

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON PEOPLE'S TRAVEL DECISIONS

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of trust in social media influencers' SMI on the decision-making behavior of customers in the context of the tourism industry. The research examines the role of SMI trust in the overall customer journey, without limiting the study to only direct effects, but more than that. Investigating factors of trust in a novel or rather digital space, this study seeks to explore, