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**An Analysis of the Impact of an Influencer's Perceived
Trustworthiness and Content Quality on Their Follower's Travel
Intent**

Josh C. McNair

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An analysis of the impact of an influencer's perceived trustworthiness and content quality
on their follower's travel intent

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the George Fox University School of Business
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Abstract

Influencer marketing is quickly becoming an essential aspect of a company's online and social media strategy. This research examines the field of influencer marketing by conducting a quantitative study that researches the impact of two influencer attributes, trust and content quality, and how they affect the travel intentions of a follower. The study was conducted directly by an influencer on their followers, and the analysis showed that trust and content quality impact the travel intentions of followers. This work is important as the travel industry is still recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic. It provides a better understanding of how companies, through influencers, can impact an audience's potential travel intentions.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, trust, content quality, travel intentions

Dedication

I dedicate this work to God, who has given me the strength and mental fortitude needed to finish this journey. I also dedicate it to my wife Amie and my children, Jack and Sunny. Your love and support are what kept me moving forward, and I hope this encourages you to pursue your dreams as well. Lastly, I dedicate it to my father, Jeff (the original Dr. McNair), who spent many hours on the phone or in the car on a road trip discussing my research and how to make it the best it could be.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

“Social media has fundamentally changed the way individuals plan and consume travel.” (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014)

Throughout the last decade, Web 2.0 has infiltrated our daily lives and led to the established digital platforms (social media, blogs, etc.) that neither marketers nor consumers can live without. These platforms have given businesses unprecedented access to consumers in ways that were not possible previously. Social media specifically has shifted the marketing landscape to allow a third party, known as an influencer, to become a makeshift middleman between a company and consumer (Dodosh et al., 2019). These influencers use both their reputation and their access to impact the behaviors of those in their sphere of influence through content generation. One’s influence has become a new form of digital currency that can be bought and sold by brands and wielded in their digital marketing campaigns. Influence, therefore, is changing online marketing and facilitating the growth of people whose sole job is to manage their influence, attract social followers, and use their platform (Instagram, Facebook, blogging, etc.) to encourage their followers towards a particular goal. Nowhere is this better seen than in online travel marketing, where influencers with popular social media channels and blogs, have altered how tourists plan and book trips (Jashi, 2013).

The photo sharing social media site Instagram has over 1 billion active users, and 100 million photos are shared on the channel each day. It is estimated that there are currently over 500,000 influencers (people who have been paid for a post) on the platform currently (Instagram by the Numbers, 2020). Travel is one of the most influential areas on Instagram, lending itself well to a visual medium, and travel

influencers are leading destination marketing efforts worldwide. Chris Burkard (a travel influencer with over 2 million followers) states that his followers are “less than 10 clicks away from seeing an image on Instagram and purchasing a ticket to go there,” and that many people have booked travel based on seeing images he has shared (Miller, 2017, para. 7). Terttunen (2017) researched the impact of Instagram travel influencers through a survey of users on the platform and found that 82% of the users surveyed said the platform had at least some impact on their travel planning. Shuqair and Cragg (2017) further studied Instagram and found that influencers could change users’ perception of a place through their content. They also stated that more research should be done on how the shared content impacted travel intentions.

Influencers use travel blogs to share stories and to work with tourism companies to market destinations as well. Recent statistics show that almost one third (500 million) of all websites on the Internet are blogs (“How Many Blogs Are There in 2020,” 2019). Researchers found that blogs can be very impactful in forming an online image of a destination and changing how people see that location (Ay et al., 2019). Blogs can influence potential tourists and help form a perceived destination image for those who have never traveled to a location (Sun et al., 2015). Brands and tourism destinations have begun to see this value and plan to spend over \$15 billion in the influencer marketing space in 2020, with more than 60% forecasting year over year growth in their spending with influencers (Schomer, 2019). The research to date has been narrow in scope and has focused on those being influenced, to help paint a better picture of the effect of influencer marketing work on the consumer.

At its core, influencer marketing is not a new concept, and the theory behind it has roots in both word of mouth and social capital. Word of mouth is not inherently a marketing term, as it involves one person telling another about a product or service. However, marketers have seen the value in word of mouth and have begun to encourage consumers to tell their friends and communities (virtual or otherwise) about the products they purchase. This information sharing has been successful in swaying consumers to try a new product or service, based primarily on the trust fostered in these communities (Weil 2010).

Trust is a significant part of social capital, another vital aspect of influencer marketing. Social capital focuses on who one knows in real life and how those connections can help them advance. As a result of social media, a face-to-face connection is no longer necessary. Influencers can cultivate trust and encourage consumers to accept product information shared by those they do not know but simply follow online (Cooley and Parks-Yancy, 2019). A recent study found that trust in influencers was close to the trust consumers have in their friends (Swant, 2016). The trust established through the influencer-follower relationship is moving social connections online and giving brands a new platform to reach targeted consumers. These platforms have led to the rise of influencer marketing as a vital factor in modern advertising and an area worthy of additional study. Studies show that historic advertising is being lost in the noise of contemporary technology, which has created room for influencers who can reach a customer base more effectively than the traditional ads of the past (Butte, 1998).

The direct impact of influencer work outside of campaign based ROI is anecdotal. Business research has focused on ROI from specific campaigns, and the data is available

on a single campaign basis to answer ROI-related questions (Baer, 2016; Harvey, 2018). However, scholarly research has moved past ROI to determine which aspects of the influencer, such as content quality and trust, are the most impactful on their followers. (Magno and Cassia, 2018; Lou and Yuan, 2019). Scholarly research can continue to benefit from studying the aspects of an influencer's personality and content that are most impactful to their followers' travel intentions. This study focuses on that area.

Travel intentions, or one's motivation to travel, are impacted by several factors, such as demographic variables, emotional stories, and visual content creation (Hsiao et al., 2013; Abubakar, 2016). Social media is vital to the travel world because of its ability to connect online communities with on-demand destination information, making social media the "primary medium by which travel information is shared" (Lange-Faria and Elliot, p. 196, 2012). The image created through social media posts can positively influence a consumer's desire to visit, and this creates familiarity with destinations the person may never have heard of before (Chaulagain et al., 2019). Previous research has focused on the content, devoid of the influencer, examining how that content impacts travel intentions. Content is part of the puzzle, but research should also focus on the influencer and their impact on their followers through aspects such as trust and content quality.

Statement of the Research Problem

Influencer marketing is one of the most talked-about areas of social media and online marketing. As stated earlier in this chapter, approximately \$15 billion was spent on influencer marketing in 2020 (Schomer, 2019). Nevertheless, regardless of all of the buzz that influencer marketing has received, researchers are still studying how much

control these new influencers wield over their followers. With the industry poised for expansion, researchers and businesspeople need to know what aspects of an influencer most impact their influencer marketing work. Researchers have found that elements such as authority, trust, and content quality can affect influence on followers (Magno and Cassia, 2018). However, the research is still new and segmented with most studies focusing on variables such as follower count or the content itself instead of looking directly at how influencers engage and encourage their audience's behaviors (Childers, Lemon, and Hoy, 2019). This study builds on the work previously executed on the effects of online trust and content quality by working with an influencer in the travel industry to survey their audience and see what impact the influencer has on their followers' travel behavior.

Research Questions

For this study, the research question is:

What are the impacts of an influencer's perceived trustworthiness and content quality on their follower's travel intentions?

Hypotheses

H₁: An influencer's trustworthiness has a positive correlation with their followers' travel intent.

H₂: An influencer's content quality has a positive correlation with their followers' travel intent.

H₃: An influencer's content quality and trustworthiness have a positive correlation with their followers' travel intent.

Definitions of Terms

This research examines an emerging industry, one in which the terms used to describe central aspects are still being developed and refined. It is vital to understand the main terms in the context of this study. Some of the key terms used in this research are listed below.

Influencer – Freberg et al. (2011) were among the first researchers to define an influencer in the modern context. They stated that an influencer is “a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, and Freberg, p. 90, 2011). This definition was expanded to include more focus on the content itself through the research of Lou and Yaun (2019). They stated that “a social media influencer is first and foremost a content generator: one who has a status of expertise in a specific area, who has cultivated a sizable number of captive followers—who are of marketing value to brands—by regularly producing valuable content via social media (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

Destination Image - This is formed by the consumer through the content shared on social media by the influencer. It is defined by Kaikkonen (p. 6, 2016) as “a picture or idea formatted by knowledge, impressions, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of a place created by tourists and visitors or, by consumers.”

Web 2.0 – This is defined as the “technological trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet—a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects” (Witteman and Zikmund-Fisher, p. 3735, 2012)

Social Media – This is hard to define, as it constantly shifts with new platforms starting and others collapsing. Peters et al. (p. 282, 2013) described the social media landscape broadly, which is more helpful than looking at each network in isolation. They stated that “social media are communication systems that allow their social actors to communicate along dyadic ties” (Peters et al., p. 282, 2013).

Trust – This area has been studied for centuries, but in this research, the primary focus is on how trust is conveyed through a digital medium. The business definition of trust can be summed up by a “willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence” (Moorman, Deshpandé, and Zaltman, p. 82, 1993). Trust can be studied through the lens of social capital as well, where “trust is considered essential in exchange relations because it is a key element of social capital” (Kim, Ferrin, and Rao, p.2, 2008).

Content Quality – This is the value one places on the content that has been created. Song and Zinkhan (p. 110, 2003) stated that it is “the extent to which consumers think that the information is useful, good, current, accurate, and trustworthy.” The main focus of content quality is how it impacts user behavior through technology and the impact the content has in terms of the “value obtained through interaction” with a blog or influencer (Tsai and Men, 2013).

Delimitations

For this study, the sample consisted of subscribers to the influencer’s newsletter. It is a convenience sample, having excluded a large population that lacked the opportunity to participate. According to participant exclusion criteria, participants are included if they are subscribed to the newsletter, and these inclusions do not consider age, sex, socioeconomic status, or race. The primary disqualifying exclusion is that if a user

did not sign up for the newsletter, they were not considered for the study. This can impact the replication of this study since no one except the author has access to this particular sample, and future studies would be unable to test the same population.

The study was conducted using a Likert scale, which does not allow the population to input their own answers and may be seen as “too closed.”. This survey method could reduce the probability of participants completing the survey, especially if they had something they wanted to convey that was not covered by the available answers.

While many options are available for performing a study of this nature, a quantitative study with a correlation-based analysis was the chosen approach. There are inherent limitations with correlation studies, since a positive or negative correlation does not mean that the variables have a direct cause-and-effect relationship. The positive or negative correlation simply means that there is an association present when studying the two variables together.

