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Relationship of Social Media Influencers towards Attitudes of Travel Preferences among Young People in Klang Valley

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Abstract
This study aims to investigate the relationship between social media influencers and young people's travel preferences in the Klang Valley. The study reveals a significant positive relationship between travel preferences and the influencers who influence those decisions by examining factors such as expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness. The findings reveal that influencers not only provide reliable and appealing information but also have the power to effectively influence the behavior of young people. The discussion of tactics for leveraging influencer marketing in the tourism industry emphasizes the role of expertise and trustworthiness.

Keywords: social media influencer; travel preferences; youth behavior; influencer marketing

1.0 Introduction
Social media influencers wield substantial influence in the travel industry, leveraging their vast and engaged followings to spotlight destinations and services (Bastrygina et al., 2024) Figures like @pojiegraphy and @amirul.haniff, known for their stunning visual narratives, collaborate closely with tourism boards, hotels, and travel agencies to showcase unique attractions and experiences. This collaboration elevates lesser-known locales, boosting their visibility and appeal.

Influencers produce diverse travel content catering to varied tastes and interests, with travel vlogs particularly resonating due to their immersive quality (Sharma, 2024). These vlogs feature personal insights, cultural tips, and detailed itineraries, serving as comprehensive resources for prospective travelers. Additionally, influencers offer critical travel reviews encompassing accommodations, dining, and attractions, along with curated itineraries and guides shared via blogs and social media captions. This content empowers followers to craft personalized travel plans with ease.

The research underscores influencers' significant impact on consumer travel decisions, especially among millennials and Gen Z, who often derive trip inspiration and recommendations from social media (Nur'afifah & Prihantoro, 2021; Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019). Their authentic and relatable content fosters trust, guiding followers in destination selection, activity planning, and booking

accommodations and dining options. Consequently, influencers play a pivotal role in travel industry marketing strategies, driving increased bookings and tourism revenue for endorsed destinations and services.

In essence, social media influencers are pivotal in stimulating interest in travel destinations, activities, and services. They influence followers' travel preferences and choices through visually compelling and relatable content, making them indispensable partners in the industry's promotional efforts. Therefore, this study aims to examine the correlation between social media influencers and attitudes toward travel preferences among youth in Klang Valley.

2.0 Literature Review

An increasing amount of research has been conducted in the travel industry, specifically focusing on the role that social media influencers play in shaping the behavior of consumers. Influencers exhibit various qualities that enhance their efficacy, such as expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness.

2.1 The Influence of Influencers' Expertise on Consumer Travel Preferences

Chen et al. (2023) highlights the significant importance of perceived expertise in influencer marketing, specifically in the travel industry. Travel influencers who are acknowledged for their expertise in travel destinations and experiences exert a more substantial influence on the travel decisions of their followers. The influencer's credibility can be enhanced by showcasing expertise through detailed reviews, insider tips, and extensive travel experiences (Bastrygina et al., 2024).

Szakal et al. (2024) confirms this perspective, asserting that influencers who possess substantial expertise can significantly influence the travel decisions of their followers by providing reliable and valuable information. Followers are more likely to trust and follow recommendations from influencers who are considered experts in the field of travel. This concept is reinforced by Femenia-Serra and Gretzel (2020), who noted that experienced influencers often direct their followers to lesser-known destinations, thereby expanding their travel perspectives.

2.2 The Influence of Influencers' Attractiveness on Travel Preferences

One of the most important factors in an influencer's capacity to draw in and keep followers is their physical appearance. According to Foster (2022), influencers who have an attractive appearance tend to attract more attention and engagement on social media platforms. Influencers who are visually appealing often produce content that is visually pleasing and resonates with their audience, thereby making their travel recommendations more persuasive (Omeish, 2024).

