

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON THE TRAVEL DECISION OF 2ND-YEAR TOURISM STUDENTS AT BESTLINK COLLEGE OF THE PHILIPPINES

ABSTRACT

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In today's digital age, social media has become a vital part of individuals' daily lives, serving as a platform for communication, entertainment, and business. Its widespread use has given rise to social media influencers (SMIs), individuals who create and share content across various platforms and shape public perceptions and behaviors. These influencers have gained credibility among followers, with their content significantly influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. As a result, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) have begun collaborating with SMIs to attract potential tourists, recognizing their growing influence in the travel and tourism industry. While previous studies have largely focused on the role of social media in disseminating tourism-related content, this study aims to explore the specific impact of SMIs on destination promotion and tourist decision-making. This study applies Hovland's Source Credibility Theory, which asserts that individuals are more likely to be influenced by sources they perceive as credible. To assess the impact of social media influencers on travel decisions, the researchers conducted a survey involving 50 second-year Tourism Management students at Bestlink College of the Philippines. The results show that 64% of the respondents were aged 19 to 20 years old. A majority of the participants were female, accounting for 36 out of 50 respondents, and most belonged to section BSTM 22003. The results indicate that social media influencers play a significant role in shaping students' travel decisions by offering more informed and appealing destination choices. In terms of travel intentions, influencers inspire students to try new experiences through engaging content. Regarding trustworthiness, influencers build audience confidence by sharing personal travel experiences, making their recommendations more relatable and believable. In terms of credibility, respondents viewed influencers as reliable sources when their content was supported by factual information, which further strengthened consumer trust and influenced travel-related choices. The findings of this study reveal that social media influencers (SMIs) have a positive influence on the travel decisions of Tourism Management students. SMIs contribute to making destination selection more accessible and efficient by offering relevant and engaging content. They also help students make well-informed choices by showcasing various travel options and experiences. Moreover, influencers inspire students to discover the deeper purpose of travel and motivate them to explore beyond their comfort zones, promoting both personal and professional growth in the field of tourism.

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