
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumers' Brand Perception of Travel Applications

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ABSTRACT

Social media has been used as a platform to learn or share a person's travel experiences which enabled a new wave of marketing where influencers play a huge role. From this instance, would the consumers' brand perception and usage intention be affected by these influencers that they see on social media? The study was characterized as descriptive-correlational research and gathered data through a survey using self-made questionnaires, validated by an academic practitioner and tested reliability with Cronbach alpha. With the Online Travel Agencies in the country as the subjects, and the travel enthusiasts who belong to the Millennial or Generation Z group and are living in the city, specifically in the Philippines' National Capital Region, as the respondents of this study. Using a Raosoft calculator, the researchers collected 385 responses as the minimum required sample size for this study. The data collected showed a positive correlation between influencer marketing and brand perception of travel applications with a correlation coefficient of 0.622 using Spearman's Rho. However, there are specific characteristics that respondents look for in an influencer, primarily the ability "to inspire." and their credibility in promoting travel applications.

KEYWORDS

Travel Applications; Philippines; Influencer Marketing; Brand Perception. Millennial, Generation Z

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, social media has become an integral platform for communication that helps people reach beyond their physical limitations. People started to share experiences on social media, such as travels or trips, which enabled the new wave of marketing where influencers play a huge role. Social media influencers are people who have built a reputation and wield influence through social media networks. ("What is an Influencer," 2021). These influencers are third-party endorsers who use blogs and social media to help shape consumers' thoughts and attitudes. They can promote brands, products, or services through their platforms and encourage their followers to use or purchase the brand they promote. Influencers are persuasive and have a broad audience, and it is for those reasons that many brands seek alliances with influencers (Forbes, 2017).

According to Astute Solutions (2020), brand perception is how consumers view a brand through their interactions and experiences with that brand, either through first-hand experiences or word-of-mouth. Social media networks have become a prime instrument that affects how consumers perceive brands in the digital age. Viewers can use social media to create stories, whether they are analytic about negative brand encounters or narrate positive ones. (Dwivediet al. 2018; Gökeriket al. 2018; Kumaret al. 2016, 2017). Social media has made it easier for consumers to engage and interact with brands and share their own experiences with other consumers. According to Statista (2021), the top three social media sites in the Philippines are Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. In addition, one trendy platform with the most considerable growth is Tiktok, where Generation Z and Millennials showcase their talents, creativity, and expertise.

In today's generation, families, friends, social media, and other third-party applications (Berhanu and Raj, 2020). Important information that affects the traveler's decision mostly comes from an online interpersonal influence or electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (Chung and Buhalis, 2008, as cited in Berhanu and Raj, 2020). There are many studies about the effectiveness of influencers in asserting this vital information to trigger consumers' purchase intention. To mention some of these studies, "How

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electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) triggers intention to visit through destination image, trust, and satisfaction: the perception of a potential tourist in Japan and Indonesia" by Purbadhamaja et al. (2021); "Marketing on Instagram: Social influence and image quality on the perception of quality and purchase intention" by Theo et al. (2019); "Seeing destinations through vlogs: implications for leveraging customer engagement behavior to increase travel intention" by Cheng et al. (2020); and "YouTube vloggers' popularity and influence: The roles of homophily, emotional attachment, and expertise" by Ladharia (2020). However, in the Philippines setting, the effectiveness of influencer marketing on travel applications has not, as of the moment, been highly studied.

Travel applications aim to have an online travel service platform with a user-friendly interface for quick and easy booking steps. It allows users to look for destinations, book cheap flights, and even help secure hotel rooms. Some of the travel apps that are actively operating in the Philippines are Traveloka (flights, hotels, activities), Google Flights (flights), Skyscanner (flights, hotels, car rentals), Klook (activities, dining, etc.), Kayak (flights, hotels, car rentals), KKday (tours, activities), Airbnb (accommodations), Hopper (flights, hotels), and TripAdvisor (hotels, dining, activities). Several factors affect tourists' intention to use travel apps installed on their smartphones. Performance expectations, social influence, price savings, perceived risk, trust, and prior usage habits are major determinants. Except for practices, usage behavior was mediated mainly by usage purpose (Gupta et al., 2018).

2. Review of Related Literature

To further expand the academic knowledge regarding the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' brand perception of travel applications, and get a clearer understanding of the study's research objectives, a series of journals and articles have been used and synthesized. The researchers reviewed previous studies that tackled Millennials, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), influencer marketing, online travel agencies, usage intention, and brand perception.

2.1 Millennials

According to Grafström et al. (2018), "Millennials' attitudes are affected by influencer marketing due to several reasons such as the alignment of promotions presented by an influencer, the level of credibility and trustworthiness of the persuasive messages, as well as the change in the style of the influencer in delivering the message.". Moreover, Millennials are more likely to use social media to connect with brands than the Generation X. Millennials have high involvement in the digital prospect, and are often referred to as "digital natives" because this generation primarily grew up in a social networking-entrenched environment led by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube. Moreover, this generation has gained immense attention since it is a large consumer segment with high purchasing power and massive consumption. In addition to that, research shows that Millennials are considered to be highly educated and mature with a technological understanding. In the Philippines, Filipino Millennials are budget travellers; their expenditures are budgeted wisely on things that would enrich their trip (Handog, 2018).