Limitations

The sample was recruited from followers of the author of this paper, who can be considered an influencer. He has grown the newsletter list used for the data, so there is an inherent bias in the research based on the sample. A survey request from the author might therefore result in biased responses. Also, since the study only uses people who have chosen to subscribe to the influencer’s newsletter, one could assume that they value the content the influencer creates and may have a certain level of trust and appreciation of the content already established. Alternatively, if the participant no longer uses the email address with which they subscribed, or the message goes to their spam inbox, this would limit their ability to respond during the survey window.

The survey is limited by focusing on one group of people connected to one influencer. The research would benefit from working with multiple influencers to survey their audiences and compare the findings. The timing of the research being conducted is also a consideration. The Covid-19 pandemic and its effect on the political and economic landscape of 2020 can skew the responses related to whether or not one is being influenced to travel. This uncertainty is impossible to control for, but it can impact consumers' answers concerning something as volatile as travel intentions.

The survey also deals with the idea of perception, since it asks participants to judge an influencer on deep topics such as trust and quality. One participant's perception is potentially different from another's, but that does not mean that the influencer is actually trustworthy, just that the individual perceives them as trustworthy.

The Significance of the Study

Since the early 2000s, technology has grown exponentially, giving rise to new businesses opportunities that did not exist previously. Coupled with the rise of personal computing and access to the Internet, this is an unprecedented era of growth in which businesses have untethered access to both global customers and a global knowledge base. For businesses, this growth has had both positive and negative ramifications, as the ability to reach new customers is now simply confined by one's imagination and access to the global communication networks known as social media. The primary negative for businesses trying to reach a connected and global customer is the lack of personal connection between the brand and the consumer. Known as brand personification, this attribution of human qualities to a brand is becoming more vital to consumers looking for those personal connections across the digital landscape (Tengblad-Kreft et al., 2017).

Brands have struggled with this since the dot-com bubble burst, but with the connections being made through social media, brand personification is occurring through the work being done in influencer marketing.

Influencer marketing allows brands to connect with individuals that share the same goals, qualities, or ideals as the brand and who have developed a platform with followers who look to the influencer to tell them what to buy, where to travel, and even how to feel about a brand or service. This influencer marketing work creates a bridge between the brand and the consumer through the third-party influencer and builds that necessary connection point to allow brands to organically market their products and services to an interested consumer base. Influencer marketing is a vital online marketing tool that a brand can access, and, as research is still in the early stages, the vital aspects of how influencers can influence their followers are not yet fully understood.

Influencer marketing as a whole was projected to be a \$15 billion industry by 2020 (The 2019 Influencer Marketing Industry, 2018), with millions of sponsored posts shared each year (Fastenau, 2018). Social media research has begun to focus on the impact of influencers, but the research is in the early stages and continuously developing. Recent nonacademic studies show that consumers value the opinion of influencers more than the opinion of brands due to the personal connection, and that influencers have a guiding impact on customer purchase decisions (The Shocking ROI of Influencer Marketing, 2016). A better understanding of what grows this impact (e.g., attributes such as content quality and trust) is vital to the industry and the academic world alike. From a brand's perspective, with the amount of money being spent in this area, there needs to be a clear understanding of the value provided by the investment and the aspects of a travel

influencer that are most impactful to their followers. Instead of research that looks at the content devoid of the influencer, researchers should shift their focus to the influencer and how they impact their followers. Such research would advance knowledge regarding an influencer's value and spotlight specific parts of an influencer's personality and created content that have the most impact on the travel intentions of their followers. Based on previous research, the proposed study looks at two vital aspects of an influencer's work—their ability to create trust between themselves and their followers and the quality of their content. The study uses these two attributes to research the impact these perceived qualities have on their followers' travel intentions.

Magno and Cassia (2018) advanced the study of this impact by surveying the followers of three influencers in Italy, revealing how much leverage the influencers have over their followers' behavior. Their study was the basis for many of the survey questions in this research project. Their study was performed in Italy, and adapting it to the United States would help researchers gain a better understanding of whether or not their results are generalizable to a larger population. Adding to the potential impact of the work they have already done will further help researchers understand influencers and their impact on targeted consumers. It will also suggest how influencers can best wield that influence by measuring the impact of cultivating trust and measuring the quality of the work they produce. The survey questions used by Magno and Cassia (2018), adapted and combined with questions from Chai et al. (2009) and Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019), were used to create the survey tool described in Chapter 3.

Researcher's Perspective

The analysis in this study is of specific interest to the researcher because he is considered an influencer in the travel industry with a large following on YouTube, Instagram, and his blog. He is hoping to understand better the value an influencer has in the travel industry and the aspects of the influencer that impact their followers' intentions to visit the locations that are shared online. This understanding would be helpful when working with brands and other influencers. It would also provide the academic world with knowledge about the value an influencer gives to brands or tourism boards. The unique perspective of an actual influencer conducting this research will be beneficial because of the relevant knowledge the influencer already possesses and the access they have to exclusive datasets to conduct the research.

Based on the time I have spent in this industry, I believe that influencers shape the travel intentions of their audience. Consequently, there is an implicit bias in the present study, since I am approaching the research from that perspective. However, I am excited to add to research on influencer marketing, regardless of the outcome of the survey.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This literature review begins with a discussion of influencer marketing and the types of opinion leaders. It then moves to an analysis of the impact of opinion leaders and the advertising movement itself, followed by an examination of various forms of word of mouth, specifically traditional and electronic forms. We discuss what makes influencer marketing successful, emphasizing the idea of trust and content quality and what contributes to and conflicts with the development of these ideas. Connections are then made between the impact of perceived trust, content quality, and travel intentions, particularly in the travel industry.

Introduction

Over the last decade, digital marketing has become an essential part of a company's marketing strategy. Where digital marketing previously focused on traditional advertising methods such as banner ads, commercials, and newsletters, modern digital marketing has been transformed through social media and the rise of influencer marketing to connect with customers where they "live online" (Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden, 2011; Glucksman, 2017). Social media has created numerous ways for people to connect (even with those outside their local sphere of influence) and has allowed companies the opportunity to interact with their audience on a more personal level. While some companies have tried to do this by creating a human persona for their social media accounts, such as the work done by Wendy's on Twitter, most businesses have begun to work with influencers who serve as that vital human element in an impersonal digital environment (Tengblad-Kreft et al., 2017; Baker, 2018).

This shift has allowed influencer marketing to flourish. As Nunes et al. (2018) noted, using the limited rationality theory, consumers do not have all the information available on a subject. Therefore, influencers can play an essential role in providing necessary information to consumers on behalf of a business. Influencer marketing has given companies new ways to connect with the online consumer organically and has provided researchers with a new avenue of study. Woods (p. 22, 2016) confirmed the importance of influencer marketing by stating that “the returns on investment are unparalleled” for businesses and that “consumers can expect influencer marketing to become much more prevalent in their feeds soon.” He pointed out that more research is needed in this critical area, especially related to the influencers and their impact on their followers.

Three Influencer Types

An analysis of influencer marketing begins with a study of the term and the history of these opinion leaders. The modern influencer has been defined by Freberg et al. (p. 90, 2011) as an “independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media.” This definition was based on work performed by Feick and Price (p. 290, 1987), in which they defined three types of influencer: the early adopter, the opinion leader, and the market maven. Their work studied how influential consumers are able to impact the spread of a company’s message. They found that each of the three groups could carry a company’s message to their potential followers by sharing information prior to the availability of modern digital marketing.

Understanding how influencers impact their audience requires a basic knowledge of Feick and Price's work on the three types of influencers. The early adopter is someone who purchases a product and influences others through the use of the product and normal conversation. This is the least impactful type, as it simply involves the consumer buying the product early in the product life cycle and using it. Opinion leaders were thoroughly researched prior to Feick and Price (1987) and were defined by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) as "individuals who acted as information brokers intervening between mass media sources and the opinions of the population" (Feick and Price, p. 84, 1987). Opinion leaders have been studied for decades and have been a crucial part of corporate marketing strategies. Lastly, market mavens are defined as:

"Individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information" (p. 85).

Backaler (2018) called mavens the "ultimate influencers" due to their ability to engage and encourage the influencer's audience. Market mavens are most often seen in fashion and travel because the influencers in those sectors are more engrained in the market through lived experiences.

Opinion Leaders and Market Mavens

While early adopters are not seen as a basis for the modern influencer, opinion leaders and market mavens are highlighted in the research as ideas that shaped influencer marketing (Zietek, 2016; Backaler, 2018). The two types are very similar: opinion leaders pass information to a consumer through their platform, while market mavens are engaged with the market, shopping, reading, and providing information on that market to those

they influence. Market mavens are more beneficial to brands, because they come from a place of active involvement in the market instead of merely being paid to impart given information. Opinion leaders are the present study's focus, since the point is not to look at the intricacies of how an influencer engages with the market but to ascertain how attributes such as trust and content quality impact followers' intentions.

When discussing the idea of opinion leadership, it is essential to note Katz's (1957) three dimensions of what makes someone an opinion leader: first, "who one is," or the personification of their values; second, "what one knows," or their competence; and third, "whom one knows," or their geographical location, which would expand later to digital followers (p. 73, 1957). Katz's work has been influential for half a decade because it defined an opinion leader in a way that is still applicable to the modern digital influencer, even though the idea of "place" has changed. Uzunogle and Kip (2014) state that the creation of social networks has moved the third dimension of geographical location to the Internet and allowed online opinion leaders to develop. In their study, the opinion leaders are bloggers, but recent research has transitioned online opinion leaders to the more general realm of the digital influencer, which includes bloggers and social media users with significant followings.

Nunes et al. (2018) made the connection between the opinion leaders of the past and current influencers by stating that modern opinion leaders are those consumers who can impact others through social media. Their ability to create a persuasive message is what makes them beneficial to a company's marketing efforts. They also found that the main attributes of an influencer are product and category knowledge, being an opinion leader, and having a platform to influence others.

While Feick and Price (1987) looked at the opinion leaders of their time, Burklin and Faber (2019) moved the research forward and applied it to current issues such as s-commerce (social commerce) and influencer marketing. They state that social media allows these opinion leaders the opportunity to "scale their opinions" and give their followers "access to these opinions quickly" (p. 156), creating a connection between opinion leaders and social media influencers. They state that it is vital for the brand and the influencer to have complementary views and for the influencer to attract the right followers that the brand is looking to reach. This work has led to a call for additional research in how brands can find the right influencer fit for their projects.

