

How Social Media Influencers Shape Consumer Perceptions and Buying Behavior at Inland Resorts: A Mixed-Methods Inquiry



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ABSTRACT. As influencer marketing evolves, understanding its impact on specific industries becomes crucial. This mixed-methods study examines the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on consumer perceptions and buying behaviors within the context of inland resorts. Using surveys and interviews with resort guests, the research measures the perceived impact of SMI characteristics on consumer decisions. Quantitative data is analyzed through mean and standard deviation, while qualitative data is explored using Lichtman's 3Cs thematic analysis. Findings indicate a strong influence of SMIs on consumer perception and purchasing behavior, with identified themes providing valuable insights for developing effective marketing strategies. This study highlights the need for further research on the role of SMIs in the broader hospitality and tourism sector.

1.0. Introduction

Influencer marketing significantly impacts industries, including travel and tourism (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2019). In the digital age, destination-marketing organizations benefit from online strategies and influencer endorsements to reach target audiences (Trivedi et al., 2022). Travelers increasingly rely on online platforms to plan visits to destinations like hotels and resorts (Han & Chen, 2022). International hotel chains are leading users of influencer marketing in this sector (Cholprasertsuk et al., 2020). For instance, New Zealand employs influencers to attract international tourists by promoting activities like skiing (Kankhuni & Ngwira, 2019).

Research in the Asia-Pacific highlights the strong influence of social media influencers on consumer decisions, with 58% of participants making purchases based on influencer recommendations and 85% following their favorite influencers' advice (Kutz et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2017). Tourists rely on influencer reviews when planning resort visits, with positive attitudes toward influencer marketing linked to higher

travel intentions (Rahjasa et al., 2024; Han & Chen, 2022). In Malaysia, initiatives like MAIKOL leverage regional influencers to promote tourism (Asyraff et al., 2022). Similarly, Instagram-based strategies in Indonesia have boosted tourist interest and awareness of resorts (Ozali & Yilmaz, 2023).

In the Philippines, social media influencers play a significant role in promoting domestic tourism. The Department of Tourism (DOT) incorporates influencers in initiatives to boost local travel, with DOT Secretary Berna Romulo-Puyat recognizing their contributions to the industry (Arnaldo, 2021). Efforts like the Creator and Influencer Council of the Philippines (CICP) empower influencers to excel in marketing and content creation. Influencers have also promoted destinations like Zamboanga Peninsula, Batangas beaches, and El Nido, enhancing visibility through platforms like Instagram (Moreno, 2023; Abdon-Liwanag & Ramos, 2022; Parris-Piper & Smith, 2023). As the "social media capital of the world," the Philippines sees a growing presence of macro-influencers endorsing various products and destinations (Hussain & Khan, 2020; Libunao & Delos Reyes, 2022).

In October 2018, social media influencers from Malaysia visited Negros Occidental, welcomed by Christine Mansinares, Supervising Tourism Operations

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Officer. Mansinares emphasized that influencers could effectively promote the region through their platforms, boosting local tourism and attracting Malaysian visitors (Nicavera & Santos, 2018). Additionally, Danjugan Island in Negros Occidental was recognized as a top destination by influencers and experts in 2023 (Santos & Nicavera, 2023).

Several studies on Negros Island have examined travel destinations and resorts, such as Villarias and Estores (2021) on resort management practices and tourism impacts and Sangat and Estores (2023) on disaster risk management preparedness in local beach and dive resorts. Malacapay and Tababa (2020) explored green technology practices and investments in a beach resort in Sipalay City, while March and Yap (2022) assessed the status of marine protected areas in Zamboanguita, Negros Oriental. However, limited research exists on the impact of social media influencers on consumer perception and behavior regarding inland resort products and services in Negros Island, a gap this study aims to address.

This study aims to assess the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on consumer perception and behavior regarding the marketing of inland resort products and services in Negros Occidental. It also seeks to identify additional factors influencing consumer decisions related to SMIs. The findings will guide the development of a marketing framework and a guideline checklist for inland resorts to strategically select and evaluate social media influencers, including recommendations for content and strategies to improve marketing efforts.

2.0. Methodology

Research design. This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method design involving two steps: quantitative data collection and analysis followed by qualitative data collection and analysis to further interpret the quantitative findings (Almeida, 2018). Descriptive quantitative and basic qualitative research methods were utilized.