Millennials are the pioneer generation that grew up in the digital age of internet connectivity, mobile, telephony, and social media (Taylor & Keeter, 2010, as cited by Corbisiero, & Ruspini, 2018). These individuals make use of the power that their digital devices give them by habitually sharing their experiences as a consumer on different social media platforms that can later on influence the purchase decisions of other consumers. An online review can be expressed through different forms such as text, photos, video, audio, presentations, or combination. In a study conducted by KPMG (2017) across 50 countries, Generation Y is likely to consult through online consumer reviews while shopping. At the same time, they also like to visit Facebook pages to read consumer-generated product reviews. It was supported by a study in the UK which found that eight out of ten Gen Y make sure to read online consumer reviews first before making a purchase. They will not proceed unless they are satisfied with the reviews that they have read (Hall, 2018).

As stated by Grafström et al. (2018), many participants followed influencers that they viewed as self-reflection and role models. The personal bond between the influencers and the product they promote is a substantial necessity. They have also mentioned that Millennials consider the importance of beautiful and visually appealing content to notice and process the posted content. In addition, their research showed that the quality of content posted on Instagram is a decisive factor if an influencer is considered trustful rather than the influencer's number of followers. The presence of various choices of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube, also accompanied by new endorsers referred to as social media stars, YouTubers, vloggers, etc., have become key opinion leaders or influencers in social media. This endorser figure is believed to be able to have a more significant influence in delivering the message to the Millennial generation, in which companies firmly believe that through this generation, their brand will remain known until the future (Nurhandayani et al., 2019).

2.2 Generation Z

According to Parker, K., and Igielnik, R. (2020), Generation Z members are born in the digital age and are familiar with computers and the internet. The year 1995 has been used by several media outlets, namely United Press International, Financial Times, and CNBC, to describe Generation Z. In a study conducted by Robinson, V.M., and Schänzel, H.A. (2019), Generation Z grew up from the world that is surrounded by digital technology including the internet, smartphones, electronics games, and mass media.

Besides, sending emails, SMS, and reaction to a post are fundamental parts of their daily lives. Generation Z is considered the first generation to have experienced both the virtual and physical worlds, who are more interested in new digital technology than the previous generation, namely Generation X and Y (Skift, 2017). As a result, consumers' perceptions and buying habits have changed (Özkan, 2017). It makes the companies integrate social media marketing as part of their digital marketing portfolio tools to communicate the message with customers and get feedback from them. According to Assaker (2020); Ayeh et al., 2016 as stated in Tseng, L.-Y., Chang, J.-H., and Zhu, Y.L. (2021), user-generated content (UGC) is most popular among social media marketing, a non-professional content uploaded in a different type of social media. Compared to the traditional marketing tools, travelers rely on and trust the information from the actual consumer experience, UGC websites, and travel review sites to assist and make them informed of their travel decisions.

In a study by Kim and Kim (2017), Tseng, L.-Y., Chang, J.-H., and Zhu, Y.L. (2021), online consumers tend to be influenced by the massive amounts of text and visuals. Multimedia instruments on the internet, such as pictures, videos, comments, and the interactive atmosphere they experience in online tourist communities, help to reduce their awareness of relevant uncertainties and risks (Park et al., 2016), allowing them to have more faith in online or online tourist communities. User satisfaction is favorably influenced by information quality, according to Laumer et al. (2017), and customers' expectation confirmation and information quality can affect their fulfillment, as mentioned by Joo and Choi (2016). Furthermore, according to Liang et al. (2018), trust and contentment harm switching intentions.

According to Haddouche H. and Salomone C. (2018), travel is a time for convivial gathering, socialization, and empowerment for Generation Z. Through traveling, new friendships were formed, socialization with locals and fellow travelers were engraved, life and self-development through hands-on, planet real-life experience. Besides, the common concept of fear of missing out has been linked to travel, a fearful attitude with regard to missing out on the opportunity, and unforgettable experiences. A survey conducted by Smith (2018) shows that 82 percent of Generation Z regret losing out on chances to travel. In a study by Kantar and Tencent (2018), Skift (2017), as stated in Tseng, L.-Y., Chang, J.-H., and Zhu, Y.L. (2021), despite being financially supported by parents and relatives, Generation Z showed impressive consuming power. As a result, they are willing to allocate more time and money to find pleasure, and they believe that travel is an essential aspect of their lives.

2.3 electronic Word-Of-Mouth

As consumers cannot check the products or services physically using the digital platforms, the need for other users' reviews is crucial. Electronic Word-Of-Mouth or WOM on social media plays a vital role in the consumer's decision-making.

