Social media influencer's influence on the travel decisions with respect to Kaveri delta region

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Abstract

After the advent of social media applications, the consumers of tourism sector rely on the social media influencers information while planning trip to a particular destination. Many previous studies were focused on the effectiveness of social media interactions in spreading content about tourism destinations. The current was aimed to examine the role of social media influencers towards attracting the social media users to visit the Tourist spot with respect to the Kaveri delta region of Tamil Nadu. The study intended to examine the consumers Pre-Purchase, Purchase decision and post-Purchase decision while scheduling a trip based on the inspiration from the social media influencer. The research instrument was circulated using social media applications and 278 valid responses was collected using Purposive sampling method. The responses were analyzed using Microsoft Excel, SPSS and Amos. The Findings shows that the research instrument was reliable and valid. Further, the result of the Path analysis demonstrates that the social media users are influenced by the social media influencers while planning their trip to the Tourist spot at the Kaveri delta region of Tamil Nadu. The findings revealed that the social media users are not willing to post their post visit experiences from the Tourist spot which could influence the future travelers.

1. Introduction

According to the statistical report of Statista, there were around 3.81 billion active users of social media Applications all over the world and India was among the top countries with higher numbers of social media users. The growing numbers of social media users has shaped the marketing trends and strategies and the marketers started to use the social media application as key tool to directly reach the consumers according to Chetioui, Benlafqih, & Lebdaoui. Social media influencers are those who post pictures and videos of the destination place in order to attract their followers in the social media applications and also to encourage the users to visit that particular destination. As per Gräve, (2019), the social media users generally rely on the social media influencers content and number of interactions owing to a particular destination and the marketers considers that as a success matrix. [1]

Many previous studies stated that destination image continues as a major area of study such as Lee, & Lockshin and Li, & Stepchenkova in perceptions-related tourism CB research. Also, most research such

as Munar,and Sigala, Christou, & Gretzel indeed focused on the efficacy of social media interactions in spreading content about tourism destinations, but only a little research has been done to investigate the 'power' of digital players in social networks sites that are shaped by these interactions. Therefore, the current study was focused on the impact of social media influencers on Travel Decisions with respect to Kaveri delta region of Tamil Nadu. [2]

The rest of the study is formatted in the following manner: initially, the review of relevant literature and the theoretical background is studied which is followed by the proposed conceptual model and hypothesis development. Subsequently, the research methodology is presented which includes Measures Development, Data collection, Demographic Information and Data Analysis. Then the tabulation of the data analyzed were presented under Result and Analysis section. Finally, the study was concluded along with the Limitations and Future Research Directions. [3]

2. Review of Literature
2.1 Consumer reviews in Tourism

The decision-making process of the current generation depends largely on the online consumer's review. The online reviews by the social media influencers are considered as highly trustworthy and credible with detailed information when compared to the information provided by the marketers according to Park, & Nicolau. Hensens suggested that the guest reviews and scores may be more insightful than the traditional star classification system in providing indications regarding the true quality and range of services offered by the tourism sector since these online reviews are posted by the consumers and they are perceived as unbiased as stated by Duverger. Moreover, this divergence from rationality that exists in travel decision-making might also be reflected in consumers' behaviors when they have to write reviews about their service experiences according to Mellinas, Nicolau, & Park. With recognition of the importance of online reviews, previous researchers in tourism and hospitality sector have mainly investigated the effect of online consumer reviews on two facets: predicting product sales as per Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, and the consumer decision making process according to Vermeulen, & Seegers. [4,5,6,7,8]

2.2 Digital influencer and their roles

According to Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, the social media influencers are defined as "a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media". The social media influencers are growing in all fields such as fashion and tourism which directly affects the formation of their followers according to Halvorsen, Hoffmann, Coste-Manière, & Stankeviciute and Magno, & Cassia. Such social media influencers can attract the social media users by transmitting the information they received by visiting a particular destination as per Jalilvand, and Uzunoğlu, & Kip. [9,10,11,12,13,14]

2.3 Bridging Destination Image

The tourism based on the destination image can be defined totally on the beliefs, lookouts, thoughts and imitations that a user or the tourist has with respect to the particular place according to Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez. The social media influencers aim at prompting the social media users desire of travelling to a particular location according to Gallarza, Saura, & García. This field of research has gained significance in the academic literature as offline and online sources are now used to build the tourism destination image, approaching it from a variety of views as per Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal. Therefore, the destination brand is grounded in the perceived image about the potential quality of experience at destination according to Correia, Oliveira, & Silva. [15,16,17,18,19,20]

2.4 Proposed Conceptual Framework. Hypothesis:

H1: Pre-Purchase Decision positively impacts the Purchase Decision with respect to the travel decision