By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, this study provides comprehensive insights into how social media influencers affect resort guests' perceptions and behaviors in marketing resort products and services. As Taguchi (2018) noted, mixed-methods research combines data analyses to uncover individual and contextual factors influencing observed patterns.

Locale of the Study and Participants. This study was conducted at selected inland resorts in Bacolod City, Philippines. Participants were inland resort guests who visited from October to November 2023, ages 18-45 and were familiar with social media influencers. A total of 389 respondents were chosen for quantitative data using quota sampling. Out of the 389 respondents, 12 were selected for the interview which were selected using

maximum variation. Three males are 23 and below, 3 females are 23 and below, 3 males are above 23, and 3 females are above 23.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variable	f	%
Age		
Younger (23 years old and below)	270	69.4
Older (above 23 years old)	119	30.6
Sex		
Male	173	44.5
Female	216	55.5
Total	389	100.0

Note: average age=23.9 years old

Instrument and data collection process. This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach to data collection. For the quantitative part, a modified questionnaire was used from the study of Magano and Nascimento (2022) and Sama (2019) on SMI characteristics and consumer behavior, respectively. It was a 4-point Likert Scale based on their agreement with verbal interpretations of very high, high, low, and very low. The questionnaire went through validity and reliability tests, and CVR by Lawshe was used (CVI=0.78) and Cronbach's Alpha (0.985), respectively. There were 389 respondents during this phase, and the number was determined using quota sampling calculation from Charan and Biswas (2013). The gathered data were analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation. For the qualitative phase, 12 respondents were chosen using maximum variation who were interviewed using a semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interview questionnaire.

Data Analysis. Descriptive statistical treatment was utilized to interpret the quantitative data gathered. Descriptive statistics is an important aspect of initial data analysis because they laid the groundwork for comparing variables using inferential statistical tests, according to Pyzdek (2021). Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation were employed to determine the degree of impact of social media influencers on consumer perception and the consumer's buying behavior.

Thematic analysis was done to analyze the qualitative data using Lichtman's (2013) 3Cs. A member-checking method was used to establish credibility. The researcher also employed a thick and rich description of the data gathered, ensuring transferability. Code-recode was used to establish the dependability of the study and the audit trail for confirmability.

3.0. Results

Characteristics of SMIs in promoting an inland resort's products and services impacting consumer perception

Table 2 shows the degree of impact of Social Media Influencers' (SMI) characteristics on consumers' perceptions of credibility, trustworthiness, expertise, likeability, familiarity, and attractiveness when taken as a whole and grouped according to age and sex.

Overall results showed that respondents perceived that SMIs' overall characteristics in promoting a resort's product and services have a *very high impact* on consumers' perception ($M=3.33$, $SD=0.45$). All specific characteristics such as perceived credibility ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.52$), trustworthiness ($M=3.28$, $SD=0.55$), expertise ($M=3.32$, $SD=0.53$), likeability ($M=3.40$, $SD=0.53$), familiarity ($M=3.28$, $SD=0.56$) and attractiveness ($M=3.35$, $SD=0.61$), aggregately resulting in SMIs overall character very high impact on consumers' perception. The overall research results indicate that SMIs significantly impact consumers' perceptions of a resort's products and services. The overall impact was notably very high, implying that the resort management may leverage SMIs as an effective marketing strategy for promoting their resort destination.

Moreover, the overall standard deviation ranges from 0.45 to 0.61, denoting that the further the data points are, the higher the deviation. This range of standard deviations across SMI-specific characteristics implies variation in every SMI characteristic and how it impacts consumer perceptions. Furthermore, results imply that this variability requires resort destination marketers to tailor their selection of SMIs and messaging strategies in alignment with their target audience preferences and expectations.

Table 2 shows that likeability had the highest mean ($M=3.40$, $SD=0.53$), indicating a strong impact on consumers, followed by perceived credibility ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.52$). This suggests travelers are highly influenced by their attraction to SMIs and view them as credible sources of travel information. The high score for credibility emphasizes the importance of trust and

authenticity in influencer-consumer relationships, highlighting the need for transparency and integrity in content creation to maintain consumer trust.

Characteristics of SMIs impacting consumer perception in terms of age

Moreover, it is worth noting that when respondents are grouped according to age, overall results show that younger people perceived a very high impact with the SMI's overall characteristic ($M=3.36$, $SD=0.44$) than the older people ($M=3.27$, $SD=0.47$), though with just a small difference. SMIs' credibility had a very high impact on both age groups' perceptions. The overall standard deviation in this group ranges from 0.44-0.47, denoting that closer data points mean a lower deviation.