The rational decision-making of purchasing intentions of a consumer is bounded by available information about the products or services. Those personal limitations, i.e. processing available information, are often made purchase intentions are left much to be desired. According to Litterio, Nantes, Larrosa, et al. (2017), potential consumers of products and services are information-hungry, attempting to find feedback and recommendation through references and experience who are associated with products or services that have previously made a purchasing intention. In a study by Lang and Hyde (2013); King et al. (2014) and Hudson et al. (2016); Wang and Gon Kim (2017), as stated in Litterio, Nantes, Larrosa, et al., (2017), WOM has been enormously studied and effectively influenced the purchasing decision and behavior of a consumer through the endorsement of a product and services associated with celebrities or opinion leaders.

In a study conducted by Ciasullo, Montera, and Palumbo in 2021, customers enable communication and social interaction in social networks using technologies. They can make a decision and control how they will receive, respond and share the information. Besides, customers can modify how they will interact with companies. In a study by Xu and Li (2015); Tsao et al. (2015), as stated in Ciasullo, Montera, and Palumbo (2021), eWOM is an informal type of communication in social networks and the most influential than WOM for a particular reason for circumstance eWOM provide convenience, anonymity, accessible to communicate with other and no limitation in terms of time and space. Thus, the companies should adopt the changes to manage their relationship with their users. The user-generated content (UGC) has been proved to be more influential on a customer's decision-making for a particular reason for circumstance being independent of advertising influence such as commercials. Specifically, In a study by Bore et al. (2017), as stated in Ciasullo, Montera, and Palumbo (2021), eWOM has been considered the most influential UGC tool for the purchasing decisions and behaviors of customers.

For service providers, the effect of eWOM is of considerable importance, especially for the tourism and hospitality industry. Scrutinizing the travel intention to visit a destination, book a hotel, and other indirect experiences of the service are significant forms of eWOM. UGC, namely website pages, online travel agencies (OTA), and third-party hotel review websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, have a great deal of information that can directly influential for tourists' decisions which reduces the pre-purchase doubt and post-purchase dissonance; therefore, it can positively affect hotel bookings and enjoy the prominent level of credibility (Ciasullo et al., 2021; Singh, and Srivastava, 2019).

Hussain et al. (2017) stated that recommendations and reviews lay as a ground for WOM, and alongside the technical developments, eWOM arises. Previous studies have proved that word-of-mouth recommendations are more effective than other marketing strategies due to the high level of credibility it provides (Kim et al., 2018). It has become the preferred way how potential consumers judge the quality of service and products seen online before making a purchase.

2.4 Influencer Marketing

In a study conducted by Ulrike Gretzel in 2018, she stated that influencer marketing relies more on "handheld names" who have developed a significant reputation and following on various social media platforms. The most notable social media sites where marketers employ influencer marketing are; 1. Instagram (used by 89% of marketers engaged in influencer marketing); 2. Facebook and Twitter (both used by 70% of marketers); 3. Youtube (59%); 4. Blogs (48%); and 5. Snapchat (45% of marketers). She also added that influencer marketing could go beyond simple endorsements or message sharing.

Social media influencers are often known to have expertise in specific areas, such as healthy living, travel, food, lifestyle, beauty, or fashion (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p. 1). Moreover, social media influencers are also often referred to as micro-celebrities because of the large number of followers (Khamiset al., 2017). For example, in a social media community such as Youtube, which people actively use to create various video content. (Lee & Watkins, 2016), thousands of "Youtubers" have emerged and managed to acquire a large base of subscribers. In September 2018, PewDiePie, a Swedish YouTuber, was ranked the most popular globally, with 66 million subscribers (Statista, 2018).

Customers widely use the increasing usage of social networks such as Instagram to update themselves about the products and brands that they are interested in. Instagram is the fastest growing social network (WebsitePlanet, 2019), allowing its users to create visual content such as photos and videos, which they can edit on the platform. In addition, because it has a higher level of engagement than other SNs, brands widely use it to promote their product (RivallQ, 2019). Companies take advantage of using Instagram when promoting their brands, products or services as it was observed that after viewing a product, Instagram users tend to perform positive actions, such as searches for information, following the brand account, or making a purchase of products (Facebook, 2019). Instagram is one of the most used social media platforms for influencer marketing. A survey shows that nine out of ten marketers prefer to use Instagram as a platform for their influencer marketing campaigns (Relatabe, 2019). Influencers are considered today's opinion leaders. They affect the decision-making of other people, most especially their followers. Other users who follow their recommendations treat these influencers as their role models because they trust their opinions and beliefs. Influencers can build a special bond with their followers, which helps them to boost the credibility and trust of their followers. They inspire them and help them discover new brands/products which, in the end, the followers might purchase or recommend (Rakuten Marketing, 2019). This is supported by Human Brand Theory which states that a human person can be developed into a human brand, a persona that gives a sense of attachment to its audience, that can lead to a good marketing outcome (Thomson, 2006, as cited by Grafström, Jakobsson, & Wiede, 2018).

