencer is attractive.	Attractiveness (ATTR)	
In my opinion, Influencer is classy.		
In my opinion, Influencer is beautiful/handsome.		
In my opinion, Influencer is elegant.		
In my opinion, Influencer is friendly.		
I find out the information about the tourist destination through influencer videos or posts.	Travel Intention (TI)	
I consider to travel to the tourist destination recommended by influencer in videos or posts.		
I travel to the tourist destination recommended by influencer in videos or posts.		
In my opinion, Influencer is honest.	Trustworthiness (TRUST)	Liljander et al. (2015)
In my opinion, Influencer is reliable.		
In my opinion, Influencer is trustworthy.		
In my opinion, Influencer is honourable.		
In my opinion, Influencer is believable.		
Influencer shares information about himself/herself.	Intimate Self-Disclosures (ISD)	Leite & Baptista (2021)
Influencer talks about his/her behaviors.		
Influencer shares his/her feelings.		
Influencer shares his/her desires		
Influencer shares his/her thoughts		
In my opinion, Influencer's videos/posts are believable.		
In my opinion, Influencer's videos/posts are reliable.		
In my opinion, Influencer's videos/posts are credible.		

In my opinion, Influencer's videos/posts are trustworthy.	Source Credibility (CRED)	Xiao et al. (2018)
In my opinion, Influencer's videos/posts are accurate.		

This study is quantitative in nature. Quantitative research is “a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analysed using statistical procedures” (Creswell, 2009). In simple words, quantifiable data is collected and analysed to reach a conclusion in quantitative research. The instrument for this study was developed by using the 5 point Likert Scale and all the questions vary from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’, except Intimate Self-Disclosures (ISDs), which range from ‘Extremely Superficial’ to ‘Extremely Intimate’.

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

A questionnaire was prepared, and the Google Form link to the questionnaire was shared on WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram with people in Delhi and the National Capital Region. The survey was carried out from January to March 2022. Respondents were asked to name at least one social media travel influencer (i.e., influencer's name or channel's name) whom they follow or whose videos or posts they watch or see as a filter question. Only those who mentioned the name of at least one social media travel influencer were allowed to fill the next part of the survey. Convenience sampling was used to obtain responses in this study because the researcher shared the link with the people as per his convenience. A total of 166 individuals participated in the study, and only 100 responses were valid that were used for the proposed model evaluation.

4 Findings

4.1 Profile of Participants

Table 2 displays the profile of the participants. There are 60% male and 40% female respondents. There are 34% participants in the age category of 19-24 years, 44% in 25-30 years, 14% in 31-40 years, 2% in above 40 years, and 6% in up to 18 years. With regard to educational qualification, 24% are Graduate, 54% are Post-Graduate, 12% have a Senior Secondary School Certificate, 6% have a Doctorate degree, and 4% have completed a professional degree. 90% of the respondents daily use social media for 1 hour or more than 1 hour, and 10% use it for less than 1 hour. 51 respondents have 1-2 social media accounts, 44 respondents have 3-5 social media accounts, and 5 respondents have more than 5 social media accounts. 72 users are active on YouTube, 43 are on Facebook, 84 are on Instagram, and 12 users are on Twitter.

Table 2: Profile of Participants

Indicator	Feature	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	40	40.0
	Male	60	60.0
Age	Upto 18	6	6.0
	19-24	34	34.0
	25-30	44	44.0

	31-40	14	14.0
	Above 40	2	2.0
Educational Qualification	Senior Secondary School (12th)	12	12.0
	Graduate	24	24.0
	Post-Graduate	54	54.0
	Doctorate	6	6.0
	Professional	4	4.0
Frequency of social media usage (per day)	Less than 1 hour	10	10.0
	2 hours	38	38.0
	3 hours	23	23.0
	4 hours	17	17.0
	5 hours	6	6.0
	6 hours	2	2.0
	More than 6 hours	4	4.0

4.2 Data Analysis Procedure

SmartPLS 3 was used to analyse the proposed research hypotheses. The sample size is small in this study, thereby selecting PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2019). At first, the measurement model was assessed, and after validating it, the structural model was assessed. However, before examining the measurement model, Common Method Bias (CMB) was checked by employing Harman's single factor test. It was found that CMB is not significant (48.23%) (Podsakoff et al., 2003), thereby representing the validity of the data set for further analysis.

4.3 Measurement Model Evaluation

First, loadings for all the statements were analysed, and all the loadings were above 0.708 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 3 shows Descriptive and Statements' loadings. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability were used to evaluate internal consistency, and the values for Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) were above 0.7 for all the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2017). Convergent validity shows 'the extent to which the construct converges to explain the variance of its items' (Hair et al., 2019). All six constructs met the minimum thresholds for Average Variance Extracted (AVE) as AVE was above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, the convergent validity of all the constructs was established. The values of Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVE are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, Loadings of Statements, Cronbach's Alpha, CR, and AVE

Factor	Statement	Average	Standard Deviation	Loading	α	CR	AVE
Attractiveness (ATTR)	ATTR2	3.62	1.023	0.821	.744	.747	.598
	ATTR4	3.58	1.017	0.722			
Trustworthiness (TRUST)	TRUST2	3.86	1.137	0.832	.845	.846	.733
	TRUST3	3.74	1.134	0.880			
Expertise (EXP)	EXP1	3.73	1.230	0.862	.907	.908	.663
	EXP2	3.95	1.048	0.767			
	EXP3	3.99	1.040	0.825			
	EXP4	3.65	1.218	0.759			

	EXP5	3.93	1.018	0.853			
Intimate Self-Disclosure (ISD)	ISD1	3.75	1.019	0.742	.819	.820	.604
	ISD2	3.75	1.067	0.831			
	ISD3	3.87	0.991	0.755			
Credibility (CRED)	CRED2	3.88	1.018	0.787	.838	.842	.729
	CRED3	3.94	1.023	0.915			
Travel Intention (TI)	TRAV1	4.06	1.071	0.721	.798	.797	.568
	TRAV2	3.90	1.115	0.739			
	TRAV3	3.65	1.242	0.798			

Next, Discriminant validity was checked. It explains that ‘items should correlate higher among them than they correlate with other items from other constructs that are theoretically supposed not to correlate’ (Zait & Berteau, 2011). Fornell-Larcker criterion is used that compares AVE and squared factor correlations and states that factors’ AVE [ATTR (.773), CRED (.854), EXP (.814), ISD (.777), TI (.753), and TRUST (.856)] must be greater than the correlation values among the constructs. Hence, discriminant validity was established according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity–Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	ATTR	CRED	EXP	ISD	TI	TRUST
ATTR	0.773					
CRED	0.632	0.854				
EXP	0.648	0.713	0.814			
ISD	0.657	0.690	0.555	0.777		
TI	0.583	0.671	0.555	0.727	0.753	
TRUST	0.716	0.809	0.758	0.587	0.535	0.856

Cross-loading criterion states that the statements of a factor must have high loadings with the same factor compared to other factors (Henseler et al., 2015). In this study, all the statements have high loadings with their own factor (Table 5), thereby establishing the discriminant validity.

Table 5: Loadings of the Statements with the Same Factors and Other Factors

	ATTR	CRED	EXP	ISD	TI	TRUST
ATTR2	.821	.504	.566	.491	.496	.584
ATTR4	.722	.474	.429	.530	.401	.522
CRED2	.502	.787	.535	.528	.538	.649
CRED3	.575	.915	.675	.645	.606	.730
EXP1	.582	.590	.862	.477	.512	.693
EXP2	.456	.529	.767	.402	.450	.460
EXP3	.583	.554	.825	.391	.505	.647
EXP4	.468	.602	.759	.508	.339	.629
EXP5	.542	.628	.853	.484	.446	.646
ISD1	.513	.544	.418	.742	.507	.490
ISD2	.536	.577	.454	.831	.601	.469
ISD3	.482	.486	.420	.755	.584	.409
TRUST2	.601	.680	.645	.452	.432	.832
TRUST3	.625	.704	.652	.550	.482	.880
TI1	.387	.489	.312	.563	.721	.404

TI2	.394	.497	.447	.538	.739	.424
TI3	.529	.531	.448	.545	.798	.382

Discriminant validity has also been established as per HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) benchmark. The HTMT ratios of all the constructs are presented in Table 6, and the values for each construct are below 0.85 (Kline, 2011), establishing the measurement model's discriminant validity.