Sokolova et al. (2022) highlight further that influencers' physical attractiveness can increase the perceived desirability of the places they promote. Followers may strive to imitate the influencer's way of life and experiences, which can result in a heightened desire to visit the featured destinations. Kilipiri et al. (2023) highlight that attractive influencers can enhance the attractiveness of travel destinations, thus exerting a substantial impact on the travel preferences of their followers.

2.3 Trustworthiness of Influencers and Their Influence on Travel Preferences

An influencer's impact is largely determined by their level of trustworthiness. Audrezet et al. (2020) contend that followers are more inclined to place trust in influencers who exhibit authenticity and transparency. Sharing personal stories, honest reviews, and behind-the-scenes content contributes to a trustworthy image. According to Lou and Yuan (2020), influencers who consistently convey their messages and uphold their values are seen as more trustworthy.

According to a study conducted by Pop et al. (2022), trustworthiness has a notable impact on the extent to which followers are willing to follow travel recommendations. When influencers are considered reliable, their endorsements of travel destinations have a greater impact, resulting in increased rates of adoption. Belanche (2021) asserts that credible influencers can form robust and devoted communities that are inclined to follow their travel recommendations. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H1: There is a significant correlation between social media influencers and attitudes toward travel preferences among youth in Klang Valley.

3.0 Methodology

This study used a quantitative research methodology to examine the impact of social media influencers on the travel preferences of young people in the Klang Valley. A sample of 211 respondents, ages 18 to 40, who actively follow social media influencers, was chosen through the use of purposive sampling. Four variables of influencer impact were measured: expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and attitudes. Data were gathered using an online structured questionnaire that also recorded social media activity and demographic data. The demographic information and social media usage habits were summed up using descriptive statistics, and the correlations between influencer impact and travel choices were investigated using inferential statistics, such as Pearson's correlation test, with a significance threshold of 0.01. The questionnaire's reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, with a minimum criterion of 0.70 for internal consistency. Content validity was confirmed by expert evaluations. The study received ethical approval, and the subjects' agreement, confidentiality, and anonymity were upheld throughout the research. This methodology ensured a rigorous examination of how social media influencers influence the travel preferences of young people in the Klang Valley.

Table 1. Background of study respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	91	43.1
Female	120	56.9
Age		
18-21	21	10.0
22-25	35	16.6
26-30	60	28.4
31-35	62	29.4
36-40	33	15.6
Education Level		
Foundation	2	.9
Pre-Diploma	3	1.4
Diploma	65	30.8
Degree	112	53.1
Postgraduate	29	13.7
Ethnicity		
Malay	104	49.3
Chinese	50	23.7
Indian	9	4.3
Indigenous Peoples	3	1.4
Bumiputera of Sabah and Sarawak	45	21.3
Living Area		
Rural	56	26.5
Urban	155	73.5
How often do you use social media?		
Rarely	5	2.4
Once a day, not a frequent user	11	5.2
Multiple times in a day, I am a frequent user	195	92.4
What is your Major Source of Information for travel preferences?		
Television	1	.5
Radio	1	.5
Internet	74	35.1
Friends	5	2.4
Family	3	1.4
Social Media	125	59.2
Others	2	.9
Do you follow influencers on social media?		
Yes	117	55.5
No	19	9.0
Sometimes	75	35.5
How frequently do you travel in a year?		
0	27	12.8
1-5	166	78.7
5-9	10	4.7
10 and above	8	3.8

(Source: Researchers generated using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

4.0 Findings

4.1 Results of descriptive analysis of dimension 1: Expertise

Table 2. Descriptive Results of Dimension 1: Expertise

Code	Measurement Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
EX1.	The social media influencer I follow is/are experts in their field	3.86	0.951
EX2.	The social media influencers I follow have great knowledge about their field	3.94	0.882
EX3.	The social media influencers I follow explain travel destinations from every perspective	3.96	0.869
EX4.	The social media influencers I follow provide references based on their expertise	3.97	0.896
Total		3.93	0.899

(Source: Researchers generated using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

The mean value for the overall Dimension 1: Academic (EX) is 3.93 (S.D 0.899) with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum score of 5. Consists of five Likert scale questions from EX1 to EX4, question EX4 shows the highest mean value of 3.97 (S.D 0.896) while question

EX1 has the lowest mean value of 3.86 (S.D 0.951). Thus, this data shows that most respondents strongly agree with question EX4 and least agree with question EX1. Further information on EX is in Table 2.