Returning to Feick and Price (1987), in a recent interview on their early research defining the three types of influencer, Price discussed what opinion leaders and market mavens are today. She stated that they are no longer a friend or co-worker, but an "Instagram influencer" (Conick, para 5, 2019). She noted that this "new-age consumer influencer" is still poorly understood by both academia and the corporate world but that they have become a vital part of a company's digital marketing strategy regardless. She added that when she and Feick wrote the article, there was no knowledge of how the digital world would develop. However, the basic principle of the importance of word-of-mouth marketing and one's ability to influence others are still vital aspects of the research on the opinion leaders of the past and the modern digital influencer. Price ended the conversation by stating that if she were still studying opinion leaders and market mavens, she would be trying to develop a better understanding of the digital influencer (Conick, 2019).

The importance of influencer marketing to today's online business is well established, but additional research can help companies gain a better understanding of the attributes of the influencer. In doing so, they can more effectively align with the correct influencer for their target audience and use their advertising budget to achieve the desired returns.

The Advertising Movement

Paying a persuasive opinion leader to advertise a product or service is not a new idea, it was a pillar of marketing in many different forms for much of the twentieth century. Early influencer marketing can be seen in everything from cigarette ads featuring celebrities to more abstract examples such as Santa promoting Coke in the 1930s (Ehrhardt, 2017). These ads utilized well-known people and characters to build brand awareness and increase product sales to the general public. This practice continued through the late 1980s and '90s, with businesses paying athletes, musicians, celebrity chefs, and movie stars to use their products to make them appealing to customers. Various studies have shown that these celebrity endorsements encouraged positive returns for the businesses they promoted (Walker et al., 1992; Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995). Walker et al. (1992) attempted to examine the trustworthiness of the celebrity and how this affected their endorsement but did not find any conclusive evidence of it making an impact.

In the early 2000s, the use of opinion leaders in marketing shifted again with the growth of the Internet. The Internet began to blur the traditional functions of the mass media endorser and marketing agency to enable ordinary people to become influencers (Bush and Bush, 2000). Through the Internet, these people could now gain a significant

following, and become players in disseminating information from businesses to consumers.

Two-Step Theory of Communication

During the last century, the impact of opinion leaders was most often studied through the lens of the two-step flow theory of communication, first described by Lazarsfeld et al. (1948). Opinion leaders became an essential part of the advertising process through the two-step flow theory, as they amplified the message to the general public and gave it more validity. These opinion leaders often obtained their information from an exclusive source outside of mass media (i.e., businesspeople or politicians). The opinion leaders then applied their own views to the information and disseminated those opinions, packaged with the information, to the general public. Hamilton (1971) continued this research during the advent of television by studying the flow of information to homemakers in Chicago. He found that exposure to opinion leaders through television was influential in dispersing business information to consumers. Other authors researched radio, magazine, and TV advertising through the two-step flow theory, but it was Wu et al. (2011) who brought it to social media. They found Twitter to be an ideal platform for opinion leaders to push information to consumers through the two-step process. The two-step theory allowed these opinion leaders to gather information from sources outside of mainstream media and then give that information to their followers after applying their own bias. Jensen (2009) disagreed with the application of the two-step theory and argued that with the Internet and social media, the flow of communication has changed. He stated that it should now be a multi-step approach, allowing for information ultimately to reach consumers through multiple people. He is

largely alone in his opinion, though, and most researchers find ways to apply two-step flow to digital influencer marketing.

Uzunoglu and Kip (2014) took the research further and developed a model to understand the flow of information, known as the "brand communication through digital influencers model" (Figure 1). They argued that mainstream media (a foundational aspect of the two-step theory) was no longer how information flowed. They stated (p. 599) that bloggers and social media conversations are the new mainstream media and that opinion leaders in these areas serve as a "reference point" from which modern consumers can get brand, product, and even political information. These opinion leaders (influencers) can also indirectly influence a second level of people the friends and family of their followers with their content. The authors argued that the two-step theory is now a multi-level theory (which somewhat agrees with Jensen's argument), with this secondary level of influence. Looking at the multiple levels, they stated that further research should continue to study the impact of influencer marketing as it is an integral part of the modern marketing landscape.

Traditional Word of Mouth

Another vital aspect of information diffusion is word of mouth (WOM). In both its traditional and electronic forms, WOM has encouraged influencer marketing's rise as a valuable part of online business advertising. It is defined as "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers" (Westbrook, p. 261, 1987). Word of mouth has occurred for centuries, but only in the last few decades have marketers recognized the value of trying to capitalize on this phenomenon for themselves.

One of the earliest examples of WOM, used in a marketing sense, is the work performed by George Silverman in the 1970s in which he conducted focus groups with physicians and found that ones with a passion for a product could sway an entire group to try the product (Erickson, 2005). During the same decade, two other researchers (Sheth, 1971; Day, 1971) studied early WOM and found that it was influential in getting consumers to try new products and that trust was a significant factor in making WOM successful. Day (1971) found that WOM was the single most effective way to shift consumers from a neutral to a positive feeling about a product. The research continued through the 1970s, focusing on physicians and agriculture before being translated to other markets in the early 1980s (Buttle, 1998).

In the 1980s, researchers took a more holistic approach when researching WOM. They found that while happy customers could influence other prospective consumers within their influence sphere, unhappy customers could also persuade their influence sphere not to purchase a product (Richins, 1983). Brown and Reingen (1987) studied strong and weak social ties to see how the influence transferred between these social connections. They found that positive and negative WOM were both effective. However, the stronger the social relationship (social tie strength), the more likely someone was to be influenced through that connection. This study also revealed that while weak connections had less influence, WOM between these connections was successful at moving information between subgroups of people and introducing new customers to brands (Brown and Reingen, 1987).

The research continued into the 1990s, with authors declaring WOM an essential part of the modern marketing mix. Many were quick to note that while it was seen as

successful, it was relatively unharnessed by modern businesses, especially in a manner that provided control over the WOM beyond the typical customer satisfaction aspects of a purchase (Buttle, 1998). The research into WOM in the 1990s focused on how businesses encouraged WOM and how they connected with people who had a stronger than average ability to "influence" others, expanding on work investigating social tie strength (Bone, 1992). Gelb and Johnson (p. 56, 1995) stated that "WOM has become more effective than traditional advertising" and that strong social ties could lead to "increased awareness" and an increased likelihood to purchase. The end of the 1990s witnessed the rise of personal computing and the Internet, which led to a shift in research from WOM tactics to a new area called electronic word of mouth (eWOM). This allowed one's sphere of influence to increase tenfold and gave people the ability to influence those they had never met by using online reviews and blog posts, leading to modern influencer marketing (Cao, Knotts, Xu, and Chau, 2009).

Electronic Word of Mouth

Electronic word of mouth was based on the same principles established by WOM, such as social tie strength and trust. The potential reach of eWOM was vastly increased by allowing those with influence to expand their network exponentially. Where previously influencers only impacted their local community, they were now able to harness the power of the Internet to reach huge virtual communities located beyond their geographical area. The earliest use of eWOM in this context was during Web 1.0 with "comments and reviews of products on weblogs, discussion forums and newsgroups" (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). During this time, users wrote their opinions anonymously, and other visitors read those comments and formed their own opinion on the product or

service based on them. Cheung and Thadani (2012) described this asynchronous model of content distribution as the primary way that eWOM differed from WOM and as the catalyst that allowed eWOM to grow as fast as it did.

Studies throughout the early 2000s continued to look at what made eWOM successful. As the Internet grew, site and user credibility became the primary way eWOM content was judged for both trustworthiness and effectiveness in influencing a potential consumer to make a purchase decision (Doh and Hwang, 2008). Cheung and Thadani (2012) found that the average Internet user was more likely to trust a review by an “unknown customer” than they were to trust the business that created the product. Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) and Subramani and Rajagopalan (2003) studied the shift between the traditional WOM described above and a new wave of viral influencers who utilized the internet to affect brand growth. Bagozzi and Dholakia (p. 19, 2002) focused their research on understanding the communities that were beginning to form online (before social media), and they found that leaders in these communities were very influential in “changing member opinions” on products and services. Subramani and Rajagopalan (2003) took a different approach and created a framework to study early influencer marketing and discern the most significant factors. They determined user influence and recipient behavior to be the vital aspects of influencer marketing. They stated (p. 301) that the confluence of “the ability to influence a large number of individuals, the minimal effort required to make influence attempts, and the flexibility to deploy a variety of influence strategies” would lead to social networks becoming a critical marketing area in the future.

With the proliferation of the Internet and new ways to access customers, brands dabbled in WOM marketing campaigns that became early examples of what we see as influencer marketing today. One notable example is the partnership between Dunkin Donuts and the marketing company BzzAgent, in which the former paid the latter to find 3,000 influential people. After they had been found, Dunkin Donuts gave these people free drink coupons for a new latte and then asked them to document the various ways they talked about the latte in their social circles over the following months. This WOM/influencer marketing campaign occurred in the physical world, not online, but it led to an increase of 26% in the markets where influencers were selected and 8% in markets without the influencers (Ferguson, 2008). This growth confirmed the power of small communities that Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) had discussed in their early work.

Bloggers and Social Media Marketing

Between 2005 and 2010, research focused on identifying social media influencers and ascertaining which communities were the easiest to influence. Bakshy, Mason, Hofman and Watts (2011) studied over 1.6 million Twitter users and found that those with more substantial follower numbers were the most influential. However, they noted that anyone could be influential if they shared what they deemed to be an "interesting" link (though it was hard to replicate what fell under "interesting"). Li, Lai, and Chen (2011) took a different approach and focused on bloggers specifically. They found that bloggers affected sales through their influencer work and that this channel outperformed early social networks in overall brand value based on the trust followers had in the bloggers' work. These articles led early researchers to recognize the value of text-based

social media interactions and long-form content such as blog posts and the importance of trust in the influencer/follower relationship.

Influencer marketing continued to grow with the rise of rich media social networks (those that incorporate photos and videos) such as Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat in the early 2010s. These content-rich networks produced a new brand of influencer, and suddenly the average consumer could be an influencer as long as they developed a significant following (Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders, 2017).

Researchers attributed this rise to the accessibility of social networks, which elevated anyone—from the daughter of a celebrity couple to a mom writing about the struggles of motherhood—to the ranks of an influencer (Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, and Watts, 2011). These new influencers were appealing for businesses due to their targeted following, which was often related to a critical niche target market (i.e., influential moms promoting products to new mothers). These influencers needed to have large followings of engaged users on a social network, with total follower count being a vital factor in determining an influencer's ability to reach an audience (Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders, 2017). The influencer also needed "to be viewed as a knowledgeable helper in the social network rather than as an agent of the marketer" (Subramani and Rajagopalan, 2003). This idea of the knowledge expert who provides value was confirmed by other studies (Woods, 2016).