According to Drummond-Butt (2019), Influencer Marketing has become a powerful online instrument in customer persuasion; it has experienced impressive growth in terms of popularity as a social network and as a medium of spreading persuading messages to companies or agencies (Kim et al., 2017; Serra-Cantalops et al., 2018; Rietveld et al., 2020). Companies utilize Instagram as a marketing platform and as a channel to reach their target viewers through the help of influencers. Instagram has become the ideal platform for brands to make use of influencer-based marketing campaigns (Relatabe, 2019; Sanz-Blas et al., 2019). Paid collaboration between influencers and brands is often done in sponsored content (De Veirman et al., 2017).

As stated by Ruiz-Mafe et al. (2018) stated that social network sites allow users to increase brand awareness, express their brand selection, and influence brand image. These websites act as the source of social influence on which the users can rely when it comes to decision making. Viewers can be an easy target when it comes to social influence due to the nature of humans to rely on other people's judgment or beliefs. A study conducted by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) shows that consumer behavior can be affected by social influence as well as the perception of purchase intention. Posts with high interactions and engagements such as likes, comments, and shares tend to have a positive response with respect to the purchase intention of the audience.

Social influence is a complex source of information wherein the opinions and behaviors of consumers have a huge impact with this, in which the online platform, namely social networks, embellishes a new range where companies and brands should delimitate their relationship with their consumers by rethinking the paradigms of digital marketing with marketing and advertising professionals (Litterio, Nantes, Larrosa, & Gómez, 2017). Opinion leaders emerge within these social networks and obtain unique knowledge, position, and interest from a marketing perspective. A particular reason for the circumstance, they have an ability to influence the purchasing decision and behavior. In a study by Peters et al. (2013); Risselada et al. (2014), as stated in Litterio, Nantes, Larrosa, et al. (2017), In digital marketing, the marketing communication of a company's or brands cannot depend solely on traditional marketing strategies and should take advantage the capabilities of WOM marketing. To generate potential consumers

and maintain the existing consumers within social networks, the company's and brands should know their identity to attract a user group connected to the brand and express their views on their behalf.

2.5 Online Travel agencies (OTA)

Online Travel agencies or OTAs are agencies specialized in online-based travel solutions with the use of a website or a mobile application for secured and easy travel destination journeys. These OTAs are usually third-party providers who are partnering with various establishments like hotels, flights, touring activities, etc., to offer their services on the agencies' platform (Ray & Bala, 2021). These platforms allow consumers to look, compare and book travel products and services: hotels, flights, cars, tours, cruises, activities, etc. OTAs target DIY and budget-conscious travellers who know what they want to do, so they are just using the platform to look for the best deals available. They highly invest in advertising, rewards, and incentives and have been leveraging on being the top spots in Google and other search engines. OTAs have continuously gained an increase in market share, capturing 39% of the US online digital booking market in 2019. By 2020, it is expected to reach 41% of the market share in the US (Feinstein, 2019). In the Philippines, as the country is still in the midst of pandemics, tourism is expected to have a slow recovery due to the stringent measures implemented to control the spread of the virus. Yet, travel intermediaries such as Booking.com can still maintain their lead in the market in terms of sales. Since consumers are avoiding as much physical contact, online bookings are their best option ("Travel Sales and Intermediaries in the Philippines", 2020).

One of the areas that would perfectly fit the use of information technology in the tourism industry. Smart tourism incorporates network technologies, software, and hardware in order to produce real-time data, which helps the stakeholders come up with a more brilliant decision (Gretzel et al., 2015). According to Molz (2012), smart tourism can be defined as connectivity through web-based applications with location capabilities; tourists as co-producers of destination content; enhancing experiences through new technologies (augmented reality; connecting and interacting with local communities and other tourists in the destination, and improving social and environmental sustainability.

2.6 Usage Intention

A study by Augustin (2018), as stated in Talwar et al. (2020), found three qualities that play a significant role in the usage intention of OTAs' platforms which are: formation and service. Talwar et al. (2020) found out that quality-of-benefits, monetary, social status, preference, and information values can affect purchase intention toward OTAs. However, their study revealed that the outcome differs based on the age groups and users having different levels of privacy and security concerns, hygiene consciousness, and visibility perceptions. In addition, Ray and Bala (2021) revealed that both price benefits and trust in-service are important factors that can affect the usage intention of OTAs. Hence, discounts, incentives, and other sale promotions and the app service reliability should be taken into consideration by OTAs. Another study suggests that increasing app image, customer inertia, and app knowledge can improve e-customer satisfaction and hence, can retain customers in the long run (Dwikesumasari & Ervianty, 2017). To further understand their target market, Im and Hancer (2016) emphasize that consumers' attitude toward using travel mobile applications is directly related to the perceived usefulness of the app. This is also proved by the study of Ozturk et al. (2016), which indicates that with the continued usage intention of consumers, the utilitarian value of Mobile Hotel Booking was perceived to be way more important than the hedonic value of Mobile Hotel Booking. The ease of using the platform and the usefulness of the app are greatly affected, and it can also be an indicator to positively influence the consumer's perceived enjoyment or satisfaction.

