

Research Article

# Influencer Marketing and Social Media: Drivers of Tourists' Destination Choices in India

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**Abstract:** The present study aims to investigate the drivers of influencer marketing and social media on tourists' destination choice behaviour in India, considering demographic factors such as age, education, and travel experience. In the age of digital and social media, which are driving a change in consumer behaviour, influencers are extremely influential and enable them to influence potential tourists' decisions, providing an authentic touch that corresponds to tourists' needs. Younger tourists pay more attention to the influencer's followers' volume, while older tourists pay more attention to the quality of content and the interaction with the influencer. The study also discovered that low-educated respondents think entertainment and informational content are relatively more important, while highly educated respondents regard informative and well-made content as relatively more important. Moreover, the research also reveals that novice travellers are more likely to rely on influencer recommendations as opposed to experienced ones. These results imply that tourism marketers should make their marketing strategies more segment-specific and the content of their message compatible with the needs of target segments. This study supports the knowledge on the influence of social media and influencer marketing to influence tourists for their destination choice, especially in India with age and education differences, which will help marketers for a more successful marketing approach with consideration to age, education and experience in travel.

**Keywords:** Influencer marketing, social media, tourist destination selections, India, demographic variances, travel experience, quality of content, engagement.

## INTRODUCTION

The ascent of digital platforms and social media has changed the way people communicate, seek information and make decisions. Among the most significant shifts has been the increasing impact of influencer marketing, which utilises individuals with a substantial social media fan base to endorse goods, services, or experiences (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg 2011). The tourism sector, specifically, has started to see influencer marketing as an important influencer of tourists' choice in a destination. Social media influencers have become valuable middlemen able to engage with specific audiences and, in doing so, are the perfect bridge between tourism brands and potential vacationers.

This global trend is not an exception in the Indian tourism sector, which is also one of the world's fastest-growing industries. Although the most preferred Asian vacation destinations are Thailand, Singapore and Dubai, which have a clear-cut social media presence, India is fast emerging as one of the top travel spots for both local and global tourists. For instance, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok enable influencers to interact with their followers directly, influencing how they perceive destinations as well as skewing their travel behaviour towards such places (Dellarocas, 2003). Although traditional marketing approaches have been proven to work still today, influencers offer a more authentic and relatable approach

that appeals to a broader population of potential tourists. This is causing shifts in the quantum of destinations being selected for travel.

In fact, research has shown that influencers' social media content and especially visual storytelling and tailored experiences, have an impact on followers when it comes to their travel attitudes towards a specific destination (Hudson & Thal, 2013). Furthermore, Influencer Marketing could lead to a "peer recommendation effect" as followers trust the recommendations of influencers they can related too or perceive credible (Liu, 2020) Seeing the background, this review aimed to examine how influencer marketing as well as social media influence Indians towards their choice for tourism destinations and importantly want drivers affect them select one over another destination with in the country.

## Role of Social Media in Tourism Marketing

While traditional plays still play a big role in tourism marketing, where OTAs won't, social media is reigning, as it allows so much reach and engagement on visuals. Instagram, YouTube and all of the other social media outlets are now invaluable resources for travellers to find out about new places that they can visit, and what to experience once they get there. This democratisation of travel content production, where anyone can produce and share a travel vlog or an Instagram post from far-off places,

has resulted in significant shifts in how destinations are marketed and experienced (Boley, McGehee, & Pesonen, 2014).

In the new internet era, Influencers people that have the power to affect other people's purchasing decisions because of their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience has become crucial assets in the tourism industry. Their skill and prowess at personalising travel experiences through stellar content boost their influence on the behaviour of tourists. There exists a correlation between travel behaviour and influencers in guiding the choice of destination, especially in countries like India with a large & growing middle class, which is digitally connected (Jain and Sharma 2020). They curate different experiences and promote offbeat and unexplored places in India that were overshadowed by conventional tourism marketing.

### **Culture and Demographics**

It has a great reliance on Indian Cultures, which ultimately influences the type of content shared by influencers and resonates with different segments. Indian tourists, diverse in terms of cultural preferences along with travel patterns, seek to access appealing and relatable content through social media platforms. The popularity of local influencers in India also represents a transformation in the ways tourism marketing is executed, as the power of influence and travel inspiration is continuously growing amongst younger age groups, particularly millennials and Gen Z, through a social media lens (Shao, 2018). Given that more numbers from this demographic will consume influencer content and even select a destination based on where their favourite influencer went, the question of how some of these social media-driven strategies play out in an Indian context needs to be explored.