H2: Post-Purchase Decision positively impacts the Purchase Decision with respect to the travel decision

H3: Pre-Purchase Decision positively impacts the Post-Purchase Decision with respect to the travel decision

3. Research Methodology
3.1 Measures Development:

Based on the proposed variables, a well-formulated questionnaire has been adopted from previous studies. The questionnaire comprises of two sections, out of which the first section includes items for demographic information. The responses were collected only from the respondents who had travel experiences to the Tourist spot of Kaveri delta region of Tamil Nadu. The subsequent part of the questionnaire includes a 5-point-Likert-Scaled items sequences from 5 for "Strongly agree" to 1 for "Strongly disagree" related to the three constructs of the study. The items used for the study and its sources were presented under Appendix 1. [21,22,23,24,25]

3.2 Data Collection:

The questionnaire has been circulated as google form using social media applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. Based on the suggestion given by Fox, Hunn, & Mathers, 300 responses were collected using purposive sampling method and out of which 278 samples were valid and used for this study. There was two screening question to check the eligibility of the respondents. The first question is related to demographic location i.e., only the respondents who are willing to travel to the Tourist spot of Kaveri delta region of Tamil Nadu will be taken forward. The second screening question was related to the social media usage i.e., the respondents who are actively using their social media applications was allowed to proceed to the succeeding questions. [26,27,28,29]

3.3 Demographic Information:

The demographic data reveals that majority of the respondents were male (64%) compared to female respondents (36%). Most of our respondents were in-between the age categories of 31-40 years (60%), compared to 20-30 years (24%) and more than 41 years (16%). The respondents who are unmarried dominated with 68% compared to married respondents with 32%. 58% of the respondents had their Post Graduate and 42% had their Under Graduate Degree in terms of Educational Qualification. Meanwhile the occupational information shows that, the respondents were mostly Private Employees (36%), followed by Government Employees (24%), Self Employed (28%) and Others (12%). [30,31,32,33]

3.4 Data Analysis:

In order to analyze the data, Microsoft Excel, SPSS 26 and AMOS have been used in this current study. The data was analyzed to examine the Reliability and Validity of the instrument as suggested by Van Teijlingen, Rennie, Hundley, & Graham, (2001). The factor loading, Cronbach's alpha, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) test have been performed to determine the Reliability of the instrument as proposed by Shrestha, (2021). Further, the validity of the instrument was examined as suggested by Rasoolimanesh, (2022). Finally, the Path analysis was made in order to validate the hypothesis for the proposed research model as denoted by Urbach, & Ahlemann, (2010).

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Measurement Model

The factor loading value have to be greater than 0.6 as recommended by Matsunaga, M. (2011) and the mean value have to be higher than 2.5. The Table 2 below exhibits the Factor Loading and Mean values for all the items in the questionnaire. It is evident that the

factor loadings of all the three constructs were greater than 0.6. Also, the mean values of all the constructs were greater than 2.5.

4.2 Reliability

The Table 3 illustrates the Reliability test based on AVE, CR and Cronbach's Alpha values. The Cronbach's Alpha is used to determine the internal consistency of the scale. As proposed by Tavakol & Dennick (2011), the acceptable values of Cronbach's Alpha should range from 0.70 to 0.95. The Cronbach's Alpha for all three constructs were within the acceptable range. The cut-off value for the AVE was 0.5 and the CR was 0.8. Since the AVE and CR values for all the constructs were greater than 0.7 and 0.9 respectively, the instrument reliability was considered as excellent.

4.3 Validity

The table 4 shows the validity based on the Discriminant validity analysis. As per Fornell-Larcker criterion the latent construct should be explained by its own indicators variance when compared to variance of other constructs as stated by Ab Hamid, Sami, & Sidek,
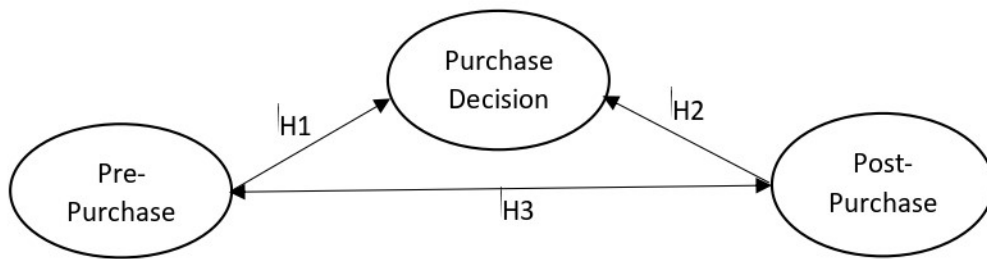
Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of samples (N = 278)

ITEM		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Gender	Male	178	64
	Female	100	36
Age	20-30 years	67	24
	31-40 years	167	60
	41+ years	44	16
Marital status	Unmarried	189	68
	Married	89	32
Education	Under Graduate	117	42
	Post Graduate	161	58
Occupation	Government Employee	67	24
	Private Employee	100	36
	Self Employed	78	28
	Others	33	12

(2017). Thus, the square root of every construct's AVE which was shown as diagonal values should be greater than the correlation co-efficient of other constructs. From the table 4 it is apparent that diagonal values are greater than the off-diagonal values. Thus, the measures developed for the study are highly valid.