2.7 Brand Perception

According to Astute Solutions (2020), brand perception is how a consumer views a brand as a result of their interactions and experiences with that brand, either through first-hand experiences or word-of-mouth.

Chang et al. (2016) found out that there was no significant relationship between eWOM and usage intention of the Taiwan Medical Travel App as the benefit of the TMT App suffices behavior intention regardless if the eWOM level is high or low. Contrastly, a study by Nurhandayani et al. (2019) in Jakarta states that building a good perceived brand image through social media influencers significantly impacts consumers' purchase decisions.

According to a study by Adi et al. (2015); Schmitt (2015), as stated in Xara-Brasil, Miadaira Hamza, & Marquina (2018), a Brand is a representation of self-expression of consumers' identity that they can relate to and have a deep emotional connection with that brand embodies. It is a communication tool to express the different personas of consumers. Brand stories, media, and popular culture are not the only factors that influence the brand perceptions of a consumer but also the sensorial, affective, and cognitive experiences of a consumer, also known as word of mouth. These external influences will integrate the concept of a brand that leads to cultural signalling from different consumers' perceptions, develop an attitude towards the brand, create an emotive response and generate a consumer-brand relationship.

H1: There is a significant relationship between Influencer Marketing and Consumers' Brand Perception that affects their usage intention of travel applications.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

2.8.1 Elaboration Likelihood Model

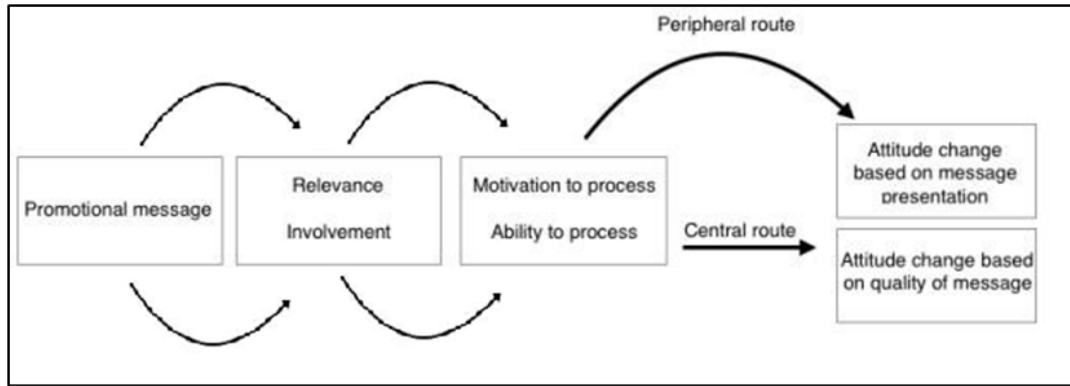


Figure 1. *Elaboration Likelihood Model developed by Petty and Cacioppo in 1980.*

As stated by Grafström, Jakobsson, and Wiede (2018), the Elaboration Likelihood Model is a model that provides a practical framework for how consumers are being persuaded by promotional messages. The model is also widely used in Advertising, Marketing, and Consumer Behavior Literature which guarantees its usefulness and reliability. Petty and Cacioppo developed this model in 1980, providing a framework for persuasive variables: source, message, recipient, and context. It is said that individuals take two different routes in processing information: central and peripheral.

The central route suggests that there is a high elaboration likelihood if the consumer can process information and their motivation exists. For example, if a consumer will have a high involvement purchase, the consumer will give full attention to specifications. Moreover, this route is focused more on the credibility and quality of the message of the information sender. (Rowbottom, 2018) On the other hand, the peripheral course has a low elaboration likelihood with very little ability and motivation to let them process information. This would mean that they are not considering the ups and downs of the information given to them and would just cut short by relying on superficial cues to develop their opinion of the message. Unlike the central route, which uses credibility and quality of the news, the peripheral road would instead look into source expertise and attractiveness (Bijil, 2018).

As Grafström et al. (2018) has demonstrated in their study, a consumer, who follows an Influencer on different social media platforms that promotes a product brand, may consider evaluating its motivation and ability to process the influencer's message. This is how the ELM is applied. The evaluation is based on the relevance and the involvement of the information receiver. The relevance refers to the legitimacy and usefulness of the information. The involvement can be referred to as interaction with the influencer, such as choosing to follow, since the influencer produces content of the consumer's interest. (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, as cited in Grafström et al., 2018)

2.9 Human Brand Theory

Human Brand Theory proposes three ways a human persona can be turned and act as a human brand. This persona becomes the bond or linkage of brands to their audience, leading to a good marketing outcome (Thomson, 2006, as cited in Ki et al., 2020). The theory has three key points. First, media personas can only be seen as human brands if they have met certain conditions. If an individual has been distinguished by its name, persona, or other qualities, it can be considered a human brand (Moulard et al., 2015). Second, it proposes that it has a good sense of attachment, which is defined by how intensive the consumer's emotional bond is to a human brand (Thomson, 2006). Third, gaining a solid attachment would successfully lead human brands to impact consumers' perceptions. Also stated by Thomas (2006), Human Brands can have an effect called attachment transfer which means that the attachment formed by an influencer, a human brand, to its followers can lead to an effective passing of positive feelings from that influencer to the brand endorses.