The move of consumer behaviour from traditional media to new digital platforms is reflecting greater global changes, but in India, the social media charm is boosted with compounded factors such as a sub-segment of people becoming smartphone owners and internet users for whom applications like Instagram have suddenly gained popularity due to its overwhelming user base and so on (Kumar, 2019). This statement means that the Tourism Board, and the brands in general, will be able to reach their audiences much more efficiently and effectively, both areas are interesting for them in terms of the domestic audience and international.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The tourism industry has seen a huge growth in influencer marketing over the past decade. More and more tourists seek advice on social media channels, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook from travel destinations to accommodation, as per a statement released by the company. Influencers — people with large numbers of followers, who can make a big impact on an audience and affect its purchasing behaviour are now central to any marketing campaign that speaks to particular demographics.

### **Key Drivers of Tourist Behaviour**

Tourists are influenced by social media and influencer

marketing when choosing their destinations. The study conducted by Jalil and Sadeghi (2022) revealed that influencers establish a bond on emotional grounds through their storytelling or visual content, which can have an impact on the intended tourist's mind (Jalil & Sadeghi, 2022). What is also the case is that influencers often seem to lend their reach to destination marketing organisations (DMOs) for this very purpose, causing a surge in tourist arrivals.

### **How Social Media Affects Destination Choices**

A study by Lee et al. (2021) prepared an account of the use of social media platforms for influencing destination decisions. Real-time updates, reviews as well as when it deals with personalised experiences, are all given by the tourists and influencers on social media. Lee et al. As previously mentioned, Lee et al. (2021) discovered that tourists' destination preferences were significantly influenced by what they had seen on influencers' posts, with an additional emphasis on interests that were important to travellers and matched those of their social identity.

### **Image and content Decision-making**

How much they have a deterministic effect is important, visual spaces like Instagram in particular. An investigation in India, however, a country packed with cultural and natural attractions, found that the influencers' followers attached great weight to the magnificent creativity of travel photos shared by their idols, something they believed would not only increase meaningful travel experiences but also provide proper inspiration for future trips (Goh & Ling 2020).

### **Influencer Marketing and Consumer Trust**

Influencers are trusted more than classic advertisements, because they are considered authentic. A study by Singh et al. The article by Whiting (2019). The power of trust in influencer marketing. Results from their study show that influencers have an impactful effect on follower visitation to places where the influencers had personally visited, as a result of greater engagement and trust with the destination praise (Singh et al., 2019).

### **Trust and the Indian Context**

However, in a country like India, where the traditional media still enjoys a large viewership and reader base, these figures find themselves playing an interstitial role; linking the digital world back to more historical channels. Indian tourists, notably the younger segment are inclined to take travel decisions based on social media content than traditional marketing strategies as indicated by study of Sharma and Rana (2021) (Sharma & Rana, 2021).

### **The Influence of Cultural and Socioeconomic Factors**

The effectiveness of influencer marketing in India is also influenced due to cultural nuances and socioeconomic factors in the region as well. In a collectivist society such as India, family, friends, and community play an even greater role. Indian travellers do consider many factors in selecting a destination, as mentioned by Gupta (2020), because decisions are highly influenced by a combination of personal taste, the advice from friends and relatives, as

well as social influencers sharing the same cultural background (Gupta, 2020).

### Regional Differences in India

We are a land of diverse palate preferences by region and the categories below make that pretty evident. Consideration Of The Aforementioned Movements And

Their Applications For Influencer Marketing. For example, influencers from other states may highlight regions that cater to certain regional preferences. Raj et al. (2018) found that there is a powerful function for regional speciality capability to create content material around local style and trend sense(padding tradition).

**Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Drivers of Influencer Marketing and Social Media for Tourists' Destination Choices in India**

| Sr. No. | Aspects                       | Not important | Slightly Important | Moderately important | Important | Very Important |
|---------|-------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1.      | No. of followers              | 73(25.2%)     | 35(12.1%)          | 46(15.9%)            | 64(22.1%) | 72(24.8%)      |
| 2.      | Interaction with followers    | 115(39.7%)    | 46(15.9%)          | 49(16.9%)            | 50(17.2%) | 30(10.3%)      |
| 3.      | Quality content               | 47(16.2%)     | 45(15.5%)          | 61(21%)              | 71(24.5%) | 66(22.8%)      |
| 4.      | Entertainment and information | 100(34.5%)    | 51(17.6%)          | 59(20.3%)            | 54(18.6%) | 26(9%)         |
| 5.      | Recommendations               | 73(25.2%)     | 66(22.8%)          | 82(28.3%)            | 43(14.8%) | 26(9%)         |

Source: compiled by authors.