4.4 Path Analysis

The hypothesis testing was done using Amos. Table 5 displays the result of hypothesis testing done for the study. The result revealed the Post Purchase factors positively impacts the Purchase Decision on Travels with respect to Kaveri delta region ($\beta=0.977$; $p<0.001$). Thus, the First hypothesis has been supported. From the result it is also evident that the Purchase Decision has positive impact on the post-Purchase factors on Travels with respect to Kaveri delta region ($\beta=0.342$; $p<0.001$), thereby supporting the second hypothesis. Finally, the result shows that there was no significant relationship between the Pre-Purchase and Post-Purchase factors ($\beta=0.95$; $p>0.05$), thus rejecting the third hypothesis.

Table 2: Factor Loading and Mean Values

VARIABLE	ITEMS IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE	FACTOR LOADING	MEAN
Pre-purchase	I research on social media when I am planning a trip to the Tourist spot of Kaveri delta region.	0.72	3.33
	I research online by reading about other traveller's experiences at the Tourist spot of Kaveri delta region via social media.	0.88	3.8
	When I have to make travel-related decisions, I will take suggestions from digital influencers.	0.77	3.73
Purchase decision	I am likely to visit the places reviewed by digital influencers	0.85	3
	I am likely to follow digital influencers who provide accurate information; Updated information; High quality content.	0.79	3.13
	I am likely to consider digital influencer's travel experiences at the Tourist spot of Kaveri delta region when making my travel decisions.	0.71	3.5
Post-purchase	Do you share travel experiences from your most recent trip on online social networking websites, photo sharing websites, travel review websites, personal blogs, and/or websites?	0.89	2.97
	In which social networks do you share your travel experiences? Facebook; Instagram; Twitter; Snapchat; Pinterest.	0.74	2.87

Table 3: AVE, CR, Cronbach's Alpha

VARIABLE	AVE	CR	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
Pre-Purchase	0.62	0.83	0.80
Purchase Desion Decision	0.61	0.82	0.92
Post-Purchase	0.66	0.8	0.89

Table 4: Validity

	PRE-PURCHASE	PURCHASE DECISION	POST-PURCHASE
Pre-Purchase	0.842797		
Purchase Decision	0.767	0.836781	
Post-Purchase	0.762	0.794644	0.89481

Table 5 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Coff	SE	P	Hypothesis
H1	Pre-Purchase – Purchase Decision	.977	.062	***	Significant
H2	Purchase Decision – Post-Purchase	.342	.068	***	Significant
H3	Pre-Purchase - Post-Purchase	.095	.056	.063	Insignificant

7. Conclusion

The study was aimed to understand the travel decisions made by the social media users based on the inspiration received from the social media influencers. The Questionnaire was created using google forms and circulated through social media applications. 278 valid samples were collected using purposive sampling method. The collected data was then analyzed to test the reliability and validity of the instrument used for the study. The SEM analysis was then performed to test the hypothesis proposed for the study. The results shows that the respondents are surfing the social media applications and reading about other traveler's experiences before planning a trip to the Tourist spot of the Kaveri delta region. The findings also proved that the social media users are more likely to visit Tourist spot of Kaveri delta region based on the reviews of the social media influencers. The findings revealed that the social media users are not willing to post their post visit experiences from the Tourist spot which could influence the future travelers. Finally, the Limitations and future research directions was provided based on the current study to improve the scope of the research in tourism sector.

6. Limitations and future research directions

The study was intended to study the impact of social media influencer on the travel decision with respect to the Kaveri delta region of Tamil Nadu. Thus, the study was confined to a particular location while the future researchers can adopt a different geographical location for their study. The current study does not consider a particular social media application, whereas the future research can be focused by choosing a particular social media application. The current study was narrated only on the perspective of the social media users and not focused on the perspective of the social media influencers. Therefore, the future studies can be focused on the social media influencers and the tourism marketer's perspective. Further the same can be used to study the role of social media influencer in some other industries other than the tourism sector.

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