The results highlight SMI's overall characteristics in forming perceptions across age groups. They imply that regardless of age, individuals consider SMI's overall characteristics influential in their decision-making process.

Mohammed and Ali (2024) found that young and older travelers use various information sources and share similar expectations for accuracy and completeness. De Castro et al. (2021) noted that SMIs are popular among specific age groups, leading brands to leverage them for promoting products and building brand awareness. Gulati (2023) also found no significant differences in how different generations respond to social media, indicating that age does not affect the influence of social media on tourists' decision-making. Tourism marketers should treat all generations equally and give them the same attention.

Characteristics of SMIs impacting consumer perception in terms of sex

The results also highlight that when respondents are grouped according to sex, overall results show that female respondents perceived a very high impact with the SMI's overall characteristics ($M=3.40$, $SD=0.44$). Male respondents perceived a high impact on the SMI's overall characteristics ($M=3.24$, $SD=0.45$). The overall standard deviation in this group ranges from 0.44 to 0.45, denoting that closer data points mean a lower deviation.

This low standard deviation implies a consistency in how male and female respondents perceive the impact of the social media influencers' characteristics.

The result suggests a gender disparity in the

Table 2A

Characters of SMI in Promoting a Resort's Products and Services Influencing the Consumer Perception

Variable	Perceived Credibility			Trustworthiness			Expertise			Likeability		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Age												
Younger	3.37	0.52	VHI	3.29	0.56	VHI	3.34	0.53	VHI	3.43	0.52	VHI
Older	3.27	0.50	VHI	3.26	0.55	VHI	3.26	0.54	VHI	3.31	0.55	VHI
Sex												
Male	3.24	0.56	HI	3.18	0.56	HI	3.26	0.52	VHI	3.31	0.52	VHI
Female	3.42	0.47	VHI	3.37	0.54	VHI	3.36	0.54	VHI	3.46	0.53	VHI
Whole	3.34	0.52	VHI	3.28	0.55	VHI	3.32	0.53	VHI	3.40	0.53	VHI

Note: VHI=Very high impact; HI=High impact

perception of SMIs, which is crucial for content creators and tourism marketers to refine their strategies. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) as cited in Han and Chen (2022), found that Instagram influencers affect the buying habits of young female users, who prefer accounts that promote positive images and feedback.

The results of the quantitative data were reinforced by the results of the qualitative data. People today tend to trust Social Media Influencers (SMIs) based on their characteristics. An SMI's credibility, trustworthiness, expertise, likeability, familiarity, and attractiveness are key in shaping consumer perception. These factors can determine whether an influencer has a positive or negative impact.

Most studies focus on SMIs' personal traits like credibility, trustworthiness, and popularity in shaping consumer perceptions (Cheung & Thadani, 2022; Sijabat et al., 2023). Mishra and Ashfaq (2023) note that consumers see influencers as relatable and trustworthy, making their recommendations influential. However, influencer fraud, fake followers, and undisclosed sponsorships raise concerns about transparency. Koay et al. (2022) highlight that SMI expertise significantly influences consumer behavior. While credibility and attractiveness are important, likeability also plays a

credibility. Influencers with credibility, transparency, and expertise are more likely to build trust and loyalty.

Credibility plays an essential role in shaping the perceptions of inland resort consumers. Studies have shown that social media influencers (SMIs) are often regarded as more relatable and trustworthy than traditional celebrities. This strengthens the ability of SMIs to persuade their audience (Schouten et al., 2019).

For example, I follow many travel vloggers on social media, and when I encounter an influencer who is a legitimate traveler, knowledgeable about attractive destinations, I trust their content. If they consistently visit well-known resorts and present credible information in their posts, I perceive them as authentic... The impact is significant when influencers post about a resort they genuinely enjoy, as it adds credibility to their endorsements. (CMVG, Personal Interview, July 2024)

SMI trustworthiness enhances consumer preference and overcomes skepticism

An SMI can be sponsored if it maintains transparency, which is crucial for its credibility. Influencers who prioritize honesty foster trust, especially when they demonstrate integrity in their content.

Transparency about paid promotions strengthens their credibility, while negative comments are less likely to be believed if the influencer is trusted. Ultimately, honesty and integrity are key to building a strong, trustworthy relationship with followers.