Table 1 explains the Frequency and Percentage Drivers of Influencer Marketing and Social Media for Tourists' Destination Choices in India. The results of the study would have implications for influencer marketing and social media. The first dimension, "Number of followers", is described by the observation that a considerable share of the respondents (24.8%) said it was "Very Important" and 25.2% thought it was "Not Important". The rest of the answers were more distributed among the other levels; while 22.1% of the responses selected this as "Important." This indicates that followers are important to some but not all, and that a destination name is not necessarily important when making decisions about destinations. "Interaction with followers" was considered not important by 39.7% participants, which indicates interactions with followers may not be as effective as perceived. An "Important" Context was found among 17.2% of the respondents, indicating that for a significant minority, meaningful exchanges could affect outcomes. "Quality content" was scored more evenly across the options, with 22.8% marking it as 'Very Important' and 24.5% citing 'Important', demonstrating extensive agreement that quality material holds the key in encouraging tourism. As for Entertainment and information," 34.5 percent of the respondents designated it as Not Important," indicating a stronger demand for something more substantial than entertainment. Nevertheless, 18.6% thought it was "Important", so some mix of informing and inculcating can connect, even if with a smaller group. "Recommendations", lastly, provided the most diverse feedback with 28.3% rating it as "Moderately Important", yet still a significant 25.2% rated it as "Not Important", hinting that recommendations are important only for some, and not everyone will choose a destination according to recommendations. These results reveal the multiplicity of factors in the influencer marketing relationship, based on one side on the priority of influence (Lipovetsky, 2013), shedding light on the multiple factorial influence of an influencer on how tourists are reached (Smith, 2023).

**Table 2: Variances in opinions regarding Drivers of Influencer Marketing and Social Media for Tourists' Destination Choices in India based on age.**

| Items                      | Age                | N   | Mean   | SD   | F-Value | P-Value |
|----------------------------|--------------------|-----|--------|------|---------|---------|
| No. of Followers           | under 20 years old | 21  | 3.38   | 1.56 | 7.087   | .000    |
|                            | 20-25              | 38  | 4.05   | 1.33 |         |         |
|                            | 25-35              | 25  | 2.64   | 1.52 |         |         |
|                            | 35-40              | 133 | 2.74   | 1.49 |         |         |
|                            | above 40           | 73  | 3.30   | 1.44 |         |         |
|                            | Total              | 290 | 3.09   | 1.52 |         |         |
| Interaction with followers | under 20 years old | 21  | 1.71   | .956 | 3.855   | .005    |
|                            | 20-25              | 38  | 1.97   | 1.32 |         |         |
|                            | 25-35              | 25  | 2.08   | 1.18 |         |         |
|                            | 35-40              | 133 | 2.64   | 1.43 |         |         |
|                            | above 40           | 73  | 2.58   | 1.50 |         |         |
|                            | Total              | 290 | 2.4276 | 1.41 |         |         |
| Quality Content            | under 20 years old | 21  | 3.3810 | 1.35 | .308    | .873    |
|                            | 20-25              | 38  | 3.0789 | 1.49 |         |         |
|                            | 25-35              | 25  | 3.2000 | 1.52 |         |         |
|                            | 35-40              | 133 | 3.1805 | 1.36 |         |         |
|                            | above 40           | 73  | 3.3288 | 1.34 |         |         |
|                            | Total              | 290 | 3.2207 | 1.38 |         |         |

|                               |                    |     |        |      |       |      |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----|--------|------|-------|------|
| Entertainment and information | under 20 years old | 21  | 1.90   | 1.13 | 4.302 | .002 |
|                               | 20-25              | 38  | 1.97   | 1.32 |       |      |
|                               | 25-35              | 25  | 2.12   | 1.16 |       |      |
|                               | 35-40              | 133 | 2.74   | 1.32 |       |      |
|                               | above 40           | 73  | 2.64   | 1.44 |       |      |
|                               | Total              | 290 | 2.50   | 1.36 |       |      |
| Recommendation                | under 20 years old | 21  | 1.8571 | 1.15 | 4.295 | .002 |
|                               | 20-25              | 38  | 2.2632 | .828 |       |      |
|                               | 25-35              | 25  | 2.8800 | 1.30 |       |      |
|                               | 35-40              | 133 | 2.8271 | 1.34 |       |      |
|                               | above 40           | 73  | 2.4658 | 1.17 |       |      |
|                               | Total              | 290 | 2.5966 | 1.25 |       |      |

Source: compiled by authors.

Table 2 shows Differences in opinions on the role of influencer marketing and social media with respect to drivers of tourists' destination choice in India, by age. The table lists items such as number of followers, interaction with followers, quality content, entertainment and information, and recommendations, looked at by age group. There are obvious differences in 'No. of Followers', whose mean value (4.0526) of 20–25 years of age becomes the highest and indicates the highest susceptibility to be affected by Internet celebrities. The F-value (.087) and P-value (.000) reveal a significant age difference with regard to follower numbers, which are evidently particularly important among young people. As for types and interaction with their followers, the youngest generation (under 20) had the lowest mean of 1.7143, while increasing age resulted in a higher level of interaction, particularly in the range of 35-40 years or older (2.6466), with a P-value of .005 indicating statistical significance. On the other hand, when the content was of high quality, there was no difference as a function of age, resulting in an F value of 0.308 with a P value of .873) would suggest that the age groups are equally likely to perceive the quality of the content. The entertainment and information factor is found to show differences, with the highest average scores (2.74 and 2.64) and P-level of .002, indicating that this factor is more relevant for older tourists. Likewise, factors meanwhile show relatively significant differences, with 'Under 20 years ago' (mean 1.8571) and '20-25 years old' (mean 2.2632) having a lower mean in the scale, and those that are older such as '25-35 years old' and '35-40 years old' with higher mean indicated on the scale, which implied that younger tourist is less likely to be lead by recommendation. The Total row collates these opinions and gives at a glance of how important age is in influencer marketing. All the statistical findings rely on original data, which speaks to a sound exploration of the generational differences in social media and influencer-promoted tourism.

**Table 3: Variances in opinions regarding Drivers of Influencer Marketing and Social Media for Tourists' Destination Choices in India based on education.**

| Items                         | Education           | N   | Mean   | SD      | F-Value | P-Value |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| No. of Followers              | No formal education | 22  | 2.9091 | 1.65929 | .777    | .541    |
|                               | upto 10th           | 36  | 3.1111 | 1.36858 |         |         |
|                               | 12th                | 17  | 3.2941 | 1.72354 |         |         |
|                               | graduate            | 123 | 3.2358 | 1.44903 |         |         |
|                               | post graduate       | 92  | 2.9022 | 1.63115 |         |         |
|                               | Total               | 290 | 3.0931 | 1.52996 |         |         |
| Interaction with followers    | No formal education | 22  | 3.0000 | 1.44749 | 3.896   | .000    |
|                               | upto 10th           | 36  | 3.3056 | 1.23796 |         |         |
|                               | 12th                | 17  | 2.1176 | 1.45269 |         |         |
|                               | graduate            | 123 | 2.1951 | 1.38291 |         |         |
|                               | post graduate       | 92  | 2.3152 | 1.37425 |         |         |
|                               | Total               | 290 | 2.4276 | 1.41785 |         |         |
| Quality Content               | No formal education | 22  | 3.4545 | 1.22386 | 3.077   | .017    |
|                               | upto 10th           | 36  | 2.5000 | 1.46385 |         |         |
|                               | 12th                | 17  | 3.0588 | 1.24853 |         |         |
|                               | graduate            | 123 | 3.3333 | 1.41228 |         |         |
|                               | post graduate       | 92  | 3.3261 | 1.31022 |         |         |
|                               | Total               | 290 | 3.2207 | 1.38439 |         |         |
| Entertainment and information | No formal education | 22  | 3.27   | 1.202   | 7.735   | .000    |
|                               | upto 10th           | 36  | 3.39   | 1.178   |         |         |
|                               | 12th                | 17  | 2.47   | 1.505   |         |         |
|                               | graduate            | 123 | 2.28   | 1.363   |         |         |
|                               | post graduate       | 92  | 2.27   | 1.250   |         |         |
|                               | Total               | 290 | 2.50   | 1.362   |         |         |
| Recommendation                | No formal education | 22  | 2.6364 | 1.29267 | 1.914   | .108    |

|  |               |     |        |         |  |  |
|--|---------------|-----|--------|---------|--|--|
|  | upto 10th     | 36  | 2.1667 | .87831  |  |  |
|  | 12th          | 17  | 2.1765 | 1.18508 |  |  |
|  | graduate      | 123 | 2.7154 | 1.26439 |  |  |
|  | post graduate | 92  | 2.6739 | 1.35150 |  |  |
|  | Total         | 290 | 2.5966 | 1.25860 |  |  |

Source: compiled by authors.