2.10 Conceptual Framework

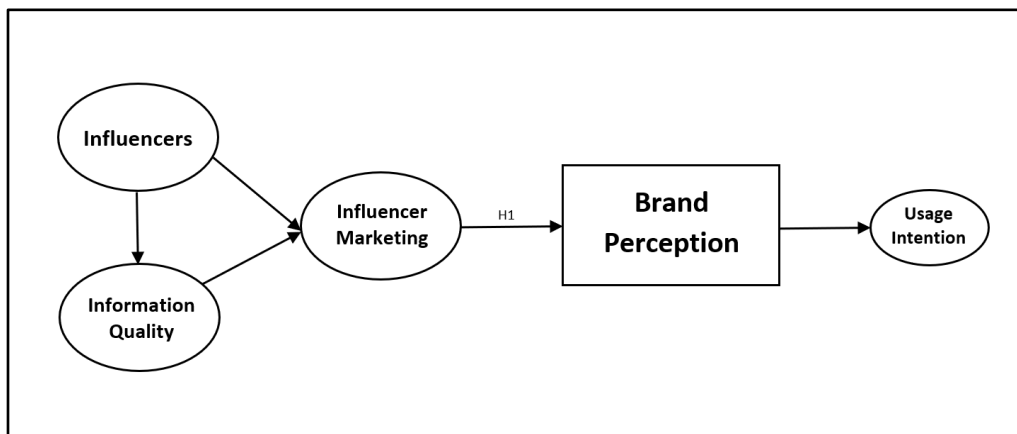


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

In the suggested conceptual framework, the elements determining the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' brand perception of travel applications were identified. This model illustrates the relationship between the independent variable—*influencer marketing*, which consists of influencers and information quality, and the dependent variable—*brand perception*. With this, the researchers will determine the independent variables' impact on consumers' brand perception of travel applications that affect their usage intention. Influencer Marketing consists of the 1) influencers or social media personalities who have built a reputation through their expertise and 2) the quality of information they provide to their particular audience concerning their credibility. In the figure above, there is an arrow below the *Influencers* pointing to *Information Quality* which shows that influencers, through their prowess, deliver reliable and quality information to their audience. Furthermore, there are arrows from these two elements pointing to *Influencer Marketing*, depicting that these elements comprise what influencer marketing is. Then from *Influencer Marketing*, the independent variable, there is an arrow that points to *Brand Perception*, the dependent variable, to show the relationship between these variables. These factors affect consumers' usage intention of travel applications.

3. Methodology

This study uses a descriptive-correlational research design to assess the demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age, gender, location, and income, to describe the level of relationship between variables. This research design was used to determine the correlation between influencer marketing and brand perception of travel applications.

The researchers selected 385 people from the Generation Z and Millennial generations who are residing within the National Capital Region of the Philippines as the respondents using the Raosoft calculator as a method of determining the minimum recommended size for the survey. A random sampling technique was also used to select the respondents that participated in this study.

For the screening phase, the researchers asked the respondents whether they had traveled internationally or locally before, used a travel application, and follow/know any social media influencers. If the answer is no, they are not qualified to take the survey, while if they answer yes to all of the qualifying questions, they can proceed to the next section of the survey.

All questions were asked using English as the universal language. The survey questionnaire is divided into two parts: Demographic Profile and Influencer Marketing and Brand Perception. The researchers used self-administered questionnaires to gather the necessary data to determine the impact of influencer marketing on customers' brand perception of travel applications. The questionnaires were divided into two parts: 1) the first part was to determine the respondent's demographic profile; thus, this part of the survey questionnaire includes age, gender, location, and income. 2) The second part includes questions that provide data regarding the impact of influencer marketing on the brand perception of travel applications.

The data collected from the participant's responses were processed and analyzed for discussion. Cronbach Alpha was used and validated by the statistician to estimate the internal consistency and reliability of each set of items. The researchers utilized descriptive statistics to present quantitative descriptions of the data gathered in a manageable form or simply describe the basic features shown by the data. To determine the correlation between the independent and dependent variables, the researchers made use of Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Characteristics of a Social Media Influencer that the Respondents are Looking For

Table 1. Respondents' Perception about the Characteristics of a Social Media Influencer that they are Looking for