Trustworthiness is particularly important in promoting inland resorts, as potential guests seek genuine and authentic experiences. For example, research by Khamis et al. (2022)

emphasizes that the relatability and authenticity of influencers foster greater trust and positive attitudes toward the brands they promote, including tourism offerings such as inland resorts.

It is okay if an SMI is sponsored as long as they are transparent. This is where you can gauge the credibility of the influencer. (IC, Personal Interview, September 2024)

The social media influencers who impact me are those who prioritize honesty in their content. (AV, Personal Interview, September 2024)

SMI expertise drives engagement

The expertise of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) plays a significant role in driving audience engagement. Their ability to create high-quality, visually appealing

Table 2B

Characters of SMI in Promoting a Resort's Products and Services Influencing the Consumer Perception

Variable	Familiarity			Attractiveness			Character		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Age									
Younger	3.30	0.55	VHI	3.41	0.59	VHI	3.36	0.44	VHI
Older	3.24	0.58	HI	3.23	0.63	HI	3.27	0.47	VHI
Sex									
Male	3.19	0.56	HI	3.20	0.66	HI	3.24	0.45	HI
Female	3.36	0.55	VHI	3.47	0.53	VHI	3.40	0.44	VHI
Whole	3.28	0.56	VHI	3.35	0.61	VHI	3.33	0.45	VHI

Note: VHI=Very high impact; HI=High impact

crucial role (Deegan, 2021). Sponsored posts from influencers can build trust through informative content value and some elements of influencer credibility, which can boost brand awareness and purchase intent (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

SMI credibility strongly influences consumer trust

Consumers trust influencers, especially in the travel sector, when perceived as credible and knowledgeable. Influencers who share authentic experiences about well-known destinations build trust, and personal recommendations seem more reliable. Transparency is key, as followers value influencers who decline promotions they do not genuinely endorse. The choice of businesses to promote also affects trust; endorsing establishments that harm their reputation can erode

content is essential for attracting and maintaining viewers. When an influencer's posts and videos are well-edited and aesthetically pleasing, it enhances the overall appeal, boosting engagement. On the other hand, poor video quality or subpar blogging can lead to lower engagement and reduced trust. Influencers invest considerable time, effort, and skills into their content, making it a legitimate profession. They deserve to be compensated for their work, whether monetarily or through other forms of recognition, which acknowledges their credibility and the trust followers place in them. Finally, how influencers create and present their content—leveraging their expertise—directly impacts their success in engaging and influencing their audience.

Studies suggest that consumers are more inclined to trust influencers who exhibit a high degree of expertise. Kim and Kim (2021) observed that influencers who share professional, in-depth content often build greater trust among their audience, leading to higher satisfaction levels. This trust becomes particularly important for consumers evaluating inland resorts, as they rely on credible information to make informed travel decisions.

It greatly enhances how they produce their content and visuals... Influencers invest effort, time, and skills in marketing, so I believe they deserve compensation. If we cannot provide monetary compensation, we can offer something that acknowledges their effort and reflects our trust in their credibility as influencers... As a marketer and an educated individual, I recognize that being a social media influencer is a profession.) (RJL, Personal Interview, September 2024)

SMI likeability nurtures consumer affinity and boosts engagement

Influencers who are humorous or authentic in their content attract more followers. When promoting resorts or products while having fun, their endorsements feel more genuine. Followers also connect with influencers who share relatable posts or advocate for causes. However, negative traits like profanity or excessive promotion can alienate viewers. Influencers with a positive, down-to-earth personality are more likely to build trust and engagement with their audience. Khamis et al. (2022) mentioned that influencers who are likable enhance the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. Previous research has shown that information posted by SMIs is more credible than normal marketing in influencing tourists' travel inclinations.

because the ones I follow usually have an advocacy on their platform. They promote activities that help or inform people, which is why I tend to follow those types of social media influencers (SMIs)... One thing I really

like is the way they are as people in their random posts... Sometimes, if they are funny, I would follow them because it entertains me. (KJM, Personal Interview, September 2024)

One more characteristic of SMIs that I am looking for when I, when I watch them go to Inland Resorts is how happy they are when they are in these places... Most of the time, you will want to be around happy people, and it is much easier to like people when they are always laughing and smiling. (JKV, Personal Interview, September 2024)

If they use negative language or profanity, I tend to stop watching their content. (TG, Zoom Conference, August 2024)

Occasionally, those who promote products or places tend to say too much, which I find unappealing... I do not appreciate social media influencers when they overact, as viewers may not want to watch their videos. (AV, Personal Interview, September 2024)

SMI familiarity greatly enhances consumers' susceptibility to influence

Consumers are more likely to trust and be influenced by familiar influencers whose content aligns with their interests. Familiarity creates trust and relatability, making their endorsements more impactful. Well-known influencers have a greater influence, though personal preferences still matter. Studies like Kim et al. (2019) show that familiarity builds consumer trust, reduces uncertainty, and eases concerns about risks, particularly in online settings.

So, when I suddenly want to visit a place or if my friends and I come up with ideas, I usually just search for recommendations and base my decisions on the posts, especially if I am familiar with the social media influencers who are posting. I find it easier to be influenced by them... I follow social media influencers based on my interests. I follow those suggested in my feed, and if I like them, I follow them right away. (KJM, Personal Interview, September 2024)

For me, the more famous the influencer, the greater their impact in marketing the resort... The mere fact that they are famous and have visited that resort significantly influences consumer perception. (CMVG, Personal Interview, July 2024)

I don't like some influencers due to my personal preferences as a consumer in the market. (RJL, Personal Interview, September 2024)

Table 3A*Perceived Impact of SMI on Consumer Behavior*

Variable	Awareness			Interest			Conviction		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Age									
Younger	3.42	0.49	VHI	3.40	0.45	VHI	3.40	0.50	VHI
Older	3.36	0.47	VHI	3.34	0.51	VHI	3.34	0.54	VHI
Sex									
Male	3.30	0.52	VHI	3.33	0.47	VHI	3.31	0.49	VHI
Female	3.48	0.45	VHI	3.43	0.47	VHI	3.45	0.52	VHI
Whole	3.40	0.49	VHI	3.39	0.47	VHI	3.38	0.51	VHI

Note: VHI=Very high impact; HI=High impact

SMI attractiveness fosters consumer attachment

Consumers are often drawn to influencers whose physical appearance and overall characteristics appeal to them. Attractive SMIs who are also trustworthy and authentic tend to create stronger connections with their audience, increasing their influence. Additionally, elements like well-edited videos and background music can enhance the attractiveness of their content, further strengthening consumer engagement and attachment.

Influencers perceived as physically attractive can significantly boost the appeal of the resorts they promote, encouraging potential customers to consider these destinations for their vacations. Kurdia et al. (2022) highlight that attractive influencers often inspire followers to aspire to their lifestyles, which can lead to heightened interest in visiting the featured resorts.

Of course, if their characteristics are appealing, people will be drawn to them. (CMVG, Personal Interview, July 2024)

The way they look also influences me. (RJL, Personal Interview, September 2024)

I feel attached if the SMIs are trustworthy, authentic, and attractive. (JR, Zoom Conference, September 2024)

Overall Perceived Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Behavior

As shown in Table 3, overall results showed that SMIs have a *very high impact* on consumer behavior (M=3.38, SD=0.44). All specific components of consumer behavior, such as awareness (M=3.40, SD=0.49), interest (M=3.39, SD=0.47), conviction (M=3.38, SD=0.51), purchase (M=3.31, SD=0.56), and post-purchase (M=3.39, SD=0.50) have aggregately resulted in SMIs' very high impact. The result implies that consumers are highly responsive to SMIs across the distinct phases of the consumer decision-making process. Furthermore, the result implies that SMIs impact consumers' purchase decisions and post-purchase behavior. Resort destination marketers may leverage this

insight to tap into SMIs to enhance destination awareness, generate sales, and enhance travelers' positive post-purchase experiences. Moreover, the overall standard deviation ranges from 0.44-0.56, denoting that the farther the data points are, the higher the deviation. A higher standard deviation denotes greater variability in respondents' responses in the dimensions of consumer behavior. For example,

consumers exhibit more variability in the purchase dimension (SD=0.56) compared to other phases of the consumer decision-making process.

In addition, the specific component of consumer behavior on which SMIs have a very high impact is attributed to *awareness* (M=3.40, SD=0.49). Resort destination marketers may investigate what content messaging strategies and platforms SMIs utilize to raise awareness, which may have been translated into brand recall and recognition.