Table 6: HTMT Criterion

	ATTR	CRED	EXP	ISD	TI	TRUST
ATTR						
CRED	0.637					
EXP	0.645	0.714				
ISD	0.664	0.691	0.557			
TI	0.579	0.673	0.550	0.727		
TRUST	0.719	0.813	0.757	0.587	0.535	

4.4 Structural Model Evaluation

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) must be examined to determine absence of multicollinearity among the independent factors before evaluating structural model. The VIF values are in the range of 1.542 to 2.959 (Table 7), which are below 5, indicating that there is no correlation among the independent constructs in the proposed framework (Garson, 2016). Subsequently, the bootstrapping method (5,000 resamples) was performed to test the significance of hypotheses for evaluating structural model (Table 8). With regard to credibility, hypotheses H3, H5, H7 were supported, denoting that trustworthiness (Beta = .394, T = 3.892, $p < .05$), expertise (Beta = .226, T = 2.382, $p < .05$), and intimate self-disclosures (Beta = .264, T = 2.730, $p < .05$) have significant positive effects. On the contrary, it was found that there is no significant positive effect of attractiveness on credibility. Thus, H1 (Beta = .023, T = .222, rejected) was rejected. On the other hand, hypotheses H8 (Beta = .356, T = 2.332, $p < .05$) and H9 (Beta = .253, T = 1.817, $p < .05$) were supported, disclosing that there are significant positive effect of intimate self-disclosures and credibility on travel intent of tourists. However, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise have no significant effect on travel intent of tourists. Thus, H2 (Beta = .102, T = 1.024, rejected), H4 (Beta = -.046, T = .376, rejected), and H6 (Beta = .120, T = 1.140, rejected) were rejected.

Table 7: Discriminant Validity: Variance Inflation Factor

	Variance Inflation Factor
ATTR2	1.542
ATTR4	1.542
CRED2	2.079
CRED3	2.079
EXP1	2.959
EXP2	2.047
EXP3	2.794
EXP4	2.609
EXP5	2.873

ISD1	1.856
ISD2	1.963
ISD3	1.714
TRUST2	2.151
TRUST3	2.151
TI1	1.740
TI2	2.047
TI3	1.570

Table 8: Hypothesis Testing Outcomes

	Path	Beta	S.E.	T-Statistics	Remark
Hypothesis1	ATTR → CRED	.023	.103	.222	Rejected
Hypothesis2	ATTR → TI	.102	.100	1.024	Rejected
Hypothesis3	TRUST → CRED	.394	.101	3.892	Accepted
Hypothesis4	TRUST → TI	-.046	.123	.376	Rejected
Hypothesis5	EXP → CRED	.226	.095	2.382	Accepted
Hypothesis6	EXP → TI	.120	.105	1.140	Rejected
Hypothesis7	ISD → CRED	.264	.097	2.730	Accepted
Hypothesis8	ISD → TI	.356	.153	2.332	Accepted
Hypothesis9	CRED → TI	.253	.139	1.817	Accepted
Hypothesis10	ATTR → CRED → TI	.006	.030	.192	Rejected
Hypothesis11	TRUST → CRED → TI	.100	.059	1.676	Accepted
Hypothesis12	EXP → CRED → TI	.057	.043	1.332	Rejected
Hypothesis13	ISD → CRED → TI	.067	.051	1.332	Rejected

4.5 Mediating role of Credibility

The significance of credibility as a mediating factor has been examined and it was found that there is significant positive full mediation between trustworthiness and travel intent of tourists through credibility. Thus, H11 (Beta = .100, T = 1.676, $p < .05$) was supported. On the other side, credibility did not mediate the association between Attractiveness (Beta = .006, T = .192, rejected), Expertise (Beta = .057, T = 1.332, rejected), and Intimate Self-Disclosures (Beta = .067, T = 1.332, rejected) with travel intent. Therefore, H10, H12, and H14 were rejected.

After it, R^2 has been assessed. Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Intimate Self-Disclosures explained a 73.8% variance in Source Credibility. Moreover, the value of R^2 for travel intention was 59.9%. Afterwards, the effect size was evaluated. Cohen (1988) suggested 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 as a threshold for small size, medium size, and large size effects. In terms of Source Credibility, Trustworthiness (0.385) indicated a large size effect, Intimate Self-Disclosures (0.225) showed a medium-size effect, Expertise (0.044) exerted a small size effect, and Attractiveness (0.012) showed no effect. Concerning Travel Intention, Intimate Self-Disclosures (0.215) exerted a medium-size effect, trustworthiness (0.024) and Source Credibility (0.084) showed low-size effects, whereas Attractiveness (0.016) and Expertise (0.014) did not show any effect. Finally, the predictive relevance has been examined with the help of Q^2 . The Q^2 value must be greater than zero (Henseler et al., 2009) for dependent variables to exhibit predictive power. The predictive relevance has been established as Credibility and Travel Intention have values of .467 and .284.