4.2 Results of descriptive analysis of dimension 2: attractiveness
The mean value for the overall Dimension 2: Attractiveness (ATR) is 4.04 (S.D 0.871) with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum score of 5. Consists of five Likert scale questions from ATR1 to ATR4, question ATR3 shows the highest mean value of 4.16 (S.D 0.812) while question ATR2 has the lowest mean value of 3.90 (S.D .995). Thus, this data shows that most respondents strongly agree with question ATR3 and least agree with question ATR2. Further information on ATR is in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Results of Dimension: Attractiveness

Code	Measurement Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
ATR1.	The social media influencer(s) I follow is/are charismatic	4.02	0.819
ATR2.	The social media influencer(s) I follow is/are good-looking	3.90	0.995
ATR3.	The social media influencer I follow has a great personality	4.16	0.812
ATR4.	The lifestyle of social media influencer(s) I follow is/are attractive	4.07	0.856
Total		4.04	0.871

(Source: Researchers generated using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

4.3 Results of descriptive analysis of dimension 3: trustworthiness
The mean value for the overall Dimension 3: Trustworthiness (TR) is 3.84 (S.D 0.887) with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum score of 5. Consists of four Likert scale questions from TR1 to TR4, Questions TR1 and TR4 show the highest mean value of each at 3.86 with the S.D 0.892 and 0.888. while question TR2 has the lowest mean value of 3.82 (S.D 0.898). Thus, this data shows that most respondents agree with question TR1 and TR4 and least agree with question TR2. Further information on TR is in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Descriptive Results of Dimension: Trustworthiness

Code	Measurement Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
TR1.	The social media influencer(s) I follow is/are dependable	3.86	0.892
TR2.	The social media influencer(s) I follow is/are honest	3.82	0.898
TR3.	The social media influencer(s) I follow is/are reliable	3.83	0.871
TR4.	The social media influencer(s) I follow is/are sincere	3.86	0.888
TOTAL		3.84	0.887

(Source: Researchers generated using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

4.4 Results of descriptive analysis of attitudes of travel preferences
The mean value for the overall Section B: Attitudes (AT) as the dependent variable is 3.83 (S.D 0.955) with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum score of 5. Consists of 5 Likert scale questions from AT1 to AT4, question AT3 and AT4 show the highest mean value of 3.86 with S.D 0.920 and 0.930 while question at2 has the lowest mean value of 3.75 (S.D 0.990). Thus, this data shows that most respondents agree with questions AT3 and AT4 and least agree with questions AT2. Further information on AT is in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Results of Attitudes of Travel Preferences

Code	Measurement Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
AT1.	I do trust travel destination advertised by social media influencers I follow	3.84	0.980
AT2.	Travel destinations recommended by social media influencers are more reliable	3.75	0.990
AT3.	I have a positive perception of travel destinations endorsed by influences	3.86	0.920
AT4.	I have favourable opinions about the travel destinations advertised by social media influencers	3.86	0.930
Overall		3.83	0.955

(Source: Researchers generated using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

4.5 Results of descriptive analysis of the level of travel preferences among youth in Klang Valley
The 5-Point Likert scale was utilized to assess the ratings of responses, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree in Section B: Attitudes of. The assessment was carried out with the help of the ranges shown in Table 6.

