

# Influencer Marketing and Hotel Booking Decisions

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## Abstract

This study examines the role of social media influencers in popularizing a brand by effective marketing and content sharing. The type of content shared has also been analyzed. With the help of the analysis a certain parameter has also been found which acts as the trust factor for social media influencers. The key finding of the study being that viral marketing and advertising is the go-to notion today to develop any brand in which these influencers play a key role.

**Keywords:** Influencer Marketing, Consumer Trust, Hotel Booking Behavior, User generated marketing.

## 1. Introduction

Viral advertising relates to the techniques employed by advertisers to promote word-of-mouth activity and earn profit from it as well as urge clients to promptly circulate marketing-related data. (Van der Lans et al., 2010 & Hinz et al., 2011). Despite being regarded as a quick-acting, cost-effective marketing tactic (Dobele et al., 2005), marketing which is transient (Bampo et al., 2008) and susceptible to waning. This is due to the limited colloquial expressions and linkages among the markets for consumers and the product or service. Contrarily, marketing with the help of online influencers uses the rising growth of online media to influence potential customers' views and processes related to making of decisions, and as a result, it has become a prominent new marketing tactic in current times (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020; Jang et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2019). Even though marketing that goes viral is frequently unintentional and transient, advertising using Social Media influencers is also difficult because they are expensive and hard to come by. In academia, viral marketing and influencer marketing have each received a lot of attention, but there hasn't been much study of how these both are interlinked. Thus it can be said, if social media marketing is being practiced, advertisers pivot their strategies for advertising and change into influencer marketing to further develop the process of marketing and enhance sales, in other words marketers modify their marketing methods to engage in influencer marketing if viral marketing is a reality so as to prolong the advertising cycle and boost sales. The research on viral and influential tourism marketing methods has to be given more focus with regard to the travel and tourist business because marketing is present in tourism studies almost everywhere (Dolnicar & Ring, 2014; Li & Petrick, 2008). Marketing which is supposed to be viral in nature and marketing based on social media influencers are frequently regarded in the context of hospitality as methods of marketing strategy with regard to destinations that enable marketers in the respective destination to advertise goods, hospitality related services in tourist areas with the help of online media (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020; Sevin, 2013). The primary driving force behind the growth of SM is the evolvement of it into a medium for forming ideas, emotions, and knowledge (Luo & Zhong, 2015),

making it a crucial information source for making decisions related to travel (Lin & Huang, 2006; Usui et al., 2018). The influence of trust on the hospitality and tourism industry has been studied in the past in a variety of contexts (Cohen et al., 2014), positively influencing the market among peers (Ert & Fleischer, 2019) and consumers' intentions to buy travel-related products online (Bonsón Ponte et al., 2015; M.-J. Kim et al., 2011), again eWOM (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016) has in the same way demonstrated various benefits of marketing with the help of online media influencers (H. Hu et al., 2019; X. Hu et al., 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Based on research in the tourism and hospitality industry, SMIs influence travel intentions of followers', increasing the possibility of visit to any particular tourist site (Magno & Cassia, 2018; Xu (Rinka) & Pratt, 2018). Using the trust variables (Chryssoula, 2017; (Magno & Cassia, 2018) guest experience (Guerreiro et al., 2019), standard of identified details on the tourism destination (Magno & Cassia, 2018), and attitudes regarding advertisement campaigns, earlier researches have also investigated the results of SMIs on purchase intentions of tourists (Xu (Rinka) & Pratt, 2018) Also, past research has revealed that SM can affect tourists' opinions and sharing of travel memoirs (Wong et al., 2020). The elements that affect how consumers interact with the information produced by online influencers for tourist locations and also how trustworthiness that too SMI-based affects consumer travel decisions, however, have received little attention. Moreover, SM is a key digital contact point that enables influence the decision-making process of travelers (L. Hu & Olivieri, 2021). To fully comprehend how SMIs impact customer journey in each stage, it is necessary to fill in the gaps left by these elements in the literature. Therefore, this study investigates how SMI trust and customer experience is related. Which in each stage being, including decisions before purchase, buy decisions, and moreover post-purchase phase also (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), as well as the role of SMI trust as a mediator between these stages. All interactions between a customer and a brand, customer experiences during the process of decision making, are represented by the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