Table 3 shows the differences in opinions concerning the influencers of marketing and social media of tourists' destination choice in India with respect to the education of the participants. Number of Followers. The first construct (Number of Followers) has a low variability among the four education levels, and the highest average score was found at the 12th-grade education level (mean = 3.29), and the lowest among never-schooled respondents (2.91). The  $F = 0.777$  and  $P = 0.541$  of the F- and P-values indicate that there is no significant difference in the perceived importance of the number of followers among education groups. "The second variable, Interaction with Follower, has a large difference ( $F=3.896$ ,  $p=.000$ ), which indicates that education level has different effect on this dimension. Participants with no formal education were the most likely to have reported an average (3.00), whereas those with 12th grade and graduate education had substantially lower scores, suggesting that education is associated with perceptions of interaction with followers on social media. The third variable, Quality Content, also has a significant difference with  $F = 3.077$  and  $P = 0.017$ . Those with no formal education also experienced the highest mean (3.45) and the lowest mean for up to 10th-grade education (2.50), which revealed that respondents with lower levels of education may perceive that they are more dependent on good media content. The fourth item, Entertainment and Information, shows very significant variance since F value of 7.735 and P value 0.000 indicating that there is strong effects of education level of the respondents on viewing the role of entertainment and information of influencer marketing. Relative to other education groups, those with no education represented the highest average (3.27), whereas 12th grade or above was significantly lower in average scores (approximately 2.27) so people with less formal education may adopt a higher level of entertaining with informational content in the tourism marketing. The last dimension, Recommendation, exhibits no significant differences across education levels with an F-value of 1.914,  $P = 0.108$ . Postgraduates and people with no formal education have the highest mean scores at around 2.5 for all educational groups. Which means: education probably isn't a particularly important factor in these recommendations in this context. These findings highlight the complex relationship between the level of education and one's view of the most important drivers of influencer marketing and social media in tourism.

**Table 4: Variances in opinions regarding Drivers of Influencer Marketing and Social Media for Tourists' Destination Choices in India based on age.**

| Items                         | Education           | N   | Mean   | SD      | F-Value | P-Value |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| No. of Followers              | No formal education | 22  | 2.9091 | 1.65929 | .777    | .541    |
|                               | upto 10th           | 36  | 3.1111 | 1.36858 |         |         |
|                               | 12th                | 17  | 3.2941 | 1.72354 |         |         |
|                               | graduate            | 123 | 3.2358 | 1.44903 |         |         |
|                               | post graduate       | 92  | 2.9022 | 1.63115 |         |         |
|                               | Total               | 290 | 3.0931 | 1.52996 |         |         |
| Interaction with followers    | No formal education | 22  | 3.0000 | 1.44749 | 3.896   | .000    |
|                               | upto 10th           | 36  | 3.3056 | 1.23796 |         |         |
|                               | 12th                | 17  | 2.1176 | 1.45269 |         |         |
|                               | graduate            | 123 | 2.1951 | 1.38291 |         |         |
|                               | post graduate       | 92  | 2.3152 | 1.37425 |         |         |
|                               | Total               | 290 | 2.4276 | 1.41785 |         |         |
| Quality Content               | No formal education | 22  | 3.4545 | 1.22386 | 3.077   | .017    |
|                               | upto 10th           | 36  | 2.5000 | 1.46385 |         |         |
|                               | 12th                | 17  | 3.0588 | 1.24853 |         |         |
|                               | graduate            | 123 | 3.3333 | 1.41228 |         |         |
|                               | post graduate       | 92  | 3.3261 | 1.31022 |         |         |
|                               | Total               | 290 | 3.2207 | 1.38439 |         |         |
| Entertainment and information | No formal education | 22  | 3.27   | 1.202   | 7.735   | .000    |
|                               | upto 10th           | 36  | 3.39   | 1.178   |         |         |
|                               | 12th                | 17  | 2.47   | 1.505   |         |         |
|                               | graduate            | 123 | 2.28   | 1.363   |         |         |
|                               | post graduate       | 92  | 2.27   | 1.250   |         |         |
|                               | Total               | 290 | 2.50   | 1.362   |         |         |
| Recommendation                | No formal education | 22  | 2.6364 | 1.29267 | 1.914   | .108    |
|                               | upto 10th           | 36  | 2.1667 | .87831  |         |         |
|                               | 12th                | 17  | 2.1765 | 1.18508 |         |         |
|                               | graduate            | 123 | 2.7154 | 1.26439 |         |         |

|  |               |     |        |         |  |  |
|--|---------------|-----|--------|---------|--|--|
|  | post graduate | 92  | 2.6739 | 1.35150 |  |  |
|  | Total         | 290 | 2.5966 | 1.25860 |  |  |

Source: compiled by authors.

In Table 4, variations in belief in the importance of influencer marketing and social media in influencing tourists' destination choices in India were reported in terms of education levels. Some of the interesting aspects are the following:

The mean scores for this item are 2.91 for the respondent having no formal education and 3.29 for of the respondent who has had 12th-grade level, which suggests a rising perception towards this item as education advances, but it is found to be not significant by looking at the non-significant F-Value of 0.777 and P-Value of 0.541. There is a significant difference across the education (F-Value-3.896, P-Value- 0.000), where no formal education holders report a higher level of interaction (M=3.00) compared with graduates (M=2.20) and postgraduates (M=2.32). This means that one who is less educated may be more involved when it comes to finding friends on social media.

The F-Value (3.077) and the associated P-Value (P-.017) yield a Proper-N (education) variance in opinion about content quality. Those with the least formal education rate quality the highest (3.45) and those with the most education rate quality the lowest (2.50), so it would appear that education does affect perceptions of content quality in influencer marketing. Significant educational impact is exerted, F-Value = 7.735; P-Value = 0.000. People with no education or just attended 1-5 years were the ones who rated highest (means of 3.27) entertainment and information, as opposed to those who had a post-graduate study who rated lowest (means of 2.27), perhaps a discrepancy in values with the level of studies? Lastly, with an F-Value of 1.914 and a P-Value of 0.108 indicating no difference for recommendations across different education levels, the mean scores hover near 2.6 at all education levels, pointing to a moderate endorsement of influencer recommendations for destination selection. These findings also imply that education level plays a key role in shaping the public's perception concerning the drivers of influencer marketing and social media in the context of tourism in general, especially as regards interaction with followers, quality content, and fun. The findings are developed based on primary data, and the role of education in influencing consumer perceptions of digital marketing strategies is showcased.

**Table 5: Variances in opinions regarding Drivers of Influencer Marketing and Social Media for Tourists' Destination Choices in India based on travel Experience.**

| Items                      | Travel Experience | N   | Mean | SD   | F-Value | P-Value |
|----------------------------|-------------------|-----|------|------|---------|---------|
| No. of Followers           | 0-5 years         | 324 | 2.76 | 1.52 | 8.648   | .000    |
|                            | 6-10              | 77  | 3.57 | 1.46 |         |         |
|                            | 11-15             | 14  | 3.79 | 1.25 |         |         |
|                            | above 15 years    | 105 | 2.68 | 1.40 |         |         |
|                            | Total             | 520 | 2.89 | 1.52 |         |         |
| Interaction with followers | 0-5 years         | 324 | 2.56 | 1.41 | 3.506   | .015    |
|                            | 6-10              | 77  | 3.05 | 1.46 |         |         |
|                            | 11-15             | 14  | 2.50 | 1.45 |         |         |
|                            | above 15 years    | 105 | 2.91 | 1.46 |         |         |
|                            | Total             | 520 | 2.70 | 1.44 |         |         |
| Quality Content            | 0-5 years         | 324 | 3.06 | 1.44 | .638    | .591    |
|                            | 6-10              | 77  | 3.27 | 1.30 |         |         |
|                            | 11-15             | 14  | 3.07 | 1.49 |         |         |
|                            | above 15 years    | 105 | 2.99 | 1.42 |         |         |
|                            | Total             | 520 | 3.08 | 1.42 |         |         |

|                               |                |     |      |      |       |      |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----|------|------|-------|------|
| Entertainment and information | 0-5 years      | 324 | 2.73 | 1.36 | .778  | .507 |
|                               | 6-10           | 77  | 2.95 | 1.43 |       |      |
|                               | 11-15          | 14  | 2.64 | 1.39 |       |      |
|                               | above 15 years | 105 | 2.90 | 1.52 |       |      |
|                               | Total          | 520 | 2.79 | 1.41 |       |      |
| Recommendation                | 0-5 years      | 324 | 2.80 | 1.33 | 3.511 | .015 |
|                               | 6-10           | 77  | 2.45 | 1.28 |       |      |
|                               | 11-15          | 14  | 1.86 | 1.23 |       |      |
|                               | above 15 years | 105 | 2.81 | 1.39 |       |      |
|                               | Total          | 520 | 2.73 | 1.34 |       |      |

Source: compiled by authors.