Research into influencer marketing has begun to focus on what makes an influencer successful in reaching their audience and how they can encourage a specific behavior in their followers (Woods, 2016). Some of the most recent studies have singled out user trust in an influencer and the quality of an influencer's content as crucial details that could impact their follower's behavior when sharing sponsored content (Lou and

Yuan, 2019). This research builds on these factors by looking at travel influencers and their ability to influence their followers through their perceived trustworthiness and content quality.

Components of Influencer Marketing

While many components of influencer marketing that can impact customer intentions, trust and content quality are two of the most studied in this area. Magno and Cassia (2018) tested a small group of followers of an Italian travel blogger. They found that both perceived trust and content quality were vital to whether followers would accept the blogger's suggestions. They noted that their study provided preliminary evidence and that future research in this area would help with understanding the impact of influencer marketing and overcome the limitations of their research. Since perceived trust and content quality seem to be impactful attributes of influencer marketing (Miguéns et al., 2008; Lou and Yuan, 2019), this research plans to dive into each area and add to the research on trust, content quality and the travel intentions of followers.

Trust

The basic idea of trust is something that has been part of humanity since its inception. Many writers have looked at trust throughout human history and tied its value to success in business as far back as the Middle Ages (Isaacs, 1929). Trust in business, particularly marketing practices, has become central as companies have shifted to an impersonal online environment (Barksdale, 1972; Ott, 2000; Grabner-Kraeuter, 2002). Online customers judge websites via trust factors and even decide whether or not to order based on these factors (Hongyoun Hahn and Kim, 2009). Grabner-Kraeuter (p. 43, 2002)

stated that trust is “the most significant long-term barrier” for companies to navigate to reap the benefits of any potential digital commerce.

Trust is hard to define in the scholarly sense, with many disciplines looking at trust in their own unique way. In the context of this work, Grabner-Kraeuter's (2002) definition of trust in the online context makes the most sense. She stated (p. 44) that trust is "a mechanism to reduce the complexity of human conduct in situations where people have to cope with uncertainty." The online realm of influencer marketing is one where trust must be given in the face of uncertainty stemming from the lack of a physical relationship exhibited between an influencer and their followers. These followers must perceive the trustworthiness of the influencer without the personal connection in which trust is traditionally established.

The uncertainty of the online experience has led to trust problems that have made it challenging to transition customers to an online shopping environment. Trust is essential in business relationships, and online business adds uncertainty since goods and services are not instantly transferred upon payment (Grabner-Krauter, 2002). The difficulty of establishing trust online has led to the personification of business qualities through social media and the current push by companies to work with influencers to establish trust with their customers. Jin and Muqaddam (p. 522, 2019) found that consumers who see the source of information from an influencer first attach “higher credibility and more positive attitudes” to the brand being shared. Credibility is vital to trust in the influencer-follower relationship. Sokolva and Kefi (p. 2, 2020) pointed out that credibility relates to the “perception of the quality of the communication by the member” and that members tend to follow influencers because of their shared values.

Trust and credibility are inherently easier to earn as a person than as a company. Influencers have benefited from being able to establish trust that can then be shared with a company they are working with, which is often their primary value add to the business relationship. Handayani et al. (2019) found that there is a lower resistance to the message when it is from an influencer rather than a brand and that this perceived trust is what is most appealing to brands working with influencers. However, the authors are quick to point out that trust is not easy to earn and that it comes from “values, consistency and engagement” (p. 8) and that further research should look at how to cultivate these attributes best. Moore, Yang and Kim (2018) found that when following influencers, “audiences look for opinions they can trust, and this is determined by how trustworthy the sender is.” They added that the most effective influencers are not celebrities but those who work in specific niches that are seen as authentic and who are judged to be thought leaders through the way they interact with that niche’s community.

Trust Transfer Theory

When studying trust through online interaction, many authors have looked at online trust through the lens of trust transfer theory, which asserts that trusted parties can transfer trust they have received to a person, business, or brand (Liu et al., 2018; Abubakar, 2016). Trust transfer theory has been crucial to many disciplines, and research into how trust can be transferred has appeared in psychology, behavioral science, and business journals. The theory, in the context of this research, is mainly concerned with how trust can be transferred from an individual to a business, place, or third party and whether that transfer positively impacts consumer intentions along with influencer attributes such as content quality.

Stewart (2003) was one of the first to look at trust in the online realm and found that it was vital for trust to transfer from the company to their website if a customer was to feel confident enough to place an order. While her work focused on websites, it can also be applied to trust in an online persona. She created a model that showed how trust signals seen on a website transfer to the consumer and encourage them to place an order on the site. This same trust transfer through signals is what Handayani et al. (2019) discussed when they studied how influencers send out signals that allow the follower to establish trust with them and then transfer that trust to the business they are promoting.

Authors have now begun to apply trust transfer to influencer marketing work, and the results appear promising. Researchers have found that a follower's trust in the influencer leads to trust in whatever the influencer is sharing with their audience (Hu et al., 2019; Alkathlan et al., 2019). These authors note that the research is still in its early stages, with most articles that connect trust and influencer marketing having appeared since 2018. Both of the articles mentioned above have limited generalizability and other significant limitations. The first was conducted on students, and the second was conducted in Saudi Arabia, which has different social media usage compared to other developed nations. Testing the impact of perceived trust in a non-student population, and studying a U.S.-based influencer, would benefit the research in this area.

Away from trust transfer theory, Lou and Yuan (2019) studied influencers to ascertain the effect of their content on followers and found that the user's trust in the influencer was the most impactful way to connect with followers. They found that multiple pieces make up what they define as the trust factor, stating that an "influencer's trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity to the followers positively affect followers'

trust in the influencer." However, the idea that attractiveness impacts an influencer's followers is in direct conflict with previous work that shows the two variables do not correlate (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). These conflicts can be seen in much of the work being undertaken in the influencer marketing area, as the research is new and the sample populations are often of a particular nature (i.e., students). The same problems were revealed by Lou and Yuan (2019), who found that trust in an influencer's shared post leads to brand awareness and purchase intentions more than audience size and engagement rates. However, their study was executed through Amazon Turk, which has been shown to reflect significantly different opinions to those of the general population (Goodman et al., 2013). Therefore, looking at trust by studying an influencer's followers would strengthen research in this area.

Commitment-Trust Theory and Customer Experience

A final aspect of consumer trust in an influencer that should be noted was first highlighted by Morgan and Hunt (1994), who developed a model called the commitment-trust theory. This states that commitment and trust are the two main aspects that encourage relationship marketing. The theory was based on sales-oriented B2B relationships in traditional business operations, but it has become an essential part of the customer experience. Lemon & Verhoef (2016) used their work to trace the journey a customer undertakes while interacting with a company's marketing efforts online. Guerreiro et al. (2019) built upon both these articles to bring the theory and the idea of relationship marketing to digital influencers in tourism. They found that influencers are essential during the customer journey process and that they encourage their followers' behavior based on the relationships the influencer and followers have created. They

acknowledge that their study used a snowball sample and that a traditional sampling process would lead to more generalizable results.

It is not just followers, though—trust in an influencer is also seen as better for brands. One study found that trusted influencer content positively influences customers to a greater extent than traditional advertising shared by the brand (Childers, Lemon, & Hoy, 2019). This trust is able to "surpass customer resistance" and deliver the advertising message to customers who are often difficult to reach (Martikainen & Pitkänen, 2019). However, for how vital trust has shown to be, Childers, Lemon & Hoy (2019) found that "42% of Americans trust brands and marketers less today than they did 20 years ago." This means that trust is harder to come by, but that when it is achieved, it can lead to effective influencer marketing.

Most of these studies look at the general idea of trust and the general idea of an influencer. They ask the respondents to think about a person they follow and whether or not they trust them. This is inherently different from how influencer trust is being researched in the present study. This study focused on one influencer and those that directly followed that influencer. This approach removes the ambiguous variable of the unnamed influencer found in previous studies and created a needed distinction in this area of research.

Content Quality

The other central aspect of influencer marketing is the quality of the content being shared and how it impacts the intentions of the followers. Social media channels are built on user-generated content shared by the audience. As such, the quality of the content is a vital aspect of how a follower interacts with an influencer. Content quality means more

than just a beautiful image. It represents a connection between brand, influencer, and consumer, and it "works best when the content is natural, genuine, and realistic," adding to the importance of trust mentioned in the previous section (Childers, Lemon, & Hoy, 2019). Researchers have attached the idea of content quality to the concept of content marketing, which has been studied for decades. In content marketing, the focus is on creating "valuable, relevant, and quality content" to share in "online media," which in turn "generates a positive behavior from the customer" (Peres & Mesquita, 2015). This is the same goal as that of influencer marketing, in that positive behavior concerning a brand or location is the goal of the content being shared. Emamjome, Gable, & Bandara (2013) added to these studies with a conceptual model based on content quality. They found that users can identify "high quality content over poor quality content" and that high-quality content often gains more interaction.

In a study of content quality and its effect on social media, Aladwani (2017) found that content quality has three main benefits. First, it encourages continued interest in the brand or influencer. Second, it spurs active confidence in the message being shared. Third, it generates feedback openness from the user to the brand or influencer. Al-Qatami (p. 21, 2019) continued this research and found that the content quality of social media posts influences "how the audience receives the message." The importance of content quality, as demonstrated in the works mentioned above, confirms research by Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson (p. 74, 2012) in which they found that high-quality content "increases the likelihood of consumption and the possibility a user will share the content."

High-quality content is necessary for travel influencers as it has been shown to "change user's perceptions" of a location based on the image shared by the influencer (Shuqair & Cragg, 2017). The authors note that future research should look at how content affects users' travel behavior and not just their destination perceptions. Guerreiro, Viegas, & Guerreiro (2019) studied the impact of travel influencers on their followers and found that content quality and trust were major elements that followers connected with. They found a possible correlation between places shared by influencers and whether or not the follower visited the place. They acknowledged that understanding "the influence of opinion leaders on the customer decision journey stages in travel and tourism contexts is limited" (p. 255, 2019). This is a gap that this research project proposes to address.

Influencer Marketing and Tourism

Through social media and the rise of the influencer, many sectors have experienced large-scale growth in their ability to reach new customers through influencer marketing work. Fashion, food, lifestyle marketing, and tourism are some of the largest and the most impactful areas for influencers (Kolo & Haumer, 2018). Since 2008, there have been many studies on the connection between tourism and influencer marketing. One of the first to connect tourism and influencers was the study by Miguens et al. (2008) involving the Tripadvisor online website. This study predates today's social media channels, and the authors focused on one city to see how the destination image was shaped through Tripadvisor. They found that users could develop the destination's image and encourage the desire in others to visit the city through the forums and reviews that users submitted to the website.

Leung et al. (2013) built on the previous work by creating a comprehensive review of social media and tourism research up to that point. They found that most research focused on the planning phase of the customer decision-making process and that there was a positive connection between trip-planning and the use of social media. They stated that the sharing of an experience, post-travel, would be an essential part of the content created on these social media channels moving forward. Zeng & Gerritsen (p. 33, 2014) agreed, stating "social media continues to grow and increasingly influence many social and economic aspects of tourism." They were quick to highlight that since the research is new, it is not usually found in peer-reviewed journals but is viewed via "websites and online travel communities." They noted that researchers should spend more time connecting tourism and social media influencers in the future.

Pestek and Alic (2017) interviewed 150 people who used social media and found that 79% followed a travel influencer and that the content the influencer shared could impact where the user chose to travel. This phenomenon was confirmed by Xu and Pratt (2018), who encouraged businesses to utilize influencers and asserted that an influencer's endorsement positively impacts their followers' view of a travel location. Ong & Ito (2019) confirmed the importance of influencers in marketing a destination. They found that influencers who have a positive experience in a location and share positive information about it can change the attitude of their followers toward that destination. These results are promising, but the authors used a convenience and snowball sampling method to obtain their results, which they note as a significant limitation of the study. Again, the research into influencer marketing is new and growing, but the existing studies show that travel influencers impact their followers. This potential impact is the basis for

the work proposed in this study, which seeks a better understanding of the most influential aspects of the influencer.

Summary

The research on influencer marketing can be summarized in a few central facts. First, influencer marketing has enormous potential to impact the online marketing landscape over the next decade (Schomer, 2019). Second, influencer marketing is based on marketing tenets of the past, mainly word of mouth marketing (Cao, Knotts, Xu, & Chau, 2009). Third, influencer marketing is impactful at a high level for a company's ROI and the creation of a destination image in tourism marketing (Baer, 2016; Ong & Ito, 2019). Fourth, trust and content quality are potentially vital aspects of influencer marketing's success (Guerreiro, Viegas, & Guerreiro, 2019). Fifth, influencer marketing is still a new area for academic research, and while the results are promising, research is developing on the central aspects of an influencer's personality/brand and how this impacts their followers' travel intentions (Magno & Cassia, 2018). These facts form the basis for the research described in this paper. To add to the existing knowledge on influencer marketing, I propose a study with an influencer and their followers to test both perceived trust and content quality and to ascertain whether influencers impact the travel intentions of their followers.

Chapter 3 – Research Design and Methodology

This chapter presents the research design and rationale and describes the survey used in the study. The ultimate goal of the research is to answer the question proposed in Chapter 1, which is “What are the impacts of an influencer’s perceived trustworthiness and content quality on their followers’ travel intentions?”

Research Methodology and Design

As influencer marketing continues to impact the online business world, the link between influencers and their followers has become of central importance (Farivar et al., 2019). The influencer and follower relationship is a vital part of a business connection to its customer base online. This research examines the driving factors that facilitate a strong connection, one that allows the influencer to sway the followers’ decisions (Breves et al., 2019). The study analyzes the correlation between a participant’s perception of an influencer’s trustworthiness and content quality and ascertains whether this impacts the participant’s travel intentions. Understanding these two aspects of the influencer and follower relationship will allow businesses to connect with the right influencers for their projects and allow influencers to facilitate the growth of suitable attributes for marketing success.

The study was quantitative, which is a method used to "investigate a particular topic or activity through the measurement of variables in quantifiable terms" (Mertler, p. 107, 2018). It involved participants who followed a U.S.-based travel influencer and subscribed to his newsletter. The subscribers received a link and a request to participate in a survey from the influencer via an email newsletter. The survey was divided into multiple parts, with a section for each aspect of the research question, content quality,

trustworthiness, and travel intentions. The survey tool had additional sections for social media usage and demographic information, as supplemental connections may be made with those areas. The survey was sent to all subscribers of the influencer's newsletter as part of a regular monthly email sent to 13,000 people. Any follower who chose to participate was included in the study, and the only exclusions were those who did not subscribe to the influencer's newsletter.

The quantitative study used perceived trust and content quality as the two independent variables and travel intentions as the dependent variable. A Pearson correlation was run on each independent variable versus the dependent variable and a linear regression was run to test the correlation between both independent variables and the dependent variable.

Participants and Site

The population of this study was the 13,000 newsletter subscribers that subscribe to the influencer's newsletter. This population was selected because they all follow the influencer and have made the effort to sign up to receive electronic correspondence from the influencer. The only information collected when signing up was the user's first name and the date they subscribed. Hence, no additional information is known about the users that would disqualify them, although details of age and sex were collected when the survey was administered. The average open rate of this newsletter was 30%. Dillman (2015) stated that most email surveys have a single-digit response rate, but Evans & Mathur (2018) found that it was closer to 11%. A response rate of 5% was targeted, which projected the sample size at 195 people ($13,000 * .3 * .05$). An online survey was used, since this is widely seen as the best way to survey a global population in a cost-

effective way (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Online surveys have become a preferred method for many researchers due to the rise of access to broadband internet, mobile phones, and social networks over the last 15 years (Evans and Mathur, 2018).

After the survey was approved by the dissertation committee and the Internal Review Board at George Fox, then the newsletter was sent to the participants. They were given one week to complete the survey, after which time the survey was closed.

Measures

For this study, the questions were adapted from the work of multiple authors, but mainly Magno and Cassia (2018), who developed a model (Figure 2) to examine how perceived blogger trustworthiness and content quality impact user travel intentions. Their survey involved followers of three Italian bloggers, and it was shared on their blogs. The nine questions they used (three in each section) were incorporated in the survey used in this study, adapted to focus on influencers instead of bloggers and content shared instead of information shared. Additional questions were adapted from Chai et al. (2009) and their assessment of 17 different content quality studies. One question was adapted from the work of Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández (2019), which studied the impact of influencers on brand sales. These questions were combined with general questions on social media usage and demographic information to create the survey tool.

Survey

The survey (Appendix 1) was used to capture the data for the study. The tool had multiple sections and the scale for each section was a 5-point Likert scale. A potential limitation for the survey was that it dealt with “perceived trustworthiness” and “perceived content quality,” since it was simply asking participants how they perceived these

attributes in the influencer. The research question was based on how the respondents perceived the influencer's trustworthiness and content. This perception is not necessarily an accurate analysis of what something like "high quality content" means in the academic sense, but simply what it is perceived as by the respondent.

Validation and Pilot Study

To validate the survey tool, a pilot study was conducted with a personally selected subsection of the population. Personal selection is a potential limitation, but the author selected 15 people they knew would provide thorough feedback, giving the survey the best chance of providing significant insights. A pilot study was necessary because it helped to "improve the quality and efficiency of the main study" and to "validate the feasibility of the study" (In, 2017, p. 601).

During the pilot study, three separate issues were found and addressed to maintain the integrity of the survey and the original researchers' initial position when creating the question. First, in the content quality section, two out of 15 people stated that they did not know what was being referred to by the word "consistent." This section discussed the content quality, so consistency referred to the quality of the content specifically (i.e., consistent quality). To address this, the word "(quality)" was added to clarify that consistency referred to the quality of the content. Second, in the trustworthiness section, three of the 15 people said that "is trustworthy" and "inspires trust" were similar. The goal of these questions (Magno and Cassia, p. 288, 2018) was to study how "digital influencers affect followers." To address the confusion, "is trustworthy" was retained, and "inspires trust" was changed to "inspires trust in others." This provided a distinction between whether someone sees the influencer as trustworthy and whether they believe the

influencer can inspire trust in others. Inspiring trust in others is essential if a respondent is to perceive an influencer as having the ability to affect a follower.

Thirdly, in the travel intentions section, two out of 15 people noted that questions 1 and 3 were similar. These comments were considered, but the questions were ultimately retained since they were intended to measure different things. The first question discussed whether the respondent would take suggestions from the influencer, and the second asked whether the respondent would "consider the influencer's travel" when making decisions. The first question deals with suggestions from the influencer (directly), and the second deals with the influencer's "travel experiences" (indirectly) shaping the respondent's decisions. These two questions are fundamentally different, even though it is possible that a respondent might not notice the difference when reading through quickly. This issue is a potential limitation for this section of the survey but keeping the questions as they were initially worded should help with the analysis and the distinction between direct and indirect influence.

Data Collection

To collect the data for this study, an online survey was created through Survey Monkey and sent to the newsletter subscribers. The subscribers were given a week to answer the survey questions before the survey was closed. The results were collected anonymously through the Survey Monkey system and then exported to Excel and SPSS. Using Survey Monkey helped to maintain anonymity—an essential requirement—as their terms of service state that surveys are sent over "a secure, SSL encrypted connection" and that survey creators can ensure anonymity when the survey is created ("Are my survey responses anonymous and secure?" n.d.).

Data Analysis

After the data was collected via the survey, it was inputted into the SPSS statistical software for analysis. To analyze the Likert scale data, parametric tests (Pearson's correlation and linear regression) were used to accept or reject the hypotheses. While some researchers debate using parametric tests on Likert scale results, Sullivan & Artino (2013) wrote an analysis of this debate and stated that "parametric tests are sufficiently robust to yield largely unbiased answers that are acceptably close to the truth when analyzing Likert scale responses" (p. 542). For the analysis, Pearson's correlation was used to test hypotheses 1 and 2. The correlation studied both trust and travel intentions for hypothesis 1 and content quality and travel intentions for hypothesis 2. Pearson's correlation was selected for this analysis because it analyzed two continuous variables and measured the strength of the association.

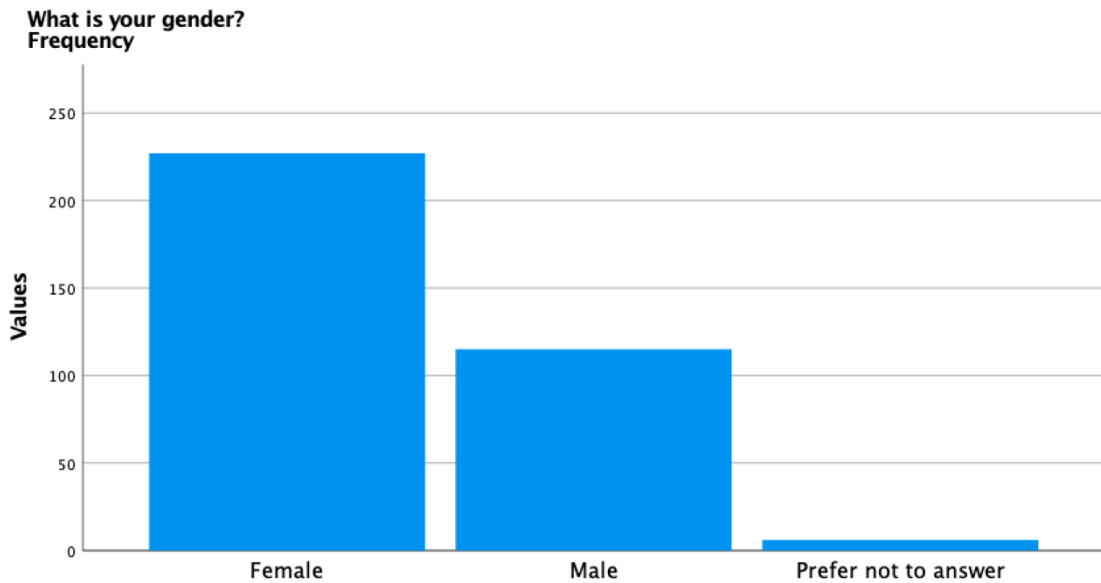
Since there are two independent variables (trust and content quality) and one dependent variable (travel intentions), a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Hyman and Sierra (2016, p. 5) stated that multiple linear regression should be used when "identifying marketing strategies that influence purchases by a target customer." In this study, the "marketing strategies" are trust and content quality, and the "purchase" is user travel behavior. This test was used to answer hypothesis 3.

Chapter 4 – Results

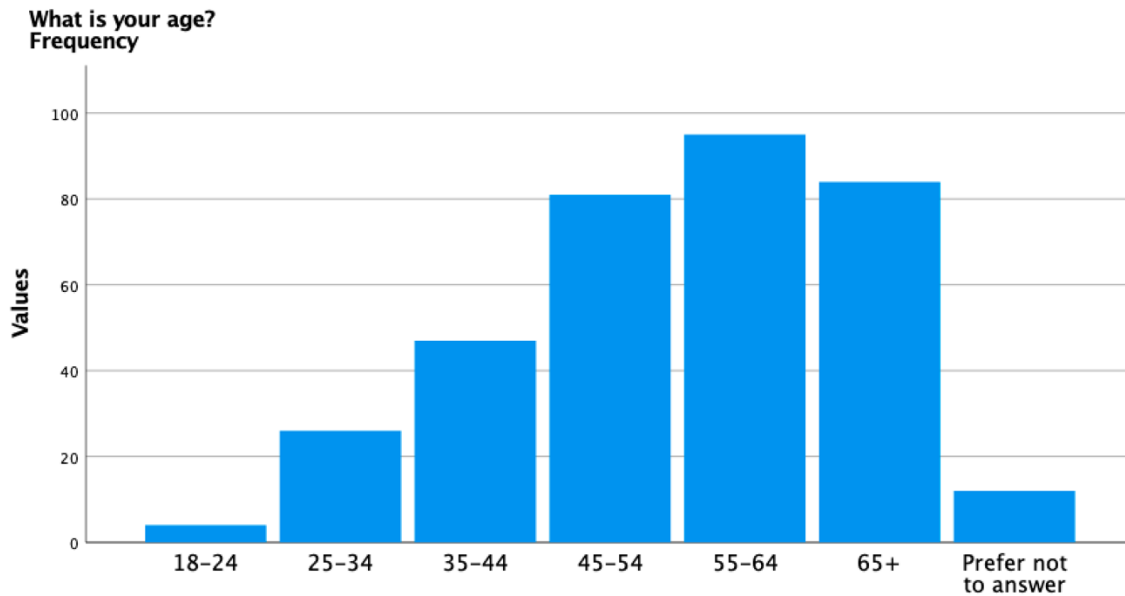
Sample

The survey was sent to 13,932 recipients, with a 31% (4,318) open rate for the email. Of those who opened the email, 375 responded, giving the survey an 8% response rate, with 349 fully completing the surveys. To maintain the integrity of the data, the 27 responses that were not fully completed were removed. These responses were a small percentage of the collected data (less than 10%), and Pigott (2001) stated that complete-case analysis can still represent the sample reliably when only a small percentage of surveys have not been completed.

The participants in this survey were predominantly female (65%), with 33% male and 2% preferring not to state their gender.



The ages ranged from 18–65+ with the majority in the 55-64 range (27%), followed by 65+ (24%) and 45-55 (23%).

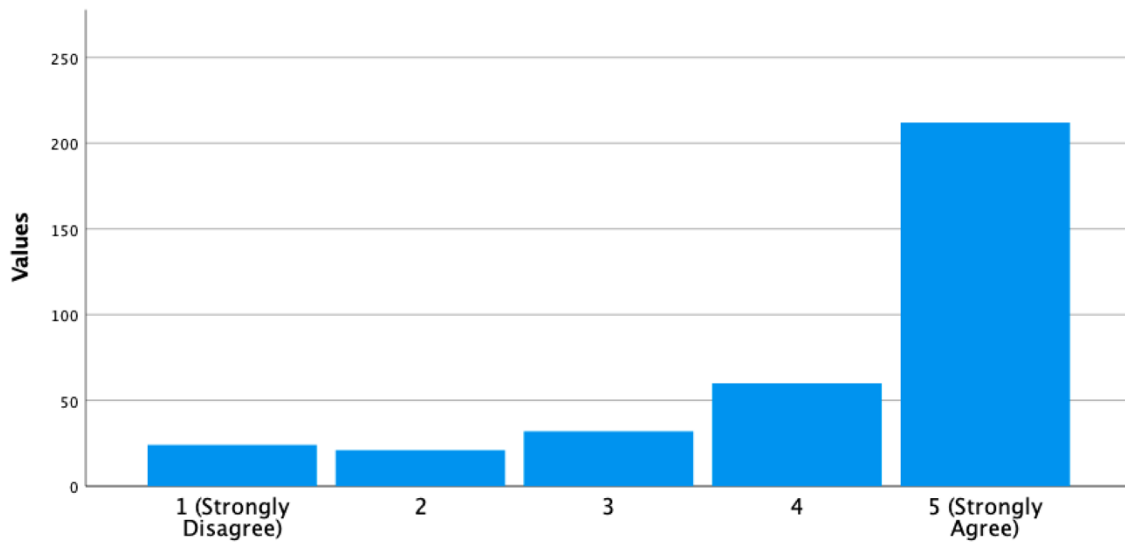


The majority of the sample (95%) lived in the United States, with Canada (1.4%) and Australia (1.1%) the only other countries with a higher than 1% representation in the sample.

Country	Total	Percentage
Australia	4	1.1%
Brazil	1	0.3%
Canada	5	1.4%
Czech Republic	1	0.3%
Germany	3	0.9%
Netherlands	2	0.6%
Norway	1	0.3%
UK	1	0.3%
USA	331	95%

Because the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the travel industry in 2020, a question was asked regarding whether the virus had impacted participants' thoughts on travel, with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree." Over 60% strongly agreed that it had affected their views on travel, with the mean being 4.19 and the standard deviation 1.2.

The coronavirus has impacted my thoughts on current travel



***H₁* – Trustworthiness and Travel Intent**

H₁ studied the correlation between how trustworthy an influencer is and whether that perceived trust impacts their followers' travel intentions. For the analysis, a Pearson's correlation was run on the average of the responses from the five questions in the trustworthiness section and the four questions in the travel intentions section, with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree." The mean from the responses in the trustworthy section was 4.63 with a standard deviation of .86. The mean from the responses in the travel intentions section was 4.45 with a standard deviation of .82.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Average of Trustworthiness	349	1	5	4.637	.863
Average of Travel Intentions	349	1	5	4.447	.822

To examine H1 ("An influencer's trustworthiness has a positive correlation with their followers' travel intent"), a Pearson's correlation was run on these two variables. The analysis shows a statistically significant ($r=.644$, $p=.001$, $r\text{-squared}=.415$) positive correlation between the two variables. The r -value is .644, so the effect size is moderately positive since it falls between 0.3 and 0.7 (Ratner, 2009). Therefore, we can accept the hypothesis that states there is a positive relationship between influencer trustworthiness and their followers' travel intent.

		Average of Trustworthiness	Average of Travel Intentions
Average of Trustworthiness	Pearson Correlation	1	.644**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	349	349
Average of Travel Intentions	Pearson Correlation	.644**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	349	349

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H₂ – Content Quality and Travel Intent

H₂ studied the connection between the content quality of the work an influencer was producing and how it correlated with the travel intentions of the influencer's followers. To analyze the relationship, the average response from the five questions in the content quality section of the survey was correlated against the average response from the four questions in the travel intentions section. The average mean from the survey responses in the content quality section was 4.62, with a standard deviation of .859. The average mean from the travel intentions section was the same as in the previous analysis at 4.45 with a standard deviation of .822.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Average of Content Quality	349	1	5	4.621	.859
Average of Travel Intentions	349	1	5	4.447	.822

To examine H_2 (“An influencer's content quality has a positive correlation with their followers’ travel intent”), a Pearson's correlation was run on the two variables. The correlation showed a significant relationship ($r=.635$, $p=.001$, $r\text{-squared}=.405$) and a moderate effect size between the quality of the content an influencer produces and their followers' travel intentions (Ratner, 2009). Therefore, we can accept the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between the two variables.

		Average of Content Quality	Average of Travel Intentions
Average of Content Quality	Pearson Correlation	1	.635**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	349	349
Average of Travel Intentions	Pearson Correlation	.635**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	349	349

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H_3 – Trustworthiness, Content Quality and Travel Intent

H_3 studied the impact of both influencer trustworthiness and influencer content quality on their followers’ travel intent. For this analysis, multiple linear regression was used. Trustworthiness and content quality were the independent variables, and travel intentions was the dependent variable.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			
						F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.654 ^a	.428	.424	.623763341	.428	129.230	2	346	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Average of Content Quality, Average of Trustworthiness

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	100.56	2	50.281	129.230	<.001 ^b
	Residual	134.62	346	.389		
	Total	235.18	348			

a. Dependent Variable: Average of Travel Intentions

b. Predictors: (Constant), Average of Content Quality, Average of Trustworthiness

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1.495	.187		8.003	<.001	1.127	1.862
	Average of Trustworthiness	.368	.096	.386	3.814	<.001	.178	.557
	Average of Content Quality	.270	.097	.282	2.787	.006	.079	.460

a. Dependent Variable: Average 3

In the analysis, both influencer trustworthiness and content quality had a statistically significant impact on a followers’ travel intentions. The average of the trustworthiness variable had a positive unstandardized beta of .368, and the average of content quality had a positive unstandardized beta of .270. The model also has an adjusted r-squared of .42, which indicates a moderately positive relationship (Ratner, 2009). Therefore, increases in the perceived trustworthiness of an influencer or the perceived quality of their content lead to a positive increase in the travel intentions of their followers. We can accept the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between both content quality and trustworthiness and followers’ travel intent.

Other Findings

After comparing the means of multiple demographic and social media usage factors with trust, content quality, and travel intentions, three additional factors were discovered, and these are presented below. An ANOVA was run on each set, and there was no statistically significant difference between the means in these data sets.

Difference between age groups

	What is your age?						Prefer not to answer Mean
	18-24 Mean	25-34 Mean	35-44 Mean	45-54 Mean	55-64 Mean	65+ Mean	
Average of Trustworthiness	3.60	4.93	4.69	4.65	4.76	4.48	4.18
Average of Content Quality	3.60	4.89	4.69	4.60	4.69	4.54	4.27
Average of Travel Intentions	3.56	4.80	4.51	4.45	4.51	4.30	4.23

An analysis of the age ranges showed a potential difference in perceived trust, content quality, and travel intentions in respondents under 24. This drop in the means appears to be associated with the younger group, but the response rate was not significant enough in the 18-24 age range to conduct a proper analysis. Future research could examine how the 18-24 group's views on social media influencers differ from those of other age ranges. This would link to the work Wan, Myers & Sundaram (2013) have undertaken to understand digital natives (born in the digital age) versus digital immigrants (learned how to use computers during their adult years).

How long a user has been subscribed

	How long have you been subscribed to this influencer?					
	Less than 6 months Mean	6 months to 1 year Mean	1 to 2 years Mean	Longer than 2 years Mean	Not sure Mean	Prefer not to answer Mean
Average of Trustworthiness	4.53	4.42	4.76	4.71	4.65	3.80
Average of Content Quality	4.58	4.44	4.71	4.68	4.60	3.80
Average of Travel Intentions	4.33	4.41	4.41	4.55	4.40	3.58

Another insightful observation from the data was the difference between how long a participant has been subscribed to an influencer and how they view the influencer's trustworthiness, content quality, and ability to influence their travel intentions. The data show high mean scores in trustworthiness and content quality during the first 6 months subscribed to an influencer and then a drop off between 6 months and a year, before gaining again for 1-2 years and 2+ years. It appears that there could be a drop-off period between 6 months and a year, which is important for an influencer to understand and plan for. Keeping a follower during this time could potentially convert them into someone who feels a long-term connection to the influencer. Furthermore, the travel intention's average means increases during each stage the participant has followed the influencer. These increases could point to a stronger connection between the influencer and the follower as the follower stays connected to the influencer, which could be another fruitful area for future studies.

Which social network is used most?

	Which social network do you use the most?						
	Facebook Mean	Instagram Mean	Pinterest Mean	TikTok Mean	Twitter Mean	YouTube Mean	Other (please specify) Mean
Average of Trustworthiness	4.54	4.76	4.49	4.63	4.88	4.59	4.79
Average of Content Quality	4.53	4.70	4.47	4.54	4.92	4.58	4.81
Average of Travel Intentions	4.35	4.53	4.39	4.68	4.71	4.48	4.33

Another noteworthy finding that could encourage future research is related to social media usage and how that impacts the answers to questions on trustworthiness, content quality, and travel intentions. There appears to be a potential difference between how much a user trusts an influencer based on their social network of choice. Instagram and Twitter have relatively high trust levels, while Facebook and Pinterest have relatively low trust levels. Similarly, in the content quality section, the quality of Facebook, Pinterest, and TikTok content is viewed as lower than the quality of Twitter and Instagram content. How much an influencer impacts followers' travel intentions is also lower for those who use Facebook and Pinterest, with users who prefer Twitter and TikTok giving an influencer more sway over their potential decisions. Each of these areas would benefit from more research, and a better understanding of whether variables such as trustworthiness and content quality differ between general users and heavy users of specific social networks would provide valuable insights.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Implications

In an editorial for the International Journal of Advertising, Taylor (2020) stated that influencer marketing is undergoing a resurgence after the Covid-19 pandemic and that there is an "urgent need for more research on influencer marketing." He asserted that one area of focus should be the "general factors associated with effectiveness" and how they impact the follower (2020, p. 891). The purpose of the present study aligns directly with that suggestion. The goal of this research was to analyze the impact of trust and content quality (two general factors of a social media influencer) and ascertain how these affect the intentions of followers. The study was limited in scope, but it provides a baseline and a preliminary look at the effectiveness of general factors that impact influencer marketing in a post-Covid-19 world. The findings reveal a significant correlation between trust/content quality and travel intentions, while also postulating logical next steps for future research and highlighting the implications for the business and academic worlds.

Findings

This study sought to answer the question "What are the impacts of an influencer's perceived trustworthiness and content quality on their followers' travel intentions?" The question led to two hypotheses that observed each of the independent variables (trustworthiness and content quality) and their correlation with travel intentions. The third hypothesis studied the relationship between trustworthiness/content quality and travel intentions. The findings showed that the variables have a positive correlation with travel intentions and that, in this study, influencer trustworthiness and content quality positively sway a follower's intentions.

***H₁ & H₂* Findings**

H₁ & H₂ examined specific influencer attributes (trustworthiness and content quality) and how they correlated with followers' travel intentions. Prior to the study, I presumed that these would have a positive impact but was unsure how impactful they would be. Magno and Cassia (2018) developed a model based on Italian bloggers that tested these two attributes and their effect on travel intentions. They found a positive correlation between trustworthiness/content quality and followers' travel intentions. In expanding the test to an influencer with more marketing avenues than solely a blog, the expectation was that the same positive correlation would be found. The survey confirmed this and revealed that both content quality and trustworthiness positively correlate with a follower's travel intentions. Due to the effect size ($r=.644$ for H_1 and $r=.635$ for H_2), it can also be stated that there is a moderately positive effect for both trustworthiness and content quality individually in correlation with travel intentions. Therefore, each of these variables will independently impact travel intentions. Cohen (1988) stated that this strength of relationship, in the context of human attributes, would be "visible to the naked eye."

***H₃* Findings**

H₃ shifted the analysis from the independent correlation of each variable (trustworthiness and content quality) with travel intentions to the variables together and their variance on travel intentions. The test reported an adjusted r-squared value of .42, meaning that 42% of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables. This value is not very high, but Frost (2020) stated that an adjusted r-squared below .5 is often seen when dealing with human participants, since

they can be harder to predict accurately. Both of the variables are statistically significant in relation to the dependent variable. Trustworthiness has a higher unstandardized coefficient than content quality, meaning that trustworthiness has a slightly higher impact on a follower's travel intention than content quality.

Implications

The aim of this study was to focus on one influencer and their followers to analyze the relationship between trustworthiness, content quality, and travel intentions. The correlation found between the variables could impact academic research, the business world, and influencers themselves as they look to expand their follower base. This is one of the first studies conducted directly by an influencer rather than a third party. This small distinction provides an insightful addition to work performed in influencer marketing research.

The study was also the first to examine these types of variables in a post-Covid-19 world. There is no doubt that Covid-19 has impacted travel (Baratti, 2020), so research involving travel influencers prior to the virus may no longer be entirely relevant. In a recent conversation with followers, the author was asked whether it is safe to stay in a hotel during the pandemic. This acknowledgment that followers are looking for advice from those they trust further highlights the value of influencer trust in future academic research. The data in this study is future-oriented, focusing on intent to travel, which means it is particularly relevant as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic and people begin to plan their future travels. While most travelers are still anticipating a late 2021 return to travel after the vaccine is rolled out, understanding travel intentions and how to sway them is more important than ever to the academic world, the business world, and

influencers themselves (“Consumer Sentiment in the US during the Coronavirus Crisis,” 2020).

Academic Implications

This study provides preliminary research from which future work on influencer marketing can be built. The research begins to piece together impactful attributes for online personalities, and it could strengthen the understanding of how influencers influence people. The study expands on the work of Magno and Cassia (2018) by broadening the scope from bloggers to influencers, doubling the sample size, focusing on a primarily U.S.-based audience, and accounting for Covid-19's impact on travel. While the study is not generalizable due to its limitations, it adds another layer to influencer marketing's academic understanding.

Influencer marketing has continued to expand in the academic research world. In the last two years, many articles have been published that either praise its potential in online marketing or underline the lack of understanding seen in the discipline currently. Tafesse and Wood (2021) lamented the lack of knowledge of how influencers engage their audience and emphasized how vital an influencer's perceived attributes are to this engagement. Their goal was to study "elements of an influencer's content" to see how they impact their "followers' engagement behavior." Campbell and Farrell (2020) studied the influencer and the follower as separate components contributing to influencer marketing's success (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). The current study adds further insights by polling the followers of an influencer specifically (instead of scraping social results for their data) and allowing followers' voices to be heard regarding the impact of trustworthiness and content quality on their travel intentions.

Hyman and Sierra (2016) stated that an in-depth analysis of influencer marketing is vital for a clear understanding of the potential factors that impact online marketing results. Therefore, since trustworthiness and content quality can significantly impact a follower's travel intentions, this understanding could have implications for how social media marketing is viewed. In the academic realm, comprehensive knowledge of which influencer attributes have the most significant impact on their followers is vital as researchers continue to study this critical area of online marketing. Trustworthiness and content quality are just two of the many factors involved, but they are crucial ones, and this study shows a positive correlation between the two. Future studies should further expand the research with broader tests to decipher the other variables that could sway travel intentions. Moreover, expanding the work to other niches, such as fashion and lifestyle, could test the results by comparing different influencer types. The present study also provides baseline research in the travel influencer niche that other studies could use as a starting point (Farivar et al., 2021).

The survey also revealed other areas that could help future academic research. First, the impact of an influencer seems to vary according to the age of the follower. This is something that researchers are beginning to study in multiple fields, including marketing and psychology, and this study's data may assist that research (De Veirman et al., 2019; Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Second, levels of trust in an influencer and their content appear to vary according to the social network being used. Modern online marketing research tends to select a specific network to focus on when conducting a survey (Jin et al., 2019; Bakshy et al., 2011). This study's data could be used to establish why it is

essential to look at different networks independently when examining an influencer's value in each of the social networks.

Business Implications

Influencer marketing is used to an increasing degree in the business world, but there are questions regarding its effectiveness (Taylor, 2020). This study shows that both variables (trust and content quality) positively correlate with the desired outcome of the followers (travel intentions). Moreover, if a business or marketing agency is looking for influencers to work with, they would benefit from selecting those influencers seen as trustworthy or producing high-quality content. Since both variables have a positive correlation on their own, a businessperson who wants to work with an effective influencer can look at these variables independently. However, when used in conjunction (i.e., an influencer with a high trustworthiness score and a high perceived content quality), these factors can be an accurate predictor of the influencer's ability to sway followers' travel intentions to a certain degree. Influencers with high scores in these areas could theoretically introduce new travel locations to their audiences and work with tourism boards to effectively promote the sites. This would allow businesses to use their allocated marketing dollars more efficiently when working with and evaluating potential influencers. However, as perceived attributes, trustworthiness and content quality would benefit from additional studies that better define how an influencer can be graded from an external perspective based on these factors, particularly if a business manager uses them to work with a potential influencer.

Covid-19 decimated the travel landscape in 2020, with many travel businesses barely surviving into 2021 (Baratti, 2020). However, people are now keen to travel, and

businesses worldwide are waiting to welcome them back ("Update on American Travel," 2021). This study could be crucial for these businesses, as it is one of the first to survey the impact of influencers post-Covid-19. It offers greater clarity on the downsides of travel during this period (with over 60% saying that the virus has strongly affected their thoughts on travel) and highlights how a followers' travel intentions are swayed through following an influencer. This insight gives current travel companies an idea of what they are facing in return customers and provides a path to regain their business (i.e., by working with influencers who are trustworthy and create high-quality content).

Influencer Implications

Influencers could also find the results of this study useful. Based on the data, influencers who want to have a more significant impact on their audiences should look at how they can establish trust or appear more trustworthy to their followers. Positive growth in perceived trust—the main selling point for influencers trying to work with brands—can increase their ability to impact people with their message (Stubb et al., 2019). The study found the same positive correlation in the perceived content quality of the influencer's work and how it impacted a followers' travel intentions. Influencers should focus on increasing their content quality if they want to influence their followers. The data from this study suggests that perceived content quality is less subjective than trust, but it can still mean different things to different people, making it difficult to articulate when providing an influencer with potential avenues of growth. However, improvement in how an influencer's trustworthiness or content quality is perceived can potentially lead to positive increases in followers' travel intentions.

The Need for Future Research

“While already a hot topic of sorts to academic research, the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with trends in youth media consumption habits have created even greater influence in influencer marketing.” (Taylor, 2020, p. 889)

Influencer marketing has become a significant player in the business world, with many companies dedicating a substantial amount of their budget to this growing sector. As Taylor (2020) asserted, research in this area is vital to help businesses and the academic world understand an influencer's value. This study has begun unraveling the layers of influencer marketing by examining two potential factors that could connect an influencer's attributes to desired outcomes in a follower. These are just two of the many factors. Future research should continue to examine possible influences such as credibility, authority, and attributes such as follower counts and average interactions. Each attribute will help build a more complete picture of the levers influencers have to pull to influence their followers.

Additional research should also focus on different levels of influencers. Traditional celebrities have already been studied extensively (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995; Walker et al., 1992; Kolo & Haumer, 2018), but there is a shift to split influencers by follower counts, which include macro (100,000 to 1 million), micro (10,000 to 100,000), and nano (1,000 to 10,000). The probability that the same variables affect an influencer's followers at each of these ranges is relatively unlikely. The influencer in the present study would fall into the macro category, but there is a significant variance between influencers in that range. A survey that selects an influencer from each category

and tests the attributes that impact follower intentions will give a clearer view of the influencer's impact and how that changes as they gain followers.

The connection between the influencer and the follower throughout the time they are associated could be another area for future research. There is an inherent benefit for influencers and the businesses working with them in knowing whether long-term followers can be influenced more strongly than short-term followers. In this study, followers' travel intentions appeared to be swayed based on how long the follower and the influencer had been connected. If a researcher could access followers throughout the time they are connected to an influencer and study whether that connection strengthens, the insights gained could impact both the business and academic worlds.

This study was limited to the followers of a specific influencer who focuses on travel and is based in the United States. While the participants were not limited to one location, 98% of the results were from participants in the United States. This limitation does not detract from the usefulness of the results, but it contributes to their limited generalizability to a larger population. The survey results provide the baseline for more substantial future research in this area. The same applies to specific social networks. This survey was conducted through a newsletter and asked participants which social networks they used the most. There appeared to be a potential link between the network used and how the participant viewed trust and content quality. The trust placed in social networks has significantly come to the forefront in the current political climate (Garrett, 2020). This survey could be replicated using specific networks, and the results could be compared to see if there is a significant difference between the social network and the participant's travel intentions.

Conclusion

Influencer marketing continues to be a significant element of the online strategy for many companies. Utilizing these new influencers to help spur growth is an essential factor for marketing departments. With the substantial rise of fake accounts, bought followers, and non-genuine engagement, it is crucial to understand which influencers are worthy of trust, how to utilize them, and what attributes a company should look for when selecting them. This study provides a baseline for a deeper understanding of the influencer's role and the importance of trustworthiness and content quality to their followers. Encouraging a follower to engage with a product, brand, or place is one of the main goals of influencers who work with brands, and this research will spur future work that could define how best to select those influencers.

The world has also changed with the rise of Covid-19. What was successful for online marketing in earlier studies may no longer be relevant today. This study benefits from being one of the first to look at influencers and their impact on their followers through the lens of this new world. While it will undoubtedly change, the impact of trustworthiness and content quality on the travel intentions of followers is significant. Successful travel influencers should establish both of these attributes if they wish to impact their followers' travel intentions in the future.

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Appendix 1

Survey

This survey tool will be used to capture the data for the study. The tool has multiple sections and the scale for each section is a 5 point Likert Scale.

Influencer Marketing Survey

Thanks for helping me with this research! All of the answers are completely anonymous and it should take 5-10 minutes to complete. The "influencer" referenced in this survey is Josh from CaliforniaThroughMyLens.com. These survey questions have gone through the Institutional Review Board at George Fox University.



Next

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Influencer Marketing Survey

Trustworthiness

Please evaluate how much you agree with the statements below using the 5 point scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

2. My perception of the influencer is that he ...

	1	2	3	4	5
is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
is sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
inspires trust in others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
is unbiased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
is reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



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Influencer Marketing Survey

Content Quality

Please evaluate how much you agree with the statements below using the 5 point scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

1. The content shared by the influencer is ...

	1	2	3	4	5
accurate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
up to date	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
high quality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
consistent (quality)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
beneficial	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



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Influencer Marketing Survey

Travel Intentions

Please evaluate the statements below using the 5 point scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

3. Please evaluate the below statements

	1	2	3	4	5
When I make travel-related decisions, I would take suggestions from this influencer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am likely to visit the places shared by this influencer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am likely to consider this influencers' travel experiences when making my travel decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My perceptions on travel destinations can change when I see content from this influencer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The coronavirus has impacted my thoughts on current travel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



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Influencer Marketing Survey

Social Media Usage

Please evaluate the questions below and select the best answer

4. How much time do you spend on social media during an average day?

- Less than 1 hour
- Between 1 and 3 hours
- Between 3 and 5 hours
- More than 5 hours
- Prefer not to answer

5. Which social network do you use the most?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- Pinterest
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Other (please specify)

6. How long have you been subscribed to this influencer?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 to 2 years
- Longer than 2 years

- Not sure
- Prefer not to answer

7. How many influencers do you follow on social media?

- Less than 5 influencers
- 5 - 10 influencers
- 11 - 20 influencers
- More than 20
- Prefer not to answer



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Influencer Marketing Survey

Demographics

Please evaluate the questions below and select the best answer.

8. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to answer
- Other

9. What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to answer

10. In what country do you live?



Prev Done

Figures

Figure 1

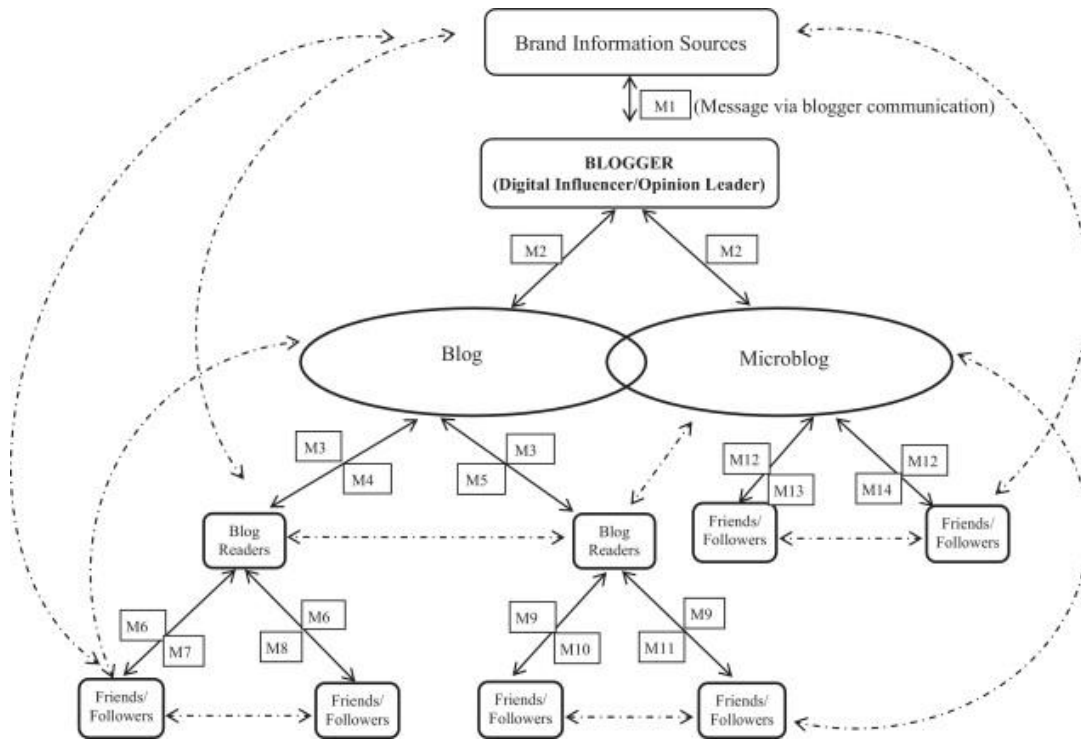


Figure 2

