

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN SHAPING TRAVEL CHOICES: A CASE OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN OMAN

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ABSTRACT

Purpose– This study aims to analyse the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on shaping travel choices: a case study of tourist destinations in the Sultanate of Oman.

Methodology– This study employed a quantitative research approach to analyse variables and test concepts using statistical methods. A descriptive research design was used along with a simple random probability sampling technique to gather data from respondents. Data were collected from 182 participants using surveys.

Findings- Instagram is the most popular social media (SM) site in Oman. The trustworthiness of SMIs is the primary reason people are motivated to follow them. The highest mean score (4.38) was noted for SMIs, who were better at promoting tourist destinations than other marketing techniques. The chi-square test results showed no clear link between the quality of content shared by SMIs and people's preferences for visiting tourist destinations. In addition, there is a connection between the similarity of SMIs and people's preferences for visiting tourist destinations. Finally, the results showed a significant correlation between SMI expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and tourists' choice to visit destinations in Oman.

Conclusion– SMIs are effective in engaging target audiences, particularly young people, and they have the highest presence on social media, making them a valuable tool for promoting tourist destinations and achieving consistent growth in Oman's tourism sector.

Keywords: Social media influencers, tourist destinations, social media, tourist choice, trustworthiness.

Jel Codes: M31, Z32, O53

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of social media has had a significant impact on the manner in which individuals communicate. This has enabled users to monitor, collaborate, and exchange information (Hamilton et al., 2021). In addition, social media (SM) is currently booming, becoming an extremely culturally relevant and dominant mode of interpersonal interaction and expression, producing omni-social engagement among shoppers (Appel et al., 2020). Users write individual comments on blog posts, visual communities, and social platforms, creating a platform for sharing music, videos, pictures, and other media assets on YouTube, Flickr, and the Internet (Zhang et al., 2017). Social networking sites have become essential platforms for businesses because they allow marketers to stay connected with their clients more effectively than other marketing mediums (Pop et al., 2022). The emergence of SM as a new technology has altered the structure of the tourism industry and has considerably influenced its development. According to Xiang & Gretzel (2010), a well-developed communication plan focused on SM will help locations become more noticeable. The benefits of using this communication technique include increased brand exposure, participation, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), friend-like trust, and social validation (Lincoln, 2016). According to Hamilton et al. (2021), 40% of respondents bought an item after watching an influencer using SM channels such as Instagram, Twitter, or YouTube. Furthermore, Twitter users indicated a five-fold increase in purchase intention after seeing both company and influencer posts on the product. Travel plans are intangible; thus, people cannot assess them without travelling. Consequently, electronic suggestions, recommendations, and reviews can be used as evidence to help decide whether to purchase travel services. This reduces the risk of booking at a specific destination (Neidhardt & Wörndl, 2020). Therefore, Social Media Influencers (SMIs) have gained prominence and are rated as highly effective and useful when promoting a destination to a specific group of target customers in a trusted and relatable manner (Cholprasertsuk et al., 2020). Gretzel (2018) analysed the effects of influencer marketing on various entities and concluded that hotels are more

likely to adopt this tactic than tourist destinations. However, Femenia-Serra & Gretzel (2020) stated that influencer marketing presents a new way for destination management organisations (DMOs) to use the power of SM (SM) to increase a destination's popularity and reach a larger audience than usual, particularly millennials and Generation Zs, which have been particularly impacted by SM.

In addition, Jahwari et al. (2020) found that SM features significantly improve overall customer purchasing behavior in Oman. Furthermore, the results indicate that friend recommendations and celebrity endorsements positively influence customers' purchase decisions. Statista (2024a) states that influencer marketing is expanding significantly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with a compound annual growth rate of 9% predicted over the next five years. Influencers use various channels, pathways, and media to reach their followers in new and inventive ways, and marketers search for profitable partnerships to reach these expanding niche audiences. Moreover, the global influencer marketing industry, as estimated by Statista, was worth USD 21.1 billion in 2023, a significant growth of 224.6% from the pandemic value of USD 6.5 billion in 2019 and a 28.7% increase from USD 16.4 billion in 2022 (Statista, 2024b). In January 2023, there were 4.17 million online social networking users in Oman (Kemp, 2023). Despite their significance, research on SMs' marketing role of SMs, particularly how they affect travel decisions, is limited in Oman. Several studies have examined the role of social media influencers in consumers' buying decision-making processes in Oman; however, they did not focus on travel choices and tourist destinations. Previous research has focused on the influence of social media in influencing international and domestic tourist visits to Oman, but none have focused on the role of social media influencers on shaping travel choices. Therefore, the current study holds critical value in terms of its contribution to the literature and the travel industry in Oman and the GCC region. Although the author's own study on the influence of SMs on Omani tourists' decisions was qualitative in nature, the following study examined the effects of SMs on travel decisions: a quantitative case study of Omani tourist attractions is urgently needed, and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Oman, travel agencies, tour operators, and other relevant stakeholders such as higher educational institutions, students, and future researchers would find value in the study's findings.

This research paper is organised into several sections. The first part of the paper is the introduction, which includes the background, rationale, research objective, and significance. The second part reviews the literature. The third part discusses the research methodology, including the research approach, design, population, sample size, sampling technique, and research ethics. The fourth part discusses the results and analysis, and the fifth part discusses the results. Finally, the conclusions, recommendations, and implications are presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A Social media influencer (SMIs) is someone who has amassed a sufficient following on their profile and established enough credibility to have the power to sway their audience's choices (Digital Marketing Institute, 2021). SMIs are influential voices that persuade people through engagement using accessibility, credibility, and closeness (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Lincoln (2016) described SMIs as individuals who have the ability to influence others' thoughts and decisions based on their expertise, status, interaction, and power. Additionally, Vollenbroek et al. (2014) found that a broad variety of factors that may play a role in influencing traits are social interaction, likability, competence, influence, power, common hobbies, uniqueness, innovativeness, and the number of followers or friends. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2017) stated that an individual's social position, personal characteristics, image, persuasion, and demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and marital status, might influence their followers.

According to Pop et al. (2021), people tend to engage in less traditional forms of media, namely television or printed campaigns; however, social media (SM) is great at reaching out to populations that are difficult to reach. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that people are influenced by SMI, and the companies they endorse become popular. In addition, the appeal, quality of information, and attractiveness of an SMI might affect viewership and hence their impact (Gedik, 2020). Similarly, Pourazad et al. (2025) reported that SMIs' attractiveness and proficiency of SMIs determine the persuasive power of influencers on tourist travel plan decisions. According to Avci & Bilgili (2020), SMIs have a stronger influence on persuading their followers and can affect their followers' emotions, ideas, and purchase decisions on SM platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. SMIs integrate their experiences with certain products or businesses, include them in the content they create, and communicate consistently with their followers. By bringing personal persuasion to the forefront, influencers drive their followers toward the products and brands they present (Rundin & Colliander, 2021). Likeability and familiarity are crucial in the appealing dimension since they are thought to have a favorable impact when passed through an influencer to the product, as likeable SMIs are more persuasive (Taillon et al., 2020). In terms of tourism, social media can be utilized in each phase of the travel process and serves as a vital source's information for consumers (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2021). Influencer advertising is a relatively new strategy, yet it has already become a staple of travel firms' marketing efforts worldwide, and the tourist industry is now the ninth largest influencer marketing expenditure globally (Peltier, 2018).

Online word-of-mouth is the primary source of travel information for consumers and serves as the foundation for SM marketing in tourism and travel (Gretzel, 2018). Influencer marketing is an important technique for attractions to generate favorable eWOM about their services and enhance their visit intentions among their target demographics. This is partly because the age groups that travel the most are millennials and Gen Y, and their consumption decisions are heavily

influenced by SMIs (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Daskin & Tumati (2024) found that Omani Gen Z travellers' destination choices were impacted by SMIs, and they choose the destination recommended by the SMIs. However, attractions near natural resources and undiscovered destinations promoted by SMIs generate curiosity among followers. Nevertheless, popular destinations do not require support from SMIs (Dorta-Preen & Santana-Talavera, 2025).

Boerman et al. (2017, p. 92) shared a Facebook commercial in which the brand promoted the product, as well as a similar advertisement featuring the influencer. The results showed that promotions in collaboration with influencers had a more favorable impact on followers' purchase intentions. By realizing influencers' directing power, marketers attempt to find influencers who may be suited to promoting their products and services. Naderer et al. (2022) claimed that sponsored posts on SM are perceived as more trustworthy than traditional marketing ones. Furthermore, Rundin & Colliander (2021) claim that timely information is the primary reason individuals follow SMI. Razak & Mansor (2022) indicated that content quality is more important than the number of posts, and SMIs storytelling techniques and follower-oriented content influence travellers to plan travel to tourist destinations. SMIs share their experiences through photos, videos, and testimonials, which aid followers in making decisions regarding what to buy (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2019). Generation Z interacts with brands mostly through SM, and Instagram is the platform that Generation Z most frequently uses for notifications when new products are announced (Tumati et al., 2025; Georgiev 2023). In addition, one of the most widely used SM platforms is Instagram, where influencers typically communicate with their followers (Digital Marketing Institute, 2021). Moreover, Studies on the motivation to use Instagram show that users not only follow their family, friends, and acquaintances but can also follow and interact with public figures, celebrities, sports stars, and brands (Tang et al., 2019).