Perceived Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Behavior in terms of age

The results also highlight that when respondents are grouped according to age, overall results show that both younger (M=3.39; SD=0.44) and older respondents (M=3.34, SD=0.46) perceived SMIs have a *very high impact* on their consumer behavior. Similar standard deviation scores also imply consistency in how the younger and older respondents perceive the impact of SMIs. The results imply that destination marketers may explore the types of content produced by SMIs that have resonated with the different age groups to tailor effective marketing strategies in every stage of the decision-making process.

This is supported by the study of Mohammed and Ali (2024), which found that context variables such as age, gender, race, education, and other factors can change behavior and attitudes. Thus, diverse groups may have differing views on behavior. Saini and Kumar (2023) also stated that SMIs influence the younger generations' perceptions through their informational content. Thus, the information provided by the SMIs is regarded as reliable and significantly impacts consumers' purchase behavior.

Perceived Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Behavior in terms of sex

The results also highlight that when respondents are grouped according to sex, overall results show that both male (M=3.30; SD=0.44) and female respondents (M=3.44, SD=0.44) perceived SMIs have a *very high*

impact on their consumer behavior. Although both respondents perceive SMIs to have a very high impact on consumer behavior, there is a slight variability, which may imply a nuance in how male and female consumers interact and are influenced by SMIs. The variability in perception implies that both may respond differently to several types of SMIs' content. It may entail content customization that is most compelling for each sex, or it may also entail destination marketers and SMIs having inclusive representation in destination marketing campaigns.

Based on the study of Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), SMIs influence the purchase behavior of young females. Females are perceptively aware and prefer to follow SMIs that purposely depict positive images and offer encouraging reviews. Al-Shehri's (2021) research findings show that male SMIs impact male consumers more than female consumers, while female SMIs impact female consumers more than male consumers. Nevertheless, the age of the consumer does not impact gender-based results.

These results were also supported by the qualitative data. Social media influencers (SMIs) significantly impact consumer behavior, especially regarding inland resorts. They amplify awareness by providing detailed information and guidance about resorts, helping people who may not know where to go. By posting genuine, well-crafted content, SMIs inspire interest, creating excitement and curiosity about a destination. Their authenticity and enthusiasm drive consumer conviction and influence decisions, often encouraging followers to

Table 3B

Perceived Impact of SMI on Consumer Behavior

Variable	Purchase			Post-purchase			Perceived Impact		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Age									
Younger	3.31	0.58	VHI	3.40	0.51	VHI	3.39	0.44	VHI
Older	3.29	0.54	VHI	3.37	0.48	VHI	3.34	0.46	VHI
Sex									
Male	3.21	0.57	HI	3.34	0.49	VHI	3.30	0.44	VHI
Female	3.39	0.55	VHI	3.43	0.51	VHI	3.44	0.44	VHI
Whole	3.31	0.56	VHI	3.39	0.50	VHI	3.38	0.44	VHI

Note: VHI=Very high impact; HI=High impact

book a stay. Additionally, SMIs shape post-purchase satisfaction by setting realistic expectations through authentic content.

SMIs have significantly amplified consumer awareness of inland resorts

Social media influencers (SMIs) are key in boosting consumer awareness of inland resorts by providing valuable guidance and information. Their engaging content, especially videos and stories, reaches a broad

audience, offering insights that enhance resort visibility. By leveraging SMIs, resorts can increase recognition and attract potential visitors, especially those unfamiliar with the location.

Social media influencers boost brand awareness by connecting with large audiences and engaging followers. Rodrigues et al. (2021) explains that influencers can effectively raise consumer awareness by using their credibility and appeal to generate interest in the products they promote. This is especially impactful for inland resorts, as the visual content influencers share highlights the distinctive features and experiences they offer, capturing the attention of potential guests.

I like to travel, but sometimes I have to search for directions on how to get to a place unless I know a local who can help me. What if I don't? I would have to ask around, which can be time-consuming... I believe social media influencers are there to guide us and provide information about resorts that regular people might not post. (KJM, Personal Interview, September 2024)

For example, if you are far away and do not travel much, you can simply watch their videos. (JJM, Personal Interview, September 2024)

SMIs drive a substantial increase in consumer interest in inland resorts

SMIs drive consumer interest in inland resorts with engaging, positive content that sparks curiosity. Well-crafted videos or blogs keep resorts top-of-mind for travelers, while negative or repetitive content can reduce interest. Influential SMIs play a key role in shaping enthusiasm for resorts.