Table 5 describes the discrepancies across the underlying factors of influencer marketing and social media and tourists' destination choice in India in terms of travel experience. The number of followers, interaction with followers, quality of content, entertainment and information, and recommendation of the account across five key items by years active in the travel experience. For each statement, the respondent count (N), the average rating (Mean), the SD, the F-Value, and the P-Value, which show there is any difference in the response by travel experience, are reported.

Travellers with 6-10 years of experience ( $M = 3.57$ ) scored the highest regarding the importance that the number of followers has, and those with more than 15 years of travel experience ( $M = 2.68$ ) scored the lowest. Travel experience has a significant influence on the number of followers in influencer marketing. The significant effect of travel experience on the number of followers ( $F = 8.648$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) was found, where group differences in travel experience were significant.

The participants in the 6-10 years of experience category (Mean = 3.05) valued the interaction with followers significantly more than the other groups, while those who had 11-15 years of experience rated it the lowest (Mean = 2.50). The significant level of difference means the travelling experience duration determines how important the communication with fans is for their destination selection, with an F-value of 3.506, and a p-value = 0.015. Perceptions about quality content were not differentiated much among the groups because the mean values ranged from 2.99 to 3.27. The findings of F-value of 0.638 and p-value of 0.591 demonstrate that travel experience does not have a statistically significant effect on the perceived importance of quality content, in which all groups of travel experience perceive the quality content equally important.

Similar to high-quality content, participants did not differ in the ratings of the importance of entertainment content and information content, with the mean ratings being 2.64 – 2.95. The F-value of 0.778 and p-value of 0.507 also confirm that travelling experience does not significantly affect the destinations' entertainment and information importance. Respondents with 0-5 years of travel experience ( $M = 2.80$ ) and above 15 years of travel experience ( $M = 2.81$ ) rated the influence of recommendations the highest, whereas respondents with 11-15 years of travel experience gave the lowest rating ( $M = 1.86$ ). With an F-value of 3.511 and a p-value of 0.015, there is a significant difference between the groups, suggesting that travel experience plays a role in how much weight is put on the value of the recommendations based on influencer marketing. This would imply that elements such as the amount of followers, effect on followers and recommendation have an increased weight for the ones with less years of travelling experience, having, on the contrary, the ones with the highest number of years travelling a lower weight in general. On the other side, quality and entertainment/information travel content do not differ significantly according to the level of travel experience. These results emphasise the complex role of travel experience when it comes to influence on influencer marketing and social media for tourism destination selection.

**Table 6: Variances in opinions regarding Drivers of Influencer Marketing and Social Media for Tourists' Destination Choices in India based on age.**

| Items                      | Nationality | N   | Mean | SD   | F-Value | P-Value |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----|------|------|---------|---------|
| No. of Followers           | Indian      | 450 | 2.81 | 1.50 | 2.894   | .005    |
|                            | Foreigners  | 70  | 3.37 | 1.48 |         |         |
| Interaction with followers | Indian      | 450 | 2.72 | 1.43 | .976    | .332    |
|                            | Foreigners  | 70  | 2.54 | 1.47 |         |         |
| Quality Content            | Indian      | 450 | 3.08 | 1.41 | .489    | .626    |

|                               |            |     |      |      |       |      |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----|------|------|-------|------|
|                               | Foreigners | 70  | 3.00 | 1.41 |       |      |
| Entertainment and information | Indian     | 450 | 2.84 | 1.40 | 1.900 | .061 |
|                               | Foreigners | 70  | 2.50 | 1.38 |       |      |
| Recommendation                | Indian     | 450 | 2.76 | 1.35 | 1.996 | .049 |
|                               | Foreigners | 70  | 2.44 | 1.25 |       |      |

Source: compiled by authors.

Variances in opinions about influencers, marketing and social media as drivers of tourists' destination choice in India by age groups and nationality are presented in Table 6. The table consists of five entries: followers count, followers' interaction, quality of messages, entertainment & information, and recommendation. As for the number of followers, Indians (N=450) reported a mean of 2.81 (SD=1.50), and foreigners (N=70) had a higher mean of 3.37 (SD=1.48). The F-score of -2.894 at a P-value of 0.005 indicates that there are differences between the two groups in considering the number of followers important. Mean Indian followers (2.72; SD 1.43) and Mean foreign followers (2.54; SD 1.47) as per the interaction were not significantly different between Indians and foreigners (F = 0.976, P = 0.332). While the two groups did not differ to a significant degree (Indians: 3.08, foreigners: 3.00) in terms of quality content, it can be observed that the means are very similar, yielding a F-value of 0.489 and a P-value of 0.626. On enjoyment and information, the means (Indians = 2.84, foreigners = 2.50) suggest that Indians attach a somewhat higher significance to this attribute, where the F and P values are 1.900 and 0.061, respectively, closer to the level of significance, to indicate marginality in the difference. Finally, with regard to recommendation, Indian (Mean=2.76, SD=1.35) participants have a higher mean than foreign participants (Mean=2.44, SD=1.25) is 1.996 and p = 0.049, indicating a statistically significant difference in the importance of recommendation. This table illustrates the subtle divergence in the perception of trends regarding influencer marketing and social media, among Indian and foreign tourists, underlining the significance of nationality in determining the choice of a destination.

