THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER TRUST "DIMAS RAMADHAN" ON THE TOURISM DESTINATION DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of Dimas Ramadhan, a prominent Indonesian travel influencer, on the decision-making process of potential travellers. Social media has significantly impacted consumer behaviour, especially in the tourism sector, making it essential for businesses to understand influencer marketing. The research aims to analyze how Dimas Ramadhan's credibility and trust affect his followers' choice of tourist destinations. Using a quantitative approach, data was collected from 250 respondents through a structured questionnaire. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 was applied to analyze the causal relationship between influencer trust and decision-making. Findings reveal that Dimas Ramadhan's credibility significantly influences his followers' travel decisions. Effective marketing communication through influencers enhances consumer engagement and increases purchasing behaviour. This study highlights the importance of collaboration between tourism businesses and credible influencers to improve marketing strategies. By emphasizing the role of trust in influencer marketing, this research provides valuable insights for tourism businesses. Future studies could explore the long-term impact of influencer marketing and the role of other social media platforms in shaping consumer behaviour.

Keywords: Social Media Influencer, Tourism Decision-Making, Consumer Behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has become a major factor in shaping travellers' travel preferences and decisions. A report from Statista (2023) shows that 88% of consumers feel influenced by social media influencers when choosing a travel destination. This shows that influencers have a significant role in building perceptions and driving travel decisions. The development of digital technology has enabled more personalised interactions between influencers and their audiences, creating stronger parasocial relationships.

Dimas Ramadhan stands out as a significant travel influencer in Indonesia, known for his captivating content across various platforms, particularly Instagram and YouTube. With an impressive follower count of 358,000, he has established himself as a key figure in the travel niche, having successfully visited 68 out of 197 countries. His content is characterized by a focus on authentic travel experiences, which include adventure, cultural exploration, and showcasing the natural beauty of Indonesia. Dimas prioritizes sharing practical travel tips and recommendations, making his posts not only entertaining but also informative for his audience. The demographics of Dimas's followers reveal a predominantly young audience, with a significant portion aged between 18-34 years. Specifically, 57.4% of his followers are male, while 42.6% are female. This demographic insight indicates that Dimas has a strong appeal among young adults who are actively seeking travel and lifestyle content. His ability to engage this audience is reflected in his remarkable average engagement rate of 12.64% on Instagram, which is considered highly favourable for brands looking to gain exposure through influencer partnerships.

Dimas's informative approach to content creation includes sharing itinerary files in PDF format, which serve as valuable resources for his followers planning their travels. This strategy not only enhances his credibility but also fosters a deeper connection with his audience. Research indicates that 88% of consumers feel influenced by social media influencers when selecting travel destinations, underscoring the significant impact Dimas has on his followers' travel decisions. Moreover, Dimas

collaborates with various brands in the tourism and lifestyle sectors, further solidifying his position as a leading influencer capable of shaping travel trends and behaviours among his audience. His collaborations range from promoting travel accessories to transportation services, showcasing his versatility and appeal in the digital tourism industry. Overall, Dimas Ramadhan exemplifies the power of social media influencers in the travel sector, effectively engaging a young audience and influencing their travel choices through authentic, informative, and visually appealing content.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Marketing

Marketing is the activity of communicating with customers and managing customer value. It is chiefly a promotion strategy that aims at acquiring new customers through perceived superior value and then retaining and increasing value from those customers through continuous delivery of exceptional value and satisfaction (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). Another definition of marketing is the glad delivery of positive customer value more profitably. Marketing is involved in the continuous pursuit of the relevance of a business organization in the marketplace by identifying dynamic customer needs (Harker, 1999).

According to Palmer (2011), Marketing is a managerial process that aims to develop and communicate consumer-focused value over the long term. Nowadays, the emphasis is placed on interaction and further continuity of buyer relationships with buyers. However, another perception defines marketing as the capacity and strategy a company undertakes to meet the market needs profitably. Marketing is a set of activities connected with goods and services and sustained communication and interaction with the market (Baker & Hart, 2003). Marketing is not limited to the sale of goods and services but also relates to activities supporting the development of continued business connections with clients. In services marketing, for instance, customer touch points and satisfaction are vital in ensuring loyalty (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2011).

2.2 Marketing Mix

According to Kotler & Armstrong (2018), Marketing Mix is a series of strategic tools that include product, price, distribution, and promotion, which companies use to generate the desired response from the target market. According to Kotler & Keller (2018), the Marketing Mix consists of various strategic tools expressed in four main elements, namely 4P: Product, Price, Place or distribution channel, and Promotion. The following is a further explanation of these four elements :

1. Product

   A product represents a blend of goods and services offered by a company to its target market. It encompasses tangible items, services, experiences, events, individuals, locations, properties, organizations, and concepts. Essential product attributes encompass variety, quality, design, features, branding, packaging, dimensions, ancillary services, warranties, and accolades.

2. Price

   Price denotes the monetary amount a customer is required to pay to obtain a product. Key characteristics of price include components such as price lists, promotional vouchers, special discounts, payment terms, and credit arrangements.

3. Place

   Denotes the strategy employed by a company, specifically Place, which encompasses activities that facilitate product availability to target consumers. These elements encompass strategic positioning, service availability, market segmentation, inventory control, and logistics, all of which are essential for customer attraction.

4. Promotion

   Promotion involves activities aimed at conveying the benefits of a product and encouraging target consumers to make a purchase. It entails prominently showcasing a product's distinctive attributes and persuading the intended audience to purchase it. Kannan & Li (2017) stated that digital marketing is characterized as a dynamic, technology-driven process through which companies engage with consumers and partners to collaboratively generate, convey, provide, and maintain value for all stakeholders.They have expanded the meaning of the term from a narrow view of using digital devices in promoting products and services in the markets to a wider meaning of using technologies to acquire customers, branding, and sell them. Digital marketing harnesses value through new customer experiences and interactions with other customers leveraging the numerous digital contacts (Kannan & Li, 2017).

2.3 Marketing Communication

The basis of marketing lies in the ability to communicate, which becomes more effective when combined with efficient communication. Inspiring consumers or audiences to be aware of, recognize, and purchase products or services through communication channels is not simple (Lestari, 2015). Marketing communication is a method used by providers of goods, services, values, or ideas to introduce themselves to a target audience to encourage dialogue, which can ultimately improve commercial relationships or other types of relationships (Egan, 2015). According to Kusniadji (2016), Marketing communication is a type of communication aimed at strengthening marketing strategies to reach a wider market segment. This aims to increase customer loyalty to products, both goods and services, offered by the company. A good understanding of marketing communication strategies is very important because success can be measured through increased product sales or income generated from consumers' use of services (Kusniadji, 2016). According to Akbari et al. (2022), eWOM or electronic word of mouth refers to an activity of online sharing of opinions and experiences regarding certain products or services. eWOM contains comments, likes, ratings, reviews, tweets, and blog posts that consumers make regarding their satisfaction with a product or service. The rise of internet users has had a big influence on the spread of eWOM where most internet users have social media, that situation allowed eWOM to be shared globally with no time and location constraints.

2.4 Social Media Influencer

An influencer is a person with a significant social media following capable of impacting their audience through content disseminated on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, X, and YouTube. Influencers are said to have a highly engaged and targeted audience and, thus, can easily market to a particular group of people (Freberg et al., 2011b). According to Abidin (2016),Social media influencers can build trust with their audience or followers through interesting, authentic, and relevant content, making the recommendations or opinions they convey more influential than traditional forms of advertising. This makes an influencer an invaluable tool in the brand's and company's digital marketing plans because an influencer can cultivate a rapport with consumers and enhance the company's believability and reliability through endorsements or partnerships (Lou & Yuan, 2019).to analyze the relationship between eWOM and consumer purchase intention.

2.5 Consumer Behavior

Consumer behaviour encompasses the analysis of decision-making, purchasing patterns, and societal habits, which can fluctuate dynamically due to factors such as knowledge, behaviour, and the surrounding environment, which vary across communities. (Indrawati et al., 2017). According to Hoyer et al. (2018) Consumer behaviour encompasses all decisions individuals or groups make concerning the acquisition, utilisation, and disposal of goods, services, activities, experiences, people, and ideas within a specific period. According to Hawkins & Mothersbaugh (2016), The correlation between consumer behaviour and decision-making is rooted in the systematic methodology employed by consumers in making purchasing determinations, particularly when confronted with multiple options.

2.6 Decision Making

The decision-making process, also known as the consumer decision process, is a stage that the consumer goes through in coming to that decision. According to Robbins & Coulter (2016), decision-making is any process the organisation undertakes, from defining issues to selecting the most appropriate solutions. They explain this process as encompassing situations, assessments, analysing information, and choosing options based on certain criteria.

A study conducted by Court et al. (2009) introduced the "consumer decision journey" model to indicate that the existing consumer decision-making process is more dynamic, interactional, and spiral. The consumer decision journey consists of four key stages: Initial Consideration Set, Active Evaluation, Purchase Moment, and Post- Purchase Experience.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study applies customer journey theory to examine how social media influencers (SMI) impact millennials' and Gen Z's travel decisions. The journey includes pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages, influenced by trust in influencer content. Pop et al. (2021) found that consumer trust in influencers positively affects each phase of travel decision-making.
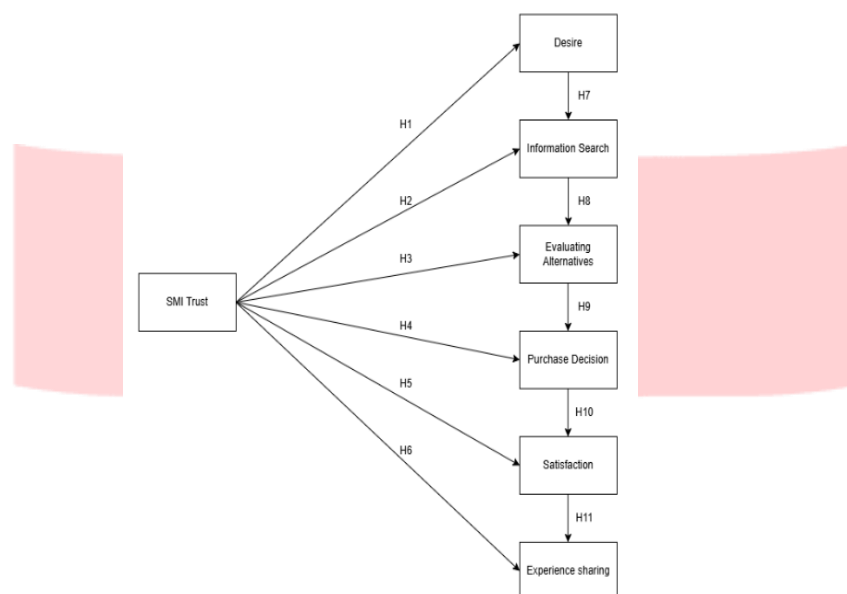
Source: Pop et al. (2021)

This Research replicates Pop et al. (2021), examining how consumer trust in influencers shapes desire, information search, evaluation alternative, purchase decision, satisfaction, and experience sharing. It highlights how influencer interactions influence tourism perceptions and decisions among social media-active generations

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses quantitative methods to measure behavior, knowledge, opinions, and attitudes (Indrawati, 2015). Based on the positivist philosophy, this study examines a specific population through data collection tools, with statistical analysis for hypothesis testing (Sugiyono, 2020) Data were collected through a questionnaire survey and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4.0. The study population was 354,000 followers of the Instagram account @dimasramadhan, with samples selected through purposive sampling based on certain criteria, such as age 12–43 years, active on Instagram, and having seen promotional content for tourist destinations from the account in the last six months. Primary data were obtained from a questionnaire, while secondary data came from a literature study. Data analysis was carried out through an evaluation of the measurement model (Outer Model) for validity and reliability, as well as an evaluation of the structural model (Inner Model) to test the relationship between variables. The results of this study are expected to provide insight into the influence of trust in social media influencers on Generation Z and Millennials' travel decisions.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study highlights the important role of Social Media Influencer Trust (SMI Trust) in shaping consumer behaviour, especially in the context of travel recommendations by influencer Dimas Ramadhan. The findings of the study indicate that SMI Trust positively influences various aspects of consumer decision-making, including Desire, Information Search, Evaluating Alternatives, Purchase Decision, Satisfaction, and Experience Sharing. Specifically, the mediation of Desire enhances the relationship between SMI Trust and Information Search, indicating that consumers who trust influencers are more motivated to seek additional information about recommended destinations. However, the mediation effect of Information Search on Evaluating Alternatives is not statistically significant, implying that although consumers engage in information search behaviour, it does not significantly affect their assessment of various travel options.

The results of the structural model test (Internal Model) show that Trust in Influencers contributes 27% to Information Search, 25% to Purchase Decisions, and 19% to Experience Sharing. The findings indicate that the higher the trust in an influencer, the greater the likelihood of seeking travel information,

making purchase decisions, and sharing experiences after travelling. Hypothesis testing using bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples confirmed that all research hypotheses were accepted. The direct effect of Trust in Influencers on each stage of the travel journey (desire, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, satisfaction, and experience sharing) has a T value> 1.96 and a P value <0.05, indicating a significant relationship between variables.

This study is in line with Putri & Tantra (2013) who found that social media marketing activities have a significant impact on consumer purchase intentions by increasing brand equity. Furthermore, research by Novitarizki et al. (2021) highlights the role of consumer engagement as a mediating variable in purchase intentions, indicating that the effectiveness of social media marketing depends on the industry context and the platform used. Likewise, the findings of Daffa et al. (2023) emphasize that Social Media Marketing Activities significantly influence brand loyalty and emotional attachment, reinforcing the importance of digital engagement in shaping consumer behaviour.

In addition, this study supports the findings of Pop et al. (2021), which state that trust in influencers influences each stage of the customer journey in travel decision-making. Interaction with influencers not only influences travel intentions but also drives purchase decisions and post-travel experience sharing. The Outer Model test further validates this, showing that all indicators have factor loadings above 0.7, meeting the convergent validity criteria. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value exceeds 0.5, indicating that the indicators sufficiently explain the latent variables. Reliability was tested using Composite Reliability, with values above 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency. The most reliable variable is Trust in Influencers (SMI Trust) with values of 0.963 and 0.966, indicating a very high level of reliability.

By integrating these perspectives, this study underlines that trust in social media influencers is not only a key driver of consumer decision-making in tourism, but also a powerful tool for increasing brand loyalty and engagement across the industry. The combination of SMI Trust and strategic social media marketing activities creates a stronger emotional connection between consumers and brands, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and a greater likelihood of sharing experiences. These insights provide valuable implications for marketers and influencers, suggesting that building trust and engagement through social media platforms can significantly improve tourism marketing effectiveness and consumer loyalty. Therefore, tourism destinations and industry players are advised to actively utilize social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to reach more potential tourists and build stronger trust in the promoted destination.

5. SUGGESTION

Future research should examine the effectiveness of influencers in specific tourism sectors such as ecotourism, religious tourism, cultural tourism, or culinary tourism to determine whether different types of influencers influence travel decisions differently. Additionally, examining influence across categories could reveal how trust in influencers for one type of tourism (e.g., religious tourism) influences decisions in another type of tourism (e.g., culinary tourism). These insights would help the tourism industry select the right influencers for targeted promotions. For marketers, building trust and engagement is key. Encouraging influencers to share authentic experiences, behind-the-scenes content, and honest reviews can increase credibility. Active engagement through Q&A sessions, live videos, and user-generated content strengthens relationships with audiences. Transparency is essential—sponsorships should be disclosed, and influencers should experience a destination firsthand before promoting it. Marketers should also use data-driven insights to select influencers based on audience demographics and engagement levels. Finally, adopting a multi-platform strategy across Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter (X) can maximize audience reach. By implementing this strategy, marketers can optimize partnerships with influencers, build trust, and increase the effectiveness of tourism marketing.

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