5 Discussion

Social media influencer marketing has become a popular marketing tool to promote products and services. The conceptual model proposed in this study can be utilised to understand the effect of the features of a travel influencer on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (at least on any one) on his/her credibility and the significance of credibility as a mediating factor between these traits and the travel intent of tourists. The study reveals that there is a significant positive effect of the trustworthiness of a travel influencer on his/her credibility, which is in line with the model proposed by Hovland, Janis, and Kelly (1953) (H3 accepted). As opposed to earlier findings by Saima and Khan (2020), the expertise of the travel influencers was also significant in influencing their credibility (H5 accepted) as they try to share all the information related to the advertised destination and its other aspects to be recognised as a specialist in the field. Furthermore, social media travel influencers also share and disclose their personal and intimate information with their followers to establish themselves as a credible source, therefore understandably the intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) in-posts and videos posted by travel influencers significantly impacts their credibility, similar to earlier results (Leite & Baptista, 2021) and tourists' travel intention (H7 and H8 accepted). But their research was not in the domain of social media travel influencers, making this finding a distinctive contribution. Therefore, it is apparent that followers of social media travel influencers perceive expert influencers as credible and expect them to share their personal information, which in turn affects tourists' travel intentions. Also, the credibility of travel influencers exerted significant effects on the tourists' travel intention (H9 accepted), similar to the findings (Saima & Khan, 2020), though the study was focused on purchase intention and generic social media influencers, respectively.

Surprisingly, contrary to the existing literature (Caraka et al., 2022; Magno & Cassia, 2018), trustworthiness and expertise did not play a significant role in affecting tourists' travel intention (H4 and H6 rejected). This finding suggests that people want an influencer to make efforts to build long-term personal relationships with them, and that being attractive, expert, and trustworthy are not adequate to make them travel to a destination or even consider one that the influencer is promoting. Furthermore, the study discloses that there is no significant positive effect of the attractiveness of travel influencers' on their credibility and travel intent of tourists (H1 and H2 rejected) against the earlier findings (Yilmazdoğan et al., 2021). This finding suggests that instead of looks and appearance, followers of the travel influencers pay attention to the expertise and intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) in content that the travel influencers share on their social media channels and/or pages.

Finally, it was found that there is significant positive mediation between trustworthiness and travel intent of tourists through credibility (H11 accepted), in accordance with the study by Saima and Khan (2020). Meanwhile, attractiveness, expertise, and intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) show no significant positive mediation on the travel intent of tourists through credibility (H10, H12, & H13 rejected), conforming to the Saima and Khan (2020). However, the study was focused on generic social media influencers and did not include intimate self-disclosures (ISDs), making these findings a unique contribution to the tourism domain. These findings suggest that attractiveness and expertise do not enhance tourists' travel intentions through credibility, as they do not value influencers' attractiveness at all, but they want to make sure that the person they are following has expertise and is trustworthy and credible, which in turn influences their travel intentions through credibility. Thus, trustworthiness improves travel intentions through credibility that is influenced by expertise and ISDs.

6 Theoretical and Managerial implications

Social media influencer marketing area has been under-researched and how they influence consumer perceptions and the brands they promote. This study extends the existing literature on social media influencer marketing to the tourism industry and shows how tourists perceive travel influencer advertisement in India. Some work has been done to understand the travel intent of tourists in the context of social media travel influencers. The results of the current study present a model to comprehend the role of travel influencers' attributes in shaping travel intent of tourists and the credibility as a mediating factor between attributes and travel intent therein.

The findings of this paper suggest that trustworthiness, expertise, and intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) directly enhance the travel influencers' credibility, therefore establishing that being trustworthy, expert, and intimate make travel influencers credible. In addition, trustworthiness had significant indirect effects on tourists' travel intention, and intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) and credibility had significant direct effects on travel intention. Attractiveness and expertise had no significant direct and indirect impact on travel intention. Thus, these findings suggest that when it comes to choosing a travel destination, the followers travel to the destination suggested by travel influencers whom they perceive trustworthy and credible. As a result, the present study establishes that the credibility as a mediating factor plays a crucial role through the attribute of trustworthiness in influencing tourists travel intention with regard to travel influencer promotion, which is a crucial addition to the existing literature to comprehend the effectiveness thereof.