## 2. Literature Review

A few interactions that make up the journey of the guest favorable are the behaviors related to purchase decisions that being before purchase, buying decisions, and moreover post-purchase phase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The three steps of customers' decision-making process based on online data, according to (Dwivedi et al., 2015), are searching of information, assessing, and purchasing. The period before a consumer makes a purchase is referred to as the pre-purchase phase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Since, tourism offerings cannot be tangibly characterized and direct experience assessment is time consuming (typically lasting post consumption) the data, beliefs, and ideas gathered through SM becomes more important for prospective tourists. (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Throughout the first stage of the process, online interaction has a considerable impact on the buyer's readiness to travel. Videos can pique tourists' curiosity about a place (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). The reading, searching, and trustworthy habits of customers have changed as a result of social media use. (Hudson & Thal, 2013) found that while looking for information before travelling somewhere, expectations about the locations are developed by the tourist which are further increased by their faith in Social Media Influencers. Consumers seeks advice from social media and previous traveler accounts when weighing their options (Chon, 2015). Since the arrival of social media, the travel decision-making procedure has experienced tremendous change. Furthermore, social media provides an excellent venue for consumers to share their observations prior to, during, and following a trip (Dabija et al., 2018; Lin & Huang, 2006). Use of social media in planning future vacations is pretty common now a days and rapid expansion of the online networking industry's

result in emergence of SMIs (Cox et al., 2009). Digital influencers who are recognized as experts in their fields can boost the effect of information communicated to others. (Jalilvand, 2017). Popularity of influencers in social media sites has resulted in them attaining mini-celebrities status (Gaenssle & Budzinski, 2021; Hudders et al., 2021). Influencer marketing has evolved as a means of communication for the internet global marketplace, allowing businesses to engage with their clientele more effectively and directly in the same way as SMIs have driven businesses to focus more on marketing strategies involving influencers. (Backaler, 2018; De Veirman et al., 2017; Hays et al., 2013). Viral advertising can be stated as a partnership among marketers and content creators who utilize their fan following to influence how services or goods are pitched to their consumer base. (De Veirman et al., 2017) celebrities are frequently employed to advertise tourist places (van der Veen, 2008; Xu (Rinka) & Pratt, 2018), fostering a favorable perception among visitors. (Rathore et al., 2016) studied the effects of influencer marketing and came to the conclusion that international hotels are more likely to utilize this strategy than destinations. (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020) illustrate that influencer-based advertising provides a new hope for hotels to enhance the appeal of a location through the popularity of online media and enhance the outreach to a wider section of audience than usual, with millennials being potential target as they are the most intrigued by SM. (Dabija et al., 2018; Khamis et al., 2017). While choosing to purchase specific tourist products, potential customers are able to depend on the past experiences shared via online media (Litvin et al., 2008). According to a global survey done by Rakuten Marketing in five nations with 3,600 consumers in 2019, 88% of those surveyed were encouraged to choose the destination of their choice because of an influencer. Hence, social networking is an effective medium for SMIs to share their travel experiences with other people, which has been a critical issue in potential tourist choices. While online media and social media influencers are powerful mediums for initiating connection among potential consumers in a number of ways, they also may harm the credibility of travel firms and locations. Furthermore, because content which are negative has greater impact than positive content, it may be systematically eliminated whenever hotels make choices. Negative consumer feedback can also hurt tourism sector initiatives (Thevenot, 2007) and deter travelers from visiting a certain location (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2019). Moreover, online media may contribute to some places' over tourism, as in the case of many prominent tourist spots (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2019), whereas unfavorable eWOM may discourage travelers from planning a return trip (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). Several researchers from several domains, notably from philosophy (Barber, 1983), sociology (Putnam, 1995), economics (Koehn, 1996), marketing (Doney & Cannon, 1997), and administrative studies, contributed to this particular topic and have investigated trust as a topic (Mayer et al., 1995). According to some scholars, there is "no other characteristic" that so strongly influence between-group and interpersonal conduct " (U. Singh & Srivastava, 2009) as trust, which is a complicated and multifaceted notion (Mayer et al., 1995). From the perspective of marketing, trust is viewed as a critical component in establishing and maintaining profitable long-term relationships. (Pennanen et al., 2007). For a successful marketing strategy both trust and trustworthiness remain a key component. Although trust and trustworthiness are not the same thing, (Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012) define trustworthiness as "the prior accumulated perceptual experiences that lead one to trust." (Deborah et al., 2019) defined online media influencers as "an engaged and empowered user of social media who is referred to and perceived as a reliable source by other social media users" in response to the emergence of this topic. Several academicians have examined faith in hospitality and tourism in variety of contexts, including aviation industry (Forgas et al., 2010), travel agents (Wu & Chang, 2006), and vacation spot management organizations (DMOs) (Marinao Artigas et al., 2017). (Agag