## CONCLUSION

There are numerous valuable insights after analysing drivers of influencer marketing and social media to influence destination decision among tourists of India, those insights are diverge having different perspective from different demographic sex, age, education and travel experiences. The results reveal that social media follower counts have a significant influence on younger tourists, in particular, 20–25 year olds in which the number of social media followers is placed as high importance (Table 2). This is consistent with the earlier studies of Sharma & Rana (2021) that support the increasing influence of social media towards millennials and Gen Z in making a decision to travel. Yet the findings also indicate that, for pockets of the older age groups, follower interaction and good content account for more when deciding (Table 3). These results challenge the belief that among young tourists, engagement metrics of our time are the single information source that matters to all young and older groups, consider also quality of content as stressed by Lee et al. (2021). Also, the study found that Indian tourists consider recommendations more significantly than foreign tourists (Table 2), highlighting again the nuanced relationship between nationality, culture and social media marketing tactics, consistent with Gupta (2020).

Education level, however, is found to influence perception of interaction with followers and perception of entertainment value, where those with lower levels of education have higher factors (Table 3). This finding confirms the results of previous studies (Kumar, 2019) suggesting that the low educated individuals are more involved contextually on humorous content, while highly educated individuals tend to be mostly focused informationally on the qualities of Content. Likewise, travel experience was also a significant influence, with respondents having fewer years of travel experience having higher appreciation of influencer recommendation, and those with longer travel experience had lower concern on

how many followers they have and engagement (Table 5). This depicts the dynamic nature of influencer marketing effectiveness and influence over an individual's experience and engagement with travel content, as earlier posited by Raj et al. (2018).

The studies Influencer marketing has the potential as a powerful tool, but it needs to carefully be framed around these demographic differences to penetrate and offer potential impacts in destination choices. The role of different types of influencers and the nature of the content they create needs to be investigated in order to develop transportable insights within the Indian context, where cultural and social aspects play a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior (Gupta, 2020).

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The implications for influencer marketing and the influence of social media on tourist destination choice, from this study of India, have significant implications for marketers and tourism boards. The different degree of social media influencer impact based on the age group indicates that the younger tourists, especially those aged between 20 and 25 years, are more influenced by the followers count of an influencer, whereas the older age groups (35–40 years) are less influenced by the followers count (Lee et al., 2021). This suggests that tourism marketers should especially adapt to the mindset of influencers with younger fans by using the influencer marketing strategies and personality matching with the influencer's fan base, but for older audiences, emphasise more the content quality and influencer interactions.

The study further shows that education levels can also affect how followers engage with, as well as perceive, content quality, with lower-educated respondents perceiving more entertainment and informational value in influencer content. This result implies that among those targeting low-education population, the content not being

too difficult is especially important. On the other, higher-educated travelers might value reading materials that are more informative and that provide a greater understanding of a destination as well (Gupta, 2020).

Furthermore, the varying effect of recommendations at different experience levels is evident, where less experienced travelers (0-5 years) trust the influencer's recommendations more than experienced travelers (above 15 years), which may prefer to rely on personal experiences or reviews. This suggests that as a destination, the newer the traveler, the more likely he/she will make the choice of destination based on influencer-recommendations as against those with experience, who might rely on other sources of information towards the choice of destination (Singh et al., 2019).

But there are pitfalls, too and a cornerstone problem is the level of authenticity and trustworthiness of influencers. Over commercialization of content can take away followers and trust; a dilemma that the tourism marketers are required to tackle by staying authentic to their campaigns (Sharma & Yadav, 2022). Further, cultural sensitivity is needed because Indian market is collectivist in which the perception of the family and community has significant impact on the destination decision than the individual preference (Gupta, 2020).

Collectively, these results imply some practical implications on the design of influencer marketing campaigns according to age, education, and travel experience levels. All while matching content and influencer types to the tastes of their chosen demographics — Because better fit results in better results. Marketers should also keep in mind the ethical implications of influencer marketing so that they can keep the trust and integrity in their campaigns in order to not disillusion their audience.

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