According to a study by Toleho and Candan (2023), SMIs significantly impact destination preferences, with their credibility and authenticity driving consumer interest. The research indicates that 70% of respondents reported being influenced by SMIs when selecting travel destinations, highlighting the critical role these influencers play in consumer decision-making processes.

SMIs generate interest among consumers when marketing an inland resort. (IC, Personal Interview, September 2024)

Most customers, especially those camping on social media, tend to show interest in every piece of information provided by SMIs in their blogs. (JR, Zoom Conference, September 2024)

However, if an influencer posts about a place, it creates excitement and a desire to learn more about it. (CMVG, Personal Interview, September 2024)

Repeated content might get boring and uninteresting... well-crafted video, putting the resort at the forefront of potential travelers' minds. (DE, Zoom Conference, September 2024)

SMIs strongly shape consumers' conviction about inland resorts

SMIs play a key role in shaping consumer views of inland resorts through engaging, authentic content. Genuine, unsponsored reviews inspire trust and interest, though skepticism can arise with paid promotions. Despite this, SMIs effectively influence perceptions and drive bookings through relatable storytelling.

SMIs create interesting and instructive content that is infused with their personalities and preferences, forming a strong parasocial relationship with their followers that influences their audience's decision-making (Breves et al., 2021; Jang et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ong et al., 2022).

The way they edit their scripts and words makes it engaging and encourages me to visit. (JJM, Personal Interview, September 2024)

I follow certain social media influencers closely, and whenever I have the chance, I try to visit the places they feature. Their strong encouraging power can genuinely motivate me to say, "Oh, that looks great!" because I trust that vlogger. (EMM, Personal Interview, September 2024)

SMIs deeply influence consumers' purchase decisions to book in inland resorts

Social media influencers (SMIs) play a crucial role in shaping consumers' convictions about inland resorts through their engaging content and personal recommendations. Their authentic, well-edited posts and positive reviews encourage followers to visit the featured destinations. Influencers, sharing genuine experiences, build trust, inspiring others to explore the same places. However, consumers tend to be skeptical of paid promotions, as they feel the content may lack authenticity. The credibility of the influencer, particularly in their passion and sincerity, strongly influences whether consumers feel compelled to visit a resort.

The trustworthiness and credibility of SMIs are essential factors that drive bookings in the resort sector. As Kutz et al. (2024) noted, influencer marketing campaigns can achieve conversion rates ranging from

1% to 5%, demonstrating their effectiveness in translating consumer interest into actual bookings.

Well, social media influencers significantly impact on customer decision-making for me because most consumers rely on what they see on social media. (DE, Zoom Conference, September 2024)

particularly regarding what to expect from the establishment or the food offered, I believe I would be more inclined to make a booking. (RJL, Personal Interview, September 2024)

Personally, it is the trust in the SMIs content that can lead customers to confidence to book a hotel or resort. (JR, Zoom Confidence, September 2024)

SMIs influence consumers' post-purchase satisfaction in inland resorts

Social media influencers (SMIs) can significantly impact consumers' post-purchase satisfaction by shaping their expectations of inland resorts. Influencers sharing content, whether through edited images or authentic portrayals, sets the stage for what viewers expect. If the experience does not align with these expectations, disappointment can arise, as seen in the "expectation vs. reality" phenomenon. Authentic, unedited content tends to lead to more accurate expectations and greater satisfaction, while overly edited or idealized portrayals can result in dissatisfaction when the real-life experience falls short of what was promised.

Moreover, the impact of SMIs extends beyond initial purchase decisions; they also influence post-purchase satisfaction. When consumers' experiences align with the expectations set by influencers, satisfaction levels increase. Chetoui and Khaoua (2020) found that positive experiences shared by influencers correlate with higher customer satisfaction ratings, leading to repeat bookings and positive word-of-mouth referrals. This relationship underscores the importance of authenticity and transparency in influencer marketing, as discrepancies between promoted experiences and actual visits can lead to dissatisfaction.

It is better when the posted images are authentic, as edited photos can sometimes create unrealistic expectations, leading to disappointment when visiting. (CMVG, Personal Interview, July 2024)

For example, it is like the meme "expectation versus reality." It turns out to be like that. I would be disappointed if I went to the place and thought, "oh okay, so it is not really like that. (JJM, Personal Interview, July 2024)

SMIs have indirect impacts on consumer buying behavior

Consumers prioritize price, accessibility, and convenience when choosing a resort, often influenced by SMIs' posts. Influencers share discount codes, highlight key features like "Instagrammable" spots and great food, and provide personal reviews, sparking interest. Detailed captions and positive community feedback enhance trust, with comments and reviews from followers reinforcing purchasing decisions.