Table 6. 5-Point Likert Scale Response Levels

Level	Mean
Low	≤ 2.33
Moderate	≥2.33 and ≤3.66
High	≥3.66

(Source: Researchers generated using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

Using SPSS Statistics V29.0, the mean value of attitudes (AT) as the dependent variable was computed to achieve Research Objective 1 (RO1). RO1: To identify the level of travel preferences among youth in Klang Valley. The mean value of the overall AT with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum score of 5 obtained through the SPSS application is 3.83 (S.D 0.955). Based on Table 7, this mean value stands at ≥3.66 at the High response level. Hence, to answer RO1, from the total of 211 respondents, the level of travel preferences among youth in Klang Valley is high.

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Table 7. Descriptive Results of attitudes of travel preferences among youth in Klang valley

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Attitudes of Travel Preferences	211	1	5	3.83	0.955

(Source: Researchers generated using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

4.6 Results of Inferential Statistics – Hypothesis Testing Pearson's Correlation Test
H1: There is a significant correlation between social media influencers and attitudes of travel preferences among youth in Klang Valley. A Pearson Correlation test was performed to analyze the relationship between the independent variable (social media influencer) and the dependent variable (Attitudes of Travel Preferences) among youth in Klang Valley. The purpose of running this test is also to review and answer Hypothesis 1 (H1). The strength level of the Correlation Coefficient Value is as in Table 8.

Table 8. Pearson's Correlation Scale

Correlation Coefficient (*r*) Value	Indication
1	Perfect positive/negative correlation
± 0.90 to ± 0.99	Very High Positive/ negative correlation
± 0.70 to ± 0.90	High Positive/ negative correlation
± 0.50 to ± 0.70	Moderate positive/ negative correlation
± 0.30 to ± 0.50	Low positive/ negative correlation
± 0.10 to ± 0.30	Very low positive/negative correlation
± 0 to ± 0.10	Markedly low and Negligible correlation/ negative correlation

(Source: Researchers generated using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

The correlation study reveals robust and favorable associations between the qualities of social media influencers—Expertise, Attractiveness, and Trustworthiness—and the Attitudes toward travel preferences among young in Klang Valley. There is a strong positive correlation (r=0.808, p<0.01) between expertise and trustworthiness, indicating that those who possess a high level of knowledge are also perceived as being reliable. The level of attractiveness is moderately positively associated with both expertise (r=0.660, p<0.01) and trustworthiness (r=0.675, p<0.01), suggesting that influencers possess a diverse range of qualities that make them appealing. The attitudes towards travel preferences are strongly positively correlated with Expertise (r=0.639, p<0.01), Attractiveness (r=0.641, p<0.01), and Trustworthiness (r=0.717, p<0.01). This indicates that Trustworthiness is the most influential element. These findings suggest that marketers should choose influencers that are both physically appealing and seen as knowledgeable and reliable. This will ensure that they deliver genuine and trustworthy information, which will increase customer interaction and promote positive attitudes towards travel preferences.

Table 9. Correlation Analysis Expertise, Attractiveness, Trustworthiness and Attitudes

	Expertise	Attractiveness	Trustworthiness	Attitudes
Expertise	1	.660**	.808**	.639**
Attractiveness	.660**	1	.675**	.641**
Trustworthiness	.808**	.675**	1	.717**
Attitudes	.639**	.641**	.717**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
(Source: Researchers generated using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

Based on Table 10, there is a positive significant relationship between the correlation analysis conducted on the relationship between social media influencers and the travel preferences of their followers shows a substantial and robust positive correlation (*r*=0.743, p<0.01). This indicates that as the influence of social media influencers grows, the attitudes of young people in the Klang Valley towards the travel destinations they promote become increasingly favorable. This means that social media influencers moderately highly effect the attitudes of travel preferences among youth in Klang Valley. Therefore, H1 is accepted.