Influencer's Characteristics	Weighted Mean	Rank	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1. I see influencers as people who are unique and attractive	3.09*	7	0.703	Agree
2. I see influencers as people who are knowledgeable, competent, and expert.	2.93*	8	0.766	Agree
3. I see influencers as people who are very relatable and talk about things that I am also interested in.	3.34*	6	0.666	Agree
4. I follow influencers because they are good at presenting themselves.	3.36*	5	0.666	Agree
5. I follow influencers because they are entertaining.	3.53*	3	0.617	Strongly Agree
6. I follow influencers because they post quality content.	3.52*	4	0.658	Strongly Agree
7. I follow influencers who give back to the community/reach out to people in need.	3.59*	2	0.607	Strongly Agree
8. I identify a person as an influencer only if they have more than 10 000 followers.	2.32*	9	1.001	Disagree
9. I follow influencers because my friends like them too.	2.24*	10	0.907	Disagree
10. I follow influencers who inspire me.	3.72*	1	0.482	Strongly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.16*			Agree

*Legend: 3.50 to 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 to 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 to 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 to 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Findings show that "being capable to inspire" is the primary characteristic that the respondents are looking for in a social media influencer that they will follow (WM=3.72, VI=Strongly Agree, SD=0.482). Meanwhile, "being a choice by their friends" is not something they consider among the characteristics they are looking for in a social media influencer (WM=2.24, VI=Disagree, SD=0.907). Overall, findings show that respondents agree that they are looking for certain positive characteristics in a social media

influencer who they will follow (OWM=3.16, VI=Agree). This result testifies that many participants follow social media influencers they view as self-reflection and role models (Grafström et al., 2018).

4.2 Influences of Social Media Influencers on Marketing Travel Applications

Table 2. Respondents' Perception of the Influences of Social Media Influencers on Marketing Travel Applications

Influencer's Marketing	Weighted Mean	Rank	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1. I trust an influencer's brand review more than that of a local celebrity.	2.92*	8	0.780	Agree
2. I feel that influencers will only advertise a product if it is aligned with their field of interest.	3.04*	4	0.837	Agree
3. I feel happy when I use the same brand as the influencer I follow.	2.84*	9	0.888	Agree
4. I feel that an influencer's lifestyle resonates with the brand they endorse.	3.03*	5	0.829	Agree
5. When an influencer gives a promotional message about a travel application, I look at their credibility before I intend to use the application.	3.47*	1	0.665	Agree
6. I believe an influencer's promotional message if it is in line with their content.	3.26*	2	0.668	Agree
7. I am more willing to use a brand if the influencer has the aesthetics in giving promotional messages.	2.97*	7	0.806	Agree
8. When I look for a travel application, I look for travel influencers because I know they can provide me with an excellent brand to choose from.	3.08*	3	0.855	Agree
9. I use a particular travel application because I	2.45*	10	0.943	Disagree

see my favorite influencer use it.				
10. I trust an influencer's recommendation because they have highly engaged audiences who trust them too.	3.02*	6	0.764	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.01*			Agree

***Legend:** 3.50 to 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 to 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 to 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 to 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

It is found that the respondents primarily look first at the credibility of the social media influencer who promotes certain travel applications before considering using that travel application (WM=3.47, VI=Agree, SD=0.665). Meanwhile, findings also reveal that respondents do not use certain travel applications just because their favorite social media influencer uses them (WM=2.45, VI=Disagree, SD=0.943). Overall, findings show that respondents agree that they perceive several influences of the social media influencers on marketing brands of travel applications (OWM=3.01, VI=Agree).

On the subject of respondents' perception of the influences of Social Media Influencers on the marketing travel applications, it is found that the respondents primarily look first at the credibility of the social media influencer who promotes certain travel applications before considering using that travel application. This can also be seen in the study conducted by Grafström, Jakobsson, and Wiede in 2018. They stated that millennials are affected by influencer marketing for plenty of reasons, including influencers' credibility and trustworthiness. In addition, people trust influencers who are widely trusted because of their competence and expertise in their respective fields. (AlFarraj et al., 2021)

4.3 Respondents' Perception of Brands of Travel Applications

Table 3. Respondents' Perception of Brands of Travel Applications

Brand Perception	Weighted Mean	Rank	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1. With the influence of influencer marketing, I am satisfied with my latest experience from a travel application.	3.06*	8	0.697	Agree
2. With my latest experience, I am willing to recommend this to a family, friend, or colleague.	3.34*	7	0.614	Agree
3. I use a travel application to make use of promos/coupons that are only available on that specific brand.	3.35*	6	0.714	Agree
4. I am excited every time I use travel applications to make use of influencer discount codes.	2.99*	9	0.835	Agree

5. I often use travel applications because I find it useful and convenient to book flights and hotels.	3.51*	4	0.685	Strongly Agree
6. I find travel applications convenient because it provides all the help that I need when traveling, including the location, ticket booking, accommodation, and information about local experiences.	3.59*	3	0.562	Strongly Agree
7. The reviews of the travel application affect my decision making when choosing an accommodation or tour package.	3.69*	1	0.496	Strongly Agree
8. I prefer to use a travel application because there is a wide variety of accommodation, airlines, and local tours. I can easily compare the different offers that are available and choose the best deal for me.	3.60*	2	0.604	Strongly Agree
9. I choose to use a travel application because of the first-hand experiences of the influencers.	2.85*	10	0.877	Agree
10. I choose to use a travel application if it is popular and widely used by many.	3.41*	5	0.698	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	3.34*			Agree