Resort attributes impact consumer purchase decisions

Resort attributes like price, accessibility, and amenities greatly influence consumer decisions. Detailed information, such as rates and ease of access, is critical. Discounts offered by social media influencers (SMIs) further attract consumers by providing cost-saving opportunities.

In addition to SMIs, resort attributes significantly affect consumer perception and behavior. High pricing can negatively influence perception, suggesting the need to reduce costs by leveraging local resources. The physical attractiveness of the environment also shapes consumer impressions. Qualified individuals are crucial for building a destination's brand identity, which impacts consumer retention and attraction (Melese & Belda, 2021).

I want to know everything, including the price range and rates. (RJL, Personal Interview, September 2024)

Additionally, social media influencers often share discounts that their followers can use; this is also a compelling factor. (EMM, Personal Interview, September 2024)

I also assess how easy it is to reach the location and whether there are accessible transportation options. (CMVG, Personal Interview, July 2024)

Social media community impacts consumer purchase decisions

Social media communities influence consumer purchase decisions by shaping perceptions through posts, comments, and reviews. High-engagement content, such as posts with many likes or comments, signals popularity and appeal. Recommendations, feedback, and shared experiences from friends, influencers, or experts build trust and create a connection. Positive comments and detailed reviews further encourage resort selection.

Social media communities foster a sense of belonging, strengthening loyalty to both influencers and the brands they promote. High engagement within these communities enhances trust, making followers more

likely to act on recommendations from influencers they feel connected to (Khamis et al., 2022).

So, when I am looking for a place to visit or brainstorming ideas with friends, I typically search for recommendations and base my decisions on their posts. I find that posts with many comments are more influential. (KJM, Personal Interview, September 2024)

A high number of likes implies that the location is attractive because many people are interested in it. (CMVG, Personal Interview, July 2024)

I also check reviews or feedback from other experts or followers. (DE, Zoom Conference, September 2024)

4.0. Conclusion

Social media influencers (SMIs) shape consumer behavior by building trust through credibility, expertise, and likeability. While paid promotions may raise doubts, transparent SMIs inspire trust and influence purchasing decisions. Their impact spans the entire consumer journey, from raising awareness to influencing bookings and post-purchase satisfaction. Resort attributes like amenities, pricing, accessibility, and the broader social media community also shape consumer perceptions and decisions, creating a complex influence system around inland resort.

5.0. Limitations of the Findings

The researcher gained insights into the impact of social media influencers on consumer behavior, but several limitations exist. The study's respondents were resort guests, and while they agreed to participate, their opinions may not have been fully captured. Many respondents visited for leisure, which may have led to rushed survey responses with less engagement. Scheduling interviews was also challenging due to randomly selecting participants from various locations. Many respondents were students, not professionals, and some lacked confidence in expressing their opinions, likely due to limited interview experience. Additionally, some appeared hurried, as seen in their body language. The researcher recommends further exploration to address these limitations and gain a deeper understanding of the topic.

6.0. Practical Value of the Paper

This study examined the perceived impact of social media influencers' characteristics on consumer perception and buying behavior, offering valuable insights into the evolving trend of digital marketing strategies, particularly for inland resorts and other tourism and hospitality establishments. While some

businesses have begun integrating digital marketing into their strategies, relatively few leverages social media influencers as part of their promotional efforts.

Beyond merely starting to collaborate with social media influencers, the findings of this study can help establishments craft more targeted and effective strategies that align with their marketing goals. By selecting the right influencers, fostering long-term relationships, and providing clear guidelines on how the resort should position itself, businesses can maximize the impact of their influencer partnerships. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing inland resorts' marketing strategies through using social media influencers.

7.0. Directions for Future Research

Future research can expand on this study by exploring the broader impact of social media influencers on consumer behavior. This could involve comparing influencer effects across tourism sectors and analyzing the impact of micro- versus macro-influencers. Additionally, examining the role of specific social media platforms in shaping influencer marketing effectiveness and consumer engagement would offer valuable insights.

8.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors wish to confirm that this study has no known conflicts of interest and that significant financial support for it could not have influenced its outcome. All the data-gathering procedures were conducted with the participant's consent.

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