

Perceived Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Perception and Buying Behavior on Inland Resort Products and Services: An Explanatory Sequential Mixed Method Study

Cristine Mae G. Montenegro¹ and Nenette D. Padilla²

^{1,2}*University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos, Philippines*

Introduction: Influencer marketing has transformed the travel and tourism industry by shaping consumer behavior and promoting destinations. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) leverage influencers to enhance brand visibility and engagement, as seen in Malaysia, New Zealand, and across the Asia-Pacific. In the Philippines, a global social media hub, influencer marketing is a key tourism strategy, with the Department of Tourism promoting destinations like Batangas, El Nido, and Negros Occidental. Negros Occidental actively collaborates with influencers to boost tourism, particularly in Danjungan Island. Research highlights sustainability, disaster preparedness, and marine conservation, emphasizing the need to explore influencers' role in tourism growth.

Methodology: This study used an explanatory sequential mixed-method approach to assess the impact of social media influencers' characteristics on consumer perception and buying behavior across five stages, considering age and sex. The quantitative phase involved 389 respondents using a validated 4-point Likert Scale questionnaire, while the qualitative phase included 12 interviews analyzed through Thematic Analysis. Data were examined using statistical and descriptive methods.

Results: Quantitative results indicate that social media influencers (SMIs) have a very high perceived impact on consumer perception overall and across age groups, while impact by sex is very high for females and high for males. SMIs also have a very high impact on consumer buying behavior across all categories. Qualitative findings support this, highlighting that SMI characteristics—credibility, trustworthiness, expertise, likeability, familiarity, and attractiveness—build trust, boost engagement, and foster emotional connections. SMIs drive awareness, interest, and bookings for inland resorts, influencing purchase decisions and post-purchase satisfaction, with resort attributes and social media communities also playing a role.

Conclusion: Social media influencers (SMIs) significantly shape consumer perception and buying behavior by leveraging credibility, trustworthiness, expertise, likeability, familiarity and attractiveness, while their recommendations, combined with resort attributes and social media community interactions, create a comprehensive ecosystem that influences awareness, interest, decision-making, and post-purchase satisfaction for inland resort guests.

Practical Value: This study explored the impact of social media influencers' characteristics on consumer perception and buying behavior. This might be useful to inland resorts or other tourism and hospitality establishments as this study offers a framework for inland resorts and tourism businesses to enhance digital marketing strategies by selecting the right influencers, fostering partnerships, and aligning promotions with their marketing goals.

Direction for Future Research: Future research can explore the broader impact of social media influencers on consumer behavior, particularly in tourism and hospitality marketing. Comparative studies across tourism sectors, analyses of micro versus macro-influencers, and platform-specific research could refine marketing strategies. This study can serve as a basis for research in other hospitality and tourism establishments. Additionally, future studies should focus on regular guests of inland resorts or similar venues for more accurate and representative insights.

Keywords: hospitality and tourism marketing, social media influencers, explanatory sequential, Philippines

CORRESPONDENCE: montenegro_christinegarzon@yahoo.com

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1566-0904>¹