Tumati et al. (2024) stated that the two most significant SM platforms in Oman are Instagram and SnapChat. According to Balida et al. (2022), SMIs engage and motivate consumers, shaping their attitudes and behaviors towards leisure and recreational products. Entertainment content and engaging videos shared on these sites are vital for shaping consumer preferences. Caraka et al. (2022) stated that Instagram is a powerful promotion tool for Millennials and Generation Z, as it motivates them to travel, increases their desire to visit, and influences their opinions on tourism brands. Its visual aspects, including photos and videos, make it a significant part of travel marketing strategies, particularly for tourist destinations. Tumati et al. (2024) found that the visual content shared by SMIs significantly affects followers' interest in travel destinations. Followers are more inclined to visit locations that their favorite influencers have shown, often seeking to replicate the experiences that they see depicted in their posts. Travel marketers have identified the possibilities of message reinforcement and targeting provided by SMIs (Gretzel, 2018). Rajput & Gandhi (2025) highlighted stated that content legitimacy by SMIs influenced sustainable travel intentions of Gen Z in India. Sharma et al. (2025) stated that destination image, nature-based tourist attractions, and influencer trust shape pro-sustainable tourism behaviours among Gen Z travellers.

Taype & Fuentes (2025) observed that TikTok and Instagram influencers are particularly popular among students and positively influence their travel choices. Students like to follow SMIs because of their highly useful travel information, which showcases affordable and authentic options. Similarly, Ahmed & Zhao (2025) found that 60% of users discovered new travel destinations through Instagram, mostly through SMIs, and that 70% of tourists visited destinations as recommended by SMIs.

Tumati et al. (2024) found that followers actively seek information from SMIs before finalizing their travel plans. This finding indicates that influencers play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of and decisions regarding travel destinations. Kim & Kim (2021) found that SMIs constantly interact with their followers, introduce them to tourist destinations, and build strong relationships with them. These interactions increase visitors' interest in the sites. As a result, followers develop a yearning for the SMI's tourism destinations, which influences their decision to visit. Wiedmann & von Mettenheim (2021) stated that similar features and shared interests are the two primary reasons individuals follow SMIs. Moreover, Balida et al. (2022) stated that the most prevalent factors affecting consumers' buying decisions regarding leisure and recreation products in Oman include recommendations from trusted individuals, high reviews and ratings from others, and endorsements by SMIs. These factors significantly contribute to the high impact of SM on decision-making. In addition, one of the factors influencing a consumer's choice of destination is visual appeal. Visual appeal is experienced by those who follow the influencer's content. To present a particular location as accurately as possible, influencers employ a wide range of effects, including image and video processing techniques and special effects (Vollenbroek et al., 2014).

Tumati et al. (2024) stated that SMIs are viewed by their followers as credible sources of information. Additionally, Babu et al. (2025) noted that the credibility and engaging communication of SMIs enhance tourist perception and motivate them towards travel related purchase behaviour. Many participants indicated that they considered recommendations from their favorite influencers when choosing travel destinations, suggesting a strong reliance on influencer opinions in their travel decisions. Masuda et al. (2022) stated that credibility is a perceived assessment of a communicator's trustworthiness, which is crucial for SM marketing. SMIs are often considered to be more credible and trustworthy in comparison to than other forms of media because they are bold and open in their conversations. Pradhan (2022) stated that trust is a crucial aspect of influence, as consumers' trust in an influencer's ability to disseminate reliable information is correlated with their confidence in the influencer's ability to recommend goods or services. Trust in influencers also affects travel and purchase intentions, making it a significant factor in influencer success (Albayrak et al., 2020). Additionally, Social media influencers' persuasive communication, authenticity, and expertise motivate their followers to consider purchasing the products and services they

endorse (Wang, 2025). Similarly, Raafat et al. (2023) stated that SMIs trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise positively impacted the travel intentions of millennials in Egypt. Finally, Ong et al. (2026) expressed that SMIs can de-influence tourists on popular destinations to avoid over-tourism and influence them to visit lesser-known tourist destinations in Japan. SMIs campaign style, mimicry, and communication style influences their followers and alter their travel intentions.