***Legend:** 3.50 to 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 to 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 to 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 to 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Regarding the perception of the respondents on the brands of travel application, findings show that the reviews about the travel application affect their decision on choosing an accommodation or tour package (WM=3.69, VI=Strongly Agree, SD=0.496). On the other hand, in choosing what travel application to use, they consider at least the first-hand experience of the social media influencers in using it (WM=2.85, VI=Agree, SD=0.877). Overall, the respondents had distinct perceptions of the brands of travel applications on average (OWM=3.34, VI=Agree). This implies that consumers' brand perception can depend on the reviews of past users but not high enough on the experiences of the influencer. The researchers believe that this depends on the influencer who markets the brand. This can be supported in the previous study on effective influencer marketing by Grafström et al. (2018), who states that consumers' attitudes can be affected by influencer marketing if the presented promotions are aligned to the influencer, there is the level of credibility and trustworthiness of the persuasive messages, and with the style of the influencer in delivering

the message. Perceived usefulness (Im and Hancer, 2016; Ozturk et al., 2016) and benefits could also contribute to the distinctive perception of the brands of travel applications. (Ray and Bala, 2021)

4.4 Relationship between the Respondents' Perceived Influences of Social Media Influencers on Marketing Travel Applications and their Brand Perception

Table 4. Relationship between the Respondents' Perceived Influences of Social Media Influencers on Marketing Travel Applications and their Brand Perception

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (Spearman's Rho)	Relationship	P-value (2-tailed)	Decision	Remarks
Influencers' Marketing x Brand Perception	0.622*	Positively Strong	0.000**	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship

0.00 to ±0.19 = Very Weak Correlation; ±0.20 to ±0.39 = Weak Correlation; ±0.40 to ±0.59 = Moderate Correlation; ±0.60 to ±0.79 = Strong Correlation; ±0.80 to ±1.0 = Very strong correlation
 **Correlation is significant at 0.05 level of significance (2-tailed)

In testing the relationship between the respondents' perceived influences of social media influencers on marketing brands of travel applications and their brand perception, findings reveal that the two mentioned variables have a positively strong and significant linear relationship, with a resulting correlation coefficient of 0.622, and rejecting the null hypothesis with a P-value (P-value = 0.000) that is less than the alpha level (= 0.05). This approves the hypothesis of the researchers that there is a positive relationship between influencer marketing and brand perception. According to Nurhandayani (2019), it was determined that utilizing social media influencers has a significant impact on building brand images. However, leveraging social media influencers to affect consumers' purchase intention has no particular significance. Instead, influencer marketing helps the brand create a perceived image in the minds of consumers, with the brand image guiding their purchase intention.

5. Conclusion

The study conducted was aimed to see The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumers' Brand Perception of Travel Applications. Undoubtedly, the rise of social media provided a new avenue for brands to connect with their consumers, which induced influencer marketing to be progressively used. Unfortunately, in the Philippines setting, the effectiveness of influencer marketing on travel applications has not been highly studied, which led the researchers to look deeper into this topic.

With the study results, the hypothesis of the researchers had been cleared. The researchers have deduced that there is a positive relationship between Influencer Marketing and Brand Perception, with a significance level of 0.622. The respondents' perception about the impact of social media influencers on marketing brands of travel applications significantly influences their perceptions towards certain brands of travel applications. With regards to influencer's characteristics, it was revealed that "being able to inspire" is the leading characteristic the respondents are looking for in an influencer. In addition, the results also suggested that based on the respondents' average perception about the influences of a social media influencer in marketing brands of travel applications, they primarily check first the credibility of a certain social media influencer that promotes a specific travel application before considering using it. Furthermore, the results also showed that reviews about the travel applications are the very first thing that the respondents consider in choosing what brand of travel applications they will use.

The researchers came up with the following recommendations: The first recommendation focuses on how the companies, owners, and developers of travel applications could effectively take advantage of influencer marketing. Upon analysis of how the results supported H1, the researchers recommend the usage of influencer marketing to advertise a particular travel application. However, the influencer's characteristics such as attractiveness, expertise, competence, and knowledge should be considered to develop a positive perception of the brand successfully. The second recommendation revolves around influencers. The researchers recommend that brand influencers study the brand they are advertising, understand their audience, and acknowledge the influence they have on someone's usage intention and brand perception. Lastly, the third recommendation is for future researchers. Since this study only focused on people living within NCR, it is highly recommended that their prospective study be carried out on people residing outside of NCR, preferably nationwide, to see if there are similarities or differences with the current findings.

Moreover, the researchers would like to recommend that future researchers add different variables that can affect this field of study, like comparing different generations to see if all ages would have the same result.

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