This study also has a number of managerial suggestions. Companies take high risks because they invest hefty amounts in travel influencers to promote a destination. They can feel more confident if they can identify the attributes of travel influencers that influence tourists' travel intention and invest in only those who possess identified attributes as it increases the chances of higher revenues and destination awareness. These factors combined with other factors may positively affect tourists' travel intention. Moreover, marketers should take into consideration the influencer's expertise and credibility in selecting a travel influencer whose content is perceived as intimate and credible, which in turn positively affects travel intention. Finally, marketers should also pay attention to how social media travel influencers present themselves to their followers in choosing them as followers look for personal cues and real people instead of edited content.

This study also proposes some vital recommendations for travel influencers. Travel influencers should share their intimate personal details, thoughts, beliefs, and opinions on the destination through their posts while also being trustworthy and credible. If they want to get prolonged success, they should positively maintain the aforementioned traits over time despite the success in the short run to attract a higher number of followers and extend their association with brands successfully.

7 Limitations and Future Scope

There are some limitations of this study that must be considered. First, more than 75% of participants fall in the age group of 19 to 30 (in years), and the number of participants is small for generalising the results as well. Thus, future researchers will focus on increasing the number of total participants, and emphasise selecting the participants over 30 years of age

as they can have different opinions concerning travel influencer promotion. Moreover, this study is also geographically limited to Delhi and National Capital Region (metropolitan areas), where the people are tech-savvy and use technology, including social media, in their day-to-day activities, though a large of India's population resides in rural areas. Therefore, future studies might include respondents from rural areas of the country to ascertain their perceptions as it might open up a new and large market. Also, a non-probability sampling technique is utilised for deciding the participants in this work. Hence, subsequent studies could use systematic random sampling or cluster sampling to determine respondents for ameliorating the generalisability of the results. Future research can also examine the association between travel influencer marketing and tourists' travel intention in the long run because such research will be subject to technological changes and how social media travel influencers maintain their credibility in the long run. In future, researchers can explore other traits of travel influencers affecting tourists' travel intentions by using exploratory research design.

8 Conclusion

Influencer marketing is redefining marketing strategies and has become an essential tool in designing marketing strategies in contemporary times. Companies are also using this new tool to their advantage and are positively shaping tourists' travel intentions. This study investigated the influence of travel influencers' attributes on the tourists' travel intention and the role of credibility as a mediating factor in the Indian scenario. The prolonged achievement of a travel influencer depends on the positive association between their attributes and tourists' travel intentions.

In this study, only some attributes are found to be significant in affecting the travel intent of tourists. The influencers' intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) and credibility play a paramount role in directly affecting the travel intent of tourists. With regards to travel influencers' credibility, trustworthiness has the most significant impact followed by intimate self-disclosures (ISDs) and expertise. Moreover, the influencer's trustworthiness fully mediated the association between credibility and tourists' travel intention. Therefore, travel/destination companies must hire a trustworthy travel influencer who possesses expertise in creating good content and focuses on intimate self-disclosures for the development of a relationship with their followers to establish himself/herself as a credible source, which eventually shapes tourists travel intention. Interestingly, a travel influencer's attractiveness had an insignificant direct and indirect effect on the credibility and tourists travel intention.

This study also offers insights for travel influencers. The findings suggest that they should remain careful about the content they post and the information therein. In this digital era, information is at the fingertips of the tourists, and they are now more aware than ever of the various sources of information. Whenever they have slight doubt; they verify it instantly by cross-checking on the internet. Therefore, travel influencers must carefully post the content and avoid misleading/confusing information that allows them to develop a long-term friendly relationship with their followers. As a result, travel influencers can establish a personal relationship with them that will enhance their credibility and will ultimately lead to positive travel intention towards promoted destinations. However, there are other factors in addition to attributes of the travel influencers that must be taken into consideration by tourists before

deciding to travel to a destination. Hence, it can be concluded that only attributes of travel influencers are not sufficient to determine tourists' travel intention, even so they can put forward a destination into the basket of alternative destinations for consideration whenever tourists commence selecting a destination for tourism.

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