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research approach was employed in this study. Quantitative research measures behaviors, attitudes, and occurrences using statistical and numerical methods and offers a data-driven basis for identifying patterns and forecasting results (Creswell, & Creswell, 2023). This study employed descriptive research design. Saunders et al. (2019) noted that descriptive research provides scholars with thorough insights into the traits and behaviors of a specific group or event, enabling them to comprehend the subject matter more thoroughly. Purposive sampling, a non-random sampling technique, was adopted in this study. Purposive sampling is a rapid and economical method of data collection in which participants are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The data for this study were gathered through offline and online surveys. Bell et al. (2022) stated that surveys are helpful in characterizing the traits of a sizable community and guaranteeing a more precise sample to collect focused findings from which conclusions can be drawn and crucial choices can be made. The study population comprised tourists visiting various destinations in Oman. An ethics form was completed and submitted to the institution where the researchers are currently employed; after approval, the data collection process began. A total of 193 respondents provided data for the study; however, 11 responses were removed due to incompleteness and errors, leaving 182 valid responses for the analysis. The survey questionnaire consisted of various sections, including respondents' demographic profiles, SM features, reasons for adhering to a certain SMI, and the degree of influence SMIs have on travelers' decisions to visit particular locations. The following descriptive statistical methods were employed to analyze the data, and the degree of influence of SMIs on travelers' decisions to visit places was assessed using frequency distribution, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The results were also inferred using chi-square tests and Spearman's correlation to assess linkages or connections between two variables, as well as other pertinent statistical tools such as Cronbach's alpha to examine reliability across several dimensions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the respondents' demographic information. Of the respondents, 32.4% were male and 67.6% were female. In addition, 51.7% of the respondents, or the majority, were in the 18–25 age group. Only 4.3% of the respondents were above the age of 46, 30.8% were in the 26–35 age range, and 13.2% were in the 36–45 age range. Additionally, 48.4% of the respondents had a bachelor's degree, 27.5% held a diploma, 14.3% earned school credentials, and 9.8% held a master's or higher degrees. Moreover, 73.6% of the respondents were single, and 26.4% were married. Furthermore, 30.8% of the respondents worked for different firms, 17.6% owned their businesses, 37.9% were students at various colleges and universities, and 13.7% were unemployed.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Entire group	182	100
Gender		
Male	59	32.4
Female	123	67.6
Age		
18-25	94	51.7
26-35	56	30.8
36-45	24	13.2
46 and above	8	4.3
Education		
School	26	14.3
Diploma	50	27.5
Bachelors	88	48.4
Masters and higher	18	9.8
Marital Status		
Single	134	73.6
Married	48	26.4
Occupation		
Employee	56	30.8
Business	32	17.6

Student	69	37.9
Unemployed	25	13.7

Table 2 presents the respondents' social media characteristics. Of those surveyed, 79.1% said that they looked for travel destinations on SM platforms. Nonetheless, 20.9% of the respondents claimed that they were not used at all. Among the respondents, 46.7% indicated that they would seek tourism destinations on the SM platform, Instagram. Of the respondents, 26.4% said they used Snapchat, and 16.5% used YouTube. and 6% used Twitter, while only 1.6% used Facebook. It is clear from the findings that few respondents used Facebook to check tourist attractions. Others mentioned 2.8%, such as TikTok, WhatsApp, Telegram, and LinkedIn. Moreover, 23.6% of the respondents stated that they did not follow SMIs, while 76.4% said that they did so. YouTube influencers accounted for 26.4% of the sample, and Instagram influencers accounted for 41.2%. Among the respondents, 22.5% were influenced by Snapchat influencers, 5.5% by Twitter influencers, and only 1.6% by Facebook influencers. The findings show that Facebook has less influence on respondents. Finally, 2.8% of the respondents selected other platforms, such as TikTok, LinkedIn, and Telegram.

Table 2: Social Media Characteristics of the Respondents

Description	Frequency	Percentage
1. Do you use social media sites to search tourist destinations?		
Yes	144	79.1
No	38	20.9
2. Which social media sites do you search for tourist attractions?		
Facebook	3	1.6
Instagram	85	46.7
X (Twitter)	11	6.0
YouTube	30	16.5
Snapchat	48	26.4
Others	5	2.8
3. Do you follow SMIs?		
Yes	139	76.4
No	43	23.6
4. What type of SMI do you prefer?		
YouTube Influencers	48	26.4
Instagram Influencers	75	41.2
Snapchat Influencers	41	22.5
Facebook Influencers	3	1.6
Twitter Influencers	10	5.5
Others	5	2.8

To examine reliability across various dimensions, Cronbach's alpha was used. This is shown in Table 3. An alpha score of 0.818 indicates the impact of SMIs on tourists' choice of tourist destinations in Oman. An evaluation of > 0.7 indicates that the supplied items have extremely high internal consistency.