& El-Masry, 2017), emphasized that the user satisfaction of online trust, website reputation, and perceived utility all play a role in how trustworthy customers consider online travel websites to be. In addition, (S. Kim et al., 2017) found that potential consumers get a clarity on their booking intention with customer trust in hotels and as well as in online booking provider websites. In their research article on consumer confidence during the selection of travel destinations, (Marinao Artigas et al., 2017) discovered that a crucial factor in establishing confidence in a travel place seen as the reputation of the location. SMI content's informational value, reliability, appeal, as well as perceived familiarity have been proven to gain trust in sponsored postings (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Trust appears to be a crucial predictor of (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019) eWOM and positive feelings about the SMI lead to trust in a stronger sense. From the consumer's point of view, SMIs manages to seem to be more trustworthy than prominent individuals, those who follow them can relate to them more than celebrities, and purchase intentions of consumers' are directly affected with the involvement of SMIs (Schouten et al., 2020). However, there are a variety of approaches by which consumers' opinions on dependability can be influenced. Sponsorships may make consumers less trusting of influencers, according to earlier studies (Hudders et al., 2021). Furthermore (J. Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000) stated that using influencers to adjust a company's image that follows an organizational turmoil might result in a drop in trust worthiness of the organization and corporate legitimacy, and this may impact customers' perceptions towards the brand (Goldsmith et al., 2000)

### 3. Objectives of the study

- To examine the impact of influencer marketing on hotel booking decisions.
- To analyze influencer content and messaging used in hotel marketing.

### 4. Research design

The current situation of influencer marketing in the context of hotel reservations is comprehensively investigated and described in this study using a descriptive research approach. This study is best suited to descriptive research since it enables the collection of thorough and factual data on the topic being studied without changing factors or proving causation.

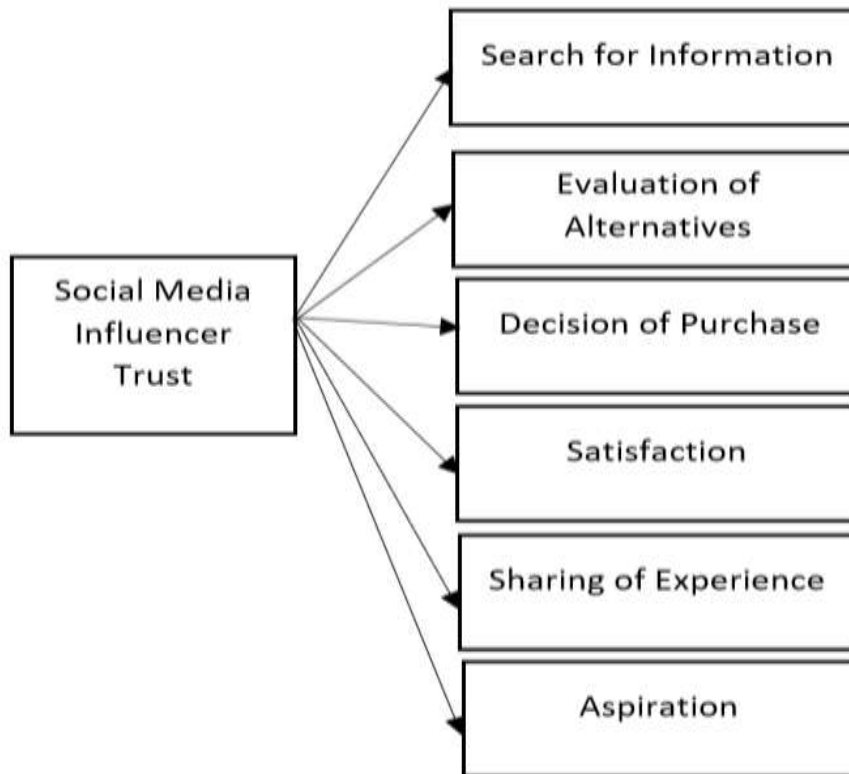
### 5. Data collecting method

Influencer marketing when it comes to advertising hotels is gaining popularity today. The influencer-generated content associated with hotel promotions will be subjected to a content examination and the same content has been collected over a time period of July to September 2023 from social media handles. The systematic analysis of posts, videos, and reviews posted by influencers on social media platforms will be a part of this qualitative method. The analysis will concentrate on the content themes, messaging tactics, and levels of follower involvement.

### 6. Sample collection and size

The main data source for this study's content analysis is influencer-generated hotel promotion-related content on several social media sites, including Instagram, YouTube, X, WhatsApp channels and Facebook. The size of the sample being 120; which mostly includes such posts which is directly associated to marketing of various hotel chains with the help of online media; prior studies in tourism and hospitality content analysis have employed similar or smaller sample sizes while yielding robust and meaningful

findings. Given the homogeneity. The decision to use this data source is in line with the research's goals, which are to comprehend the kinds of material, messaging tactics, and degrees of interaction used by influencers in the context of hotel marketing.