Table 10. Correlation Analysis Social Media Influencer

	Social Media Influencer	Attitudes
Social Media Influencer	1	.743**
Attitudes	.743**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
(Source: Researchers generated using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

5.0 Discussion
The results of this study underline the important role social media influencers play in determining young people's travel choices in the Klang Valley. This discussion explores the implications of these findings and places them in line with the broader body of knowledge on social media impact and youth behavior. The data show a strong positive association between social media influencers and the travel preferences of their followers, particularly in areas of expertise, trustworthiness, and general attitudes. Previous studies have demonstrated that customers regard influencers as trustworthy information sources, which significantly shapes their behavior (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Measuring influencers' expertise and experience emerged as a major determinant of young people's inclination to select

particular trip locations. Abidin (2016) asserts that expertise enhances credibility and trust, thereby amplifying its impact on decision-making.

The attractiveness of influencers also had a significant impact, suggesting that young people gravitate towards visually appealing or desirable lifestyles. This is consistent with the social attraction theory, which asserts that people find attractive individuals more persuasive due to their popularity and appreciation (Le & Hancer, 2021). Furthermore, researchers determined that trustworthiness, a measure of influencers' honesty and integrity, significantly influences their impact. This supports the findings by Lou and Yuan (2019) that trustworthiness strengthens influencers' persuasive ability, thereby promoting a closer relationship and greater influence over their audience.

The overall attitudes toward social media influencers, including followers' acceptance of their thoughts and views, positively correlated with travel preferences. This is consistent with the theory of planned behavior, which posits those positive attitudes towards a behavior—in this case, following the travel advice of an influencer—increase the likelihood of engaging in that behavior (Ajzen, 1991). High mean scores for attitudes-related items suggest that young people in the Klang Valley have positive opinions of social media influencers and are likely to follow their travel recommendations. However, this research has some shortcomings. The study is geographically limited to the Klang Valley, employs selective sampling, and depends on self-reported data, potentially introducing bias. The cross-sectional approach further limits causal conclusions. Future research should use a longitudinal methodology and include more extensive regional samples to improve generalisability.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The study highlights the significant influence that social media influencers have on the travel preferences of young people in the Klang Valley. The significant relationships between influencers' perceived expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and the followers' travel attitudes and preferences demonstrate that influencers have a powerful influence on travel decisions.

This study's findings suggest numerous tips for effectively harnessing the power of social media influencers. Tourism boards and travel companies should form strategic partnerships with reputable and well-informed influencers to boost the credibility and effectiveness of their marketing campaigns. By leveraging the influencers' perceived expertise, this approach can effectively sway potential travelers. In addition, creating focused marketing efforts that emphasize the appeal and way of life of influencers, while displaying genuine travel experiences, can strongly connect with the goals of young travelers and amplify the persuasive effectiveness of the ads (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

It is advisable to use a wide array of influencers, including micro-influencers that have smaller but highly involved followers, to achieve a wider reach and personalized interactions with different niche segments within the youth demographic (Evans et al., 2017). It is essential to continuously analyze the efficacy of influencer campaigns by analyzing metrics such as engagement rates, sentiment analysis, and conversion rates. Based on feedback and trends, plans should be adjusted to ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness.

Moreover, carrying out longitudinal research to comprehend the enduring effects of social media influencers on travel choices would yield more profound insights into the changing dynamics of influencer relationships and their lasting impact on consumer behavior. By implementing these ideas, stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry will be able to improve their marketing strategy by effectively utilizing the power of social media to attract and engage the younger generation.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

his study makes a significant contribution to the increasing comprehension of how social media influencers affect the behavior of young people, specifically in making travel decisions. The emphasis on the Klang Valley underscores the impact of influencers' perceived expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness on the travel preferences of young individuals. The findings are consistent with well-established theories such as social attraction and planned behavior, which further support the idea that influencers have a significant influence in persuading others. This study not only supports previous research but also offers practical suggestions for tourism marketing strategies, highlighting the significance of strategic influencer collaborations in effectively engaging and influencing young people's travel decisions.

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