Table 3: Reliability Statistics

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
Impact of SMIs on tourists' choices to visit tourist destinations in Oman.	.818	10

Figure 1 illustrates the promotion of tourist attractions in Oman by SMIs. Videos (46%), images (21%), and live feeds (15%) were used to describe locations. Post data and updates regarding location (11%), create a podcast, and publish them (7%). and Other; please indicate (0). The findings show that creating and posting a video detailing a tourist destination is the most common method used by SMIs to promote destinations.

Table 4: Why do you follow certain social media influencers?

Reasons	Percentage	Ranking
Trustworthiness	74	1
Relatable	67	2
Hilarious	64	3
Attractive	61	4
Expertise	54	5
Popularity	51	6

Quality of content	47	7
Experience	39	8
Others	26	9

Table 5 shows the results of the impact of SMIs on tourists’ choice to visit destinations in Oman. The highest mean score was that SMIs were better at promoting tourist destinations than other types of promotions (4.38). This suggests that respondents believe that SMIs are more effective than conventional forms of promotion in promoting travel destinations. The second, third, and fourth highest mean scores were that SMIs have the power to attract tourists to Oman (4.26), I share SMI promotional videos with my family, friends, and co-workers (4.17), and I trust the information shared by SMIs regarding tourist attractions (4.01). This suggests that respondents trust the information provided by SMIs about tourist attractions and that they think these influencers can attract tourists to Oman. They also share influencer promotional videos with friends, family, and co-workers. However, the lowest mean scores were that I like to follow SMIs because they can provide unbiased and reliable travel spot advice (3.44) and the tour destinations recommended by SMIs are fascinating and appealing, so I would like to go there (3.37). This means that respondents would like to follow SMIs because they can provide unbiased and credible recommendations on exciting and enticing travel places; thus, they would like to visit them.

Figure 1: How do SMIs Promote Tourist Attractions in Oman?

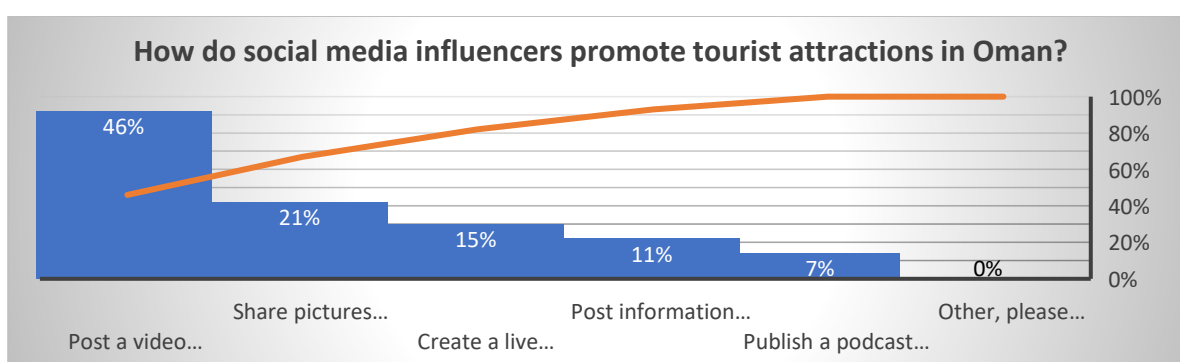


Table 4 shows that 74% of respondents who followed a particular SMI were motivated by trust in the SMIs. The second, third, and fourth ranks were relatable (67%), funny (64%), and attractive (61%). People want to follow SMIs for various reasons, including their expertise, popularity, high-quality content, and experience. Other benefits include access to news and current events, entertainment, inspiration, guidance on food, clothes, and travel, and a feeling of fellowship.