**Fig1: Parameters on which Social Media influencers trust are based on.**

## 7. Results

Identification of Important Variables Affecting Influencer Marketing's Performance in the Hotel Sector: **Influencer Credibility and Authenticity** is one of the most important characteristics found is the influencers' credibility and authenticity. Influencers who are viewed as sincere and reliable by their followers have a stronger tendency to affect hotel reservations. Their recommendations are more effective in generating bookings because people perceive them to be objective and trustworthy. Talking about Relevance and Niche Alignment; it's critical that influencers match the hotel's target audience or niche. Bookings are more likely to be influenced by influencers who specialize in travel, lifestyle, or hotel-related material and have following who are interested in these areas. The individual interests and preferences of the possible guests are represented in their material. Next we have engagement and interaction; which is an important factor in determining efficacy is the level of interaction between influencers and their followers. Influencers that actively communicate with their followers, answer comments, and promote a feeling of community typically have a larger and more devoted fan base. This engagement extends to conversations about and suggestions for hotels, enhancing their impact. The effectiveness of influencer marketing is increased by high-quality content creation, which includes visually appealing photos, carefully edited films, and compelling storytelling. High-quality content draws readers in, paints a realistic picture of the hotel's amenities, and persuades them to make a reservation followed by Transparency and

ethical behavior; Influencers must be transparent with their audience in order to keep their audience's confidence. This includes making clear disclosures of any compensated partnerships. The success of campaigns is influenced by ethical influencer marketing techniques, such as real experiences and objective reviews, and the last being Data-Driven Decision Making; which is using data analytics to find powerful influencers is an emerging trend. Before collaborating with an influencer, several hotels use statistics to analyze their audience demographics, engagement rates, and reach. This data-driven strategy increases the likelihood that campaigns will be effective.

According to the content study, three key categories of material were primarily utilized by influencers in their hotel marketing campaigns:

The most popular type of visual content used in hotel influencer marketing was visual content (photos and videos). Influencers routinely uploaded stunning images and videos that highlighted many facets of the hotels, such as the rooms, amenities, dining options, and scenic views. These images attempt to provide their viewers an engrossing and immersive experience. Talking about textual content (Reviews and Descriptions); influencers frequently posted detailed textual content, such as reviews and descriptions, in addition to visual content. They contributed insights into the overall stay, shared their own experiences, and highlighted special aspects of the properties. These textual components sought to provide illuminating and convincing narratives whereas user-generated content (Reposts and Labeled Posts); ensures the usage of user-generated content in influencer efforts is an interesting finding. Several influencers shared posts from their followers who had visited the hotels being promoted. This strategy promoted user interaction and engagement while also reinforcing authenticity.

### **Messaging Techniques**

The following major themes were covered by the messaging techniques used by influencers in hotel marketing campaigns:

First, we have experiential messaging; wherein influencers worked to give their audience a sense of adventure and experience. Participants talked about their experiences staying at hotels, highlighting the particular feelings, memories, and experiences connected to each visit followed by authenticity and trust; influencers prioritized establishing trust with their audience. They frequently emphasized candor in their posts, candidly disclosing both good and bad aspects of their hotel stay. Reviews and recommendations that were sincere helped to retain authenticity, and rewards and promotions; which depicts that some influencers added promotional components into their messaging by giving their followers access to special discounts or benefits when making reservations at particular hotels. This plan was designed to encourage quick action.

## **8. Conclusion**

Several important elements affect the efficiency of influencer marketing in the hotel sector. The target audience relevance, engagement levels, content quality, consistency, cooperation diversity, transparency, and data-driven decision making are some of these variables. Understanding and utilizing these elements can considerably increase the effectiveness of influencer marketing initiatives in generating hotel reservations. Hotels that carefully choose influencers based on these criteria are more likely to have successful marketing campaigns. The study of influencer content used in hotel marketing campaigns offers insightful information on the technique's influencers use to engage their audiences and encourage hotel reservations. Talking about dominance of visual content; wherein order to increase their appeal to influencers, hotels should make investments in visually appealing features and experiences. High-quality

images and videos can have a big impact on how people view a hotel's amenities. Thereafter storytelling and experience; which has a focus on experiential messaging by influencers highlights the significance of providing unique guest experiences. Hotels should put their efforts into creating memorable experiences that guests want to share. Followed by authenticity and trustworthiness; where Influencers' use of a trust-building strategy highlights the need of open, honest communication. To preserve a positive internet reputation, hotels should put a priority on passenger happiness and swiftly rectify any difficulties and lastly promotions with incentives; where using incentives and promos can be a successful tactic for boosting reservations through influencers. Collaborations that provide followers with exclusive incentives may inspire quick action. In conclusion, the content analysis shows that influencers are crucial in influencing consumer decisions and building the narrative surrounding hotels. In the always changing world of influencer marketing, understanding the content kinds and messaging techniques employed by influencers can inform hotel marketing tactics and improve their efficacy.

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