Table 5: Impact of SMIs on Tourists’ Choice to Visit Destinations in Oman

Impact of SMIs on tourists’ choices	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
SMIs are better at promoting tourist destinations than other forms of promotion.	4.38	1.019	1
SMIs have the power to attract tourists to Oman.	4.26	1.067	2
I share SMI promotional videos with my family, friends, and co-workers, as they are reliable.	4.17	0.991	3
I trust the information SMIs share about tourist attractions.	4.01	1.071	4
SMIs usually disseminate relevant and recent information.	3.99	1.115	5
I consider the recommendations provided by SMIs when making travel plans because their preferences are similar to mine.	3.86	1.242	6
The information provided by influencers is thorough and helps consumers decide whether to travel to a specific location.	3.82	1.230	7
SMIs, I follow constantly communicate with me and offer additional information about tourist locations when requested.	3.61	1.048	8
I would like to follow SMIs as they can provide unbiased and reliable travel advice.	3.44	1.040	9
The tour destinations recommended by SMIs are fascinating and appealing; therefore, I would like to visit them.	3.37	0.958	10

Table 6 shows that the chi-square test was not significant (sig. value was 0.297 > 0.05), indicating that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. This shows that there is no clear link between the quality of content shared by SMIs and people’s preferences for visiting tourist destinations. This indicates that there is no connection between people’s desire to travel to a particular location and the quality of content provided by SMIs.

Table 6: There is no relationship between the quality of content shared by SMIs and people's preference for visiting a tourist destination.

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.855	20	.297

Table 7 shows that the null hypothesis can be rejected because the chi-square is significant (sig. value is $0.039 < 0.05$). This suggests a clear connection between the similarity of SMIs and people's inclination to travel to SMI-posted destinations rather than others. This suggests that a correlation exists between respondents' likeness to SMIs and their intention to travel to destinations posted by SMIs.

Table 7: There is no relationship between the similarity of SMIs and people's preference for visiting a tourist destination.

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.601	16	.039

Table 8 shows a favourable and significant correlation between SMI expertise and tourists' location preferences. This was demonstrated by the obtained p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$ and Spearman's coefficient of 0.628. This demonstrates that tourists' choice of destination in Oman is significantly influenced by their SMIs skill and knowledge.

Table 8: Relationship between SMI expertise and tourist destination choice.

		Expertise of SMIs	Tourists' choice to visit a destination
Expertise of SMIs	Spearman's Correlation	1	.628**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	182	182
Tourists' choices to visit a destination	Spearman's Correlation	.628**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	182	182

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 9 shows a favourable and significant correlation between the attractiveness of SMIs and tourists' preferred destinations. This was demonstrated by the obtained p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$ and Spearman's coefficient of 0.519. This indicates that tourists' choice of destination in Oman is significantly influenced by the attractiveness of SMI.

Table 9: Relationship between the SMIs attractiveness and tourists' destination choice.

		Attractiveness of SMIs	Tourists' choice to visit a destination
Attractiveness of SMIs	Spearman's Correlation	1	.519**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	182	182
Tourists' choices to visit a destination	Spearman's Correlation	.519**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	182	182

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 10 shows a favourable and significant correlation between the attractiveness of SMIs and tourists' preferred destinations. This was demonstrated by the obtained p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$ and a Spearman's coefficient of 0.872. This indicates that tourists' choice of destination in Oman is significantly influenced by the attractiveness of SMI.

Table 10: Relationship between the SMIs trustworthiness and tourists' destination choice.

		SMIs Trustworthiness	Tourists' choice to visit a destination
Trustworthiness of SMIs	Spearman's Correlation	1	.872**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	182	182
Tourists' choices to visit a destination	Spearman's Correlation	.872**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	182	182

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

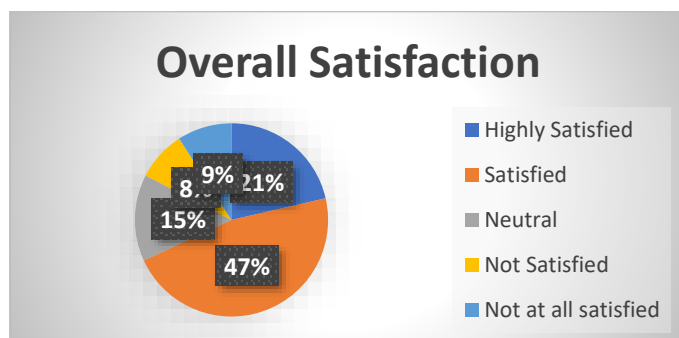
Figure 2: Overall satisfaction with the quality of information provided by SMIs about tourist destinations.

Figure 2 shows the respondents' overall satisfaction with quality of destination information provided by SMIs. Of these, 21% were highly satisfied, 47% were satisfied, 15% were neutral, 8% were not satisfied, and 9% were satisfied at all.

4.2. Discussion

According to the results in Table 2, 46.7 percent of the respondents claimed that they looked for tourism destinations on Instagram. Additionally, 41.2 percent of respondents stated that they favored Instagram influencers over those on other platforms. These findings are consistent with those reported by Taype & Fuentes (2025), Ahmed & Zhao (2025), Rajput & Gandhi (2025), Tumati et al., (2025), Tumati et al. (2024), Georgiev (2023), Caraka et al. (2022), Hamilton et al. (2021), Avci & Bilgili (2020), and Tang et al. (2019) noted that Instagram is the most widely used SM platform and that most users prefer to follow influencers on the platform. Additionally, Table 5 shows that SMIs are more effective than traditional forms of promotion in promoting travel destinations (4.38). These findings are consistent with those of previous studies, which found that SMIs are more effective in supporting tourist destinations than conventional promotional strategies (Pourazad et al., 2025; Daskin & Tumati, 2024; Tumati et al., 2024; Balida et al., 2022; Pop et al., 2021; Gedik, 2020; Lincoln, 2016; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). According to Naderer et al. (2022), trust is the primary factor motivating individuals to follow social SMIs. Moreover, Raafat et al. (2023), Balida et al. (2022), Masuda et al. (2022), Pradhan (2022), Albayrak et al. (2020), and Cholprasertsuk et al. (2020) most followers prefer to heed the counsel of their SMIs because they believe that the information, they offer is reliable and their opinions are assured. Literature supports these results, as Table 4 shows that trust (rank 1: 74%) is the main reason people follow certain SMIs. Table 5 shows that respondents trusted the information shared by SMIs regarding tourist attractions (4.01), and Table 10 reveals a significant correlation between the attractiveness of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and tourists' preferred destinations in Oman, indicating a positive impact. This was demonstrated by the obtained p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$ and a Spearman's coefficient of 0.872.

As shown in Table 7, the similarities between SMIs and people's desire to travel to a tourist site were related (sig. value is $0.039 < 0.05$). These findings are consistent with previous research Ong et al., 2026; Sharma et al., 2025; Taillon et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2021; Xu (Rinka) & Pratt (2018); Appel et al., 2020; Daskin & Tumati, 2024), which claimed that one of the primary reasons people follow SMIs is their similarities and shared interested. The resemblance between them encourages people to adhere to a specific SMI. Finally, Table 6 shows no discernible relationship between people's preference for visiting a tourist site and the quality of the content supplied by SMIs (the sig. value was $0.297 > 0.05$). This implies that people's desire to visit a particular location is unrelated to the quality of the content provided by SMIs. Babu et al. (2025), Tumati et al. (2024), Balida et al. (2022), Rundin & Colliander (2021), Gedik (2020), and Femenia-Serra & Gretzel (2019) suggested that the quality of information shared by SMIs is one of the primary factors that motivate people to follow a specific influencer; therefore, the results do not align with this literature.

5. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

From being a means of communication, SMIs (SMIs) are becoming promoters that offer entertainment, suggest products and services, and persuade their followers to visit a particular destination. Owing to the efficacy of SMI, companies employ influencer advertising to achieve several objectives, such as increasing engagement, traffic, brand awareness, audience reach, and revenue maximization. Instagram is the most popular SM site for tourists searching for tourist attractions, and most respondents prefer to follow Instagram influencers. Trustworthiness and reliability were the main reasons respondents preferred to follow certain SMIs. SMIs promote tourist attractions in Oman by posting videos and sharing pictures. The results for the impact of SMIs on tourists' choices to visit destinations in Oman showed that SMI are better at promoting tourist destinations than other types of promotions and that they have the power to attract tourists to Oman. Moreover, most respondents trusted the information SMIs shared about tourist attractions. There is a relationship between the expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness of SMIs and tourists' choice to visit a destination. However, there is a

relationship between similarity in SMIs and people's preferences for visiting tourist destinations. Most respondents were satisfied with SMIs' knowledge and the quality of the information they provided about a destination.

5.2. Recommendations

As Instagram was preferred by the majority of respondents, it is suggested that Omani tourist attractions enhance their Instagram accounts, add distinctive content, share updates regularly, and use high-definition images and videos. It is recommended to collaborate with some of the most well-known Instagram influencers and actively promote travel destinations, since the results show that Instagram is the most popular social media platform in Oman. SMIs significantly impact people's beliefs; thus, it is crucial to examine an influencer's personal or behavioral qualities when selecting them. Marketers must evaluate the importance of authenticity in SMI content, including sponsored versus naturally generated material, and examine its impact on follower trust and travel choices. Furthermore, marketers gain insights into the views and likes of sponsored and organic content. Examine current influencer marketing trends. For instance, some influencers are known to contribute to emerging travel trends, such as cultural, ecotourism, and adventure destinations. Therefore, it is preferable to collaborate with SMIs to promote our location if they fit into one of the aforementioned categories. According to this study, the main attributes of SMIs are competence, attractiveness, and trustworthiness. Therefore, businesses should ensure that SMIs have all the aforementioned qualities when forming agreements with them; otherwise, their messages might not reach the target demographic.

5.3. Implications

As influencer marketing allows for deeper customer engagement than other forms of advertising, tourism companies should focus on it to increase customer engagement. Businesses may begin partnering with influencers more as business partners than marketing participants. Sharing content based on personal experience helps influencers gain the trust of their followers. Influencer marketing is expected to continue growing in importance in the advertising sector because of its accurate targeting and high return on investment. Therefore, tour operators, destinations, and attractions are expected to collaborate with SMIs to promote their products and services to the target audience. In addition, it is necessary to focus on SMI characteristics, such as interaction rate, reliability, number of followers, and content style, to determine which has the greatest impact on followers' travel choices.

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APPENDIX 1: Questionnaire

Dear respondents,

My colleagues and I are researching the topic '*impact of social media influencers in shaping travel choices: a case of tourist destinations in Oman.*' In this regard, I would like to request you to participate in the survey, and this survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. The participation is voluntary, and you can exit it at any time. This survey will not collect personal information. The information you provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will be used only for this study. If you have questions or concerns related to the survey, please feel free to write to me at raja.tumati@otc.edu.om.

Regards,

Dr. Raja Tumati

Acting Head of Tourism and Management Studies

Oman Tourism College

Part 1 – Demographic factors

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. Age

18-25

26-35

36-45

46 and above

3. Education

School

Diploma

Bachelors

Masters and higher

4. Marital status

Single

Married

5. Occupation

Employee

Business

Student

Unemployed

Part 2. Social media characteristics of respondents

1. **Do you use social media sites to search tourist destinations?**
 Yes
 No
2. **Which social media sites do you have search for tourist attractions?**
 Facebook
 Instagram
 X (Twitter)
 YouTube
 Snapchat
 Others
3. **Do you follow social media influencers (SMIs)?**
 Yes
 No
4. **What type of SMI do you prefer?**
 YouTube influencers
 Instagram influencers
 Snapchat influencers
 Facebook influencers
 X (Twitter) influencers
 Others
5. **How do social media influencers promote tourist attractions in Oman?**
 Post a video
 Share pictures
 Create a live stream
 Post information
 Publish a podcast
 Others, please specify
6. **Why do you follow certain social media influencers?**
 Trustworthiness
 Relatable
 Hilarious
 Attractive
 Expertise
 Popularity
 Quality of content
 Experience
 Others

Part 3. Impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on Tourists’ Choice to Visit Destinations in Oman

Based on your opinion, please rate the following statements on the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) about your choice to visit destinations in Oman. From strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

<i>Description</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
SMIs are better at promoting tourist destinations than other forms of promotion.					
SMIs have the power to attract tourists to Oman.					
I share SMI promotional videos with my family, friends, and co-workers, as they are reliable.					
I trust the information SMIs share about tourist attractions.					
SMIs usually disseminate relevant and recent information.					
I consider the recommendations provided by SMIs when making travel plans, as they have similar preferences to mine.					

The information provided by influencers is thorough and helps consumers decide whether to travel to a specific location.					
SIMs, I follow constantly communicate with me and offer additional information about tourist locations when requested.					
I would like to follow SIMs as they can provide unbiased and reliable travel advice.					
The tour destinations recommended by SIMs are fascinating and appealing; therefore, I would like to visit them.					

Part 4. Overall satisfaction with the guidance provided by social media influencers (SIMs) while selecting a destination

Please rate your overall satisfaction with the guidance provided by social media influencers (SIMs) while selecting a destination. From highly satisfied (5) to not at all satisfied (1).

<i>Description</i>	<i>Highly satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Not satisfied</i>	<i>Not at all satisfied</i>
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the information provided by SIMs about tourist destinations.					
Overall, I am satisfied with SIMs, as I can relate to their tastes and styles and post tourist destinations of my choice.					
Overall, I am satisfied with SIMs professional and well-informed views on tourist destinations.					
Overall, I am satisfied with SIMs because of attractive and presentable personalities					
Overall, I am satisfied with SIMs, as they are transparent and provide unbiased opinions about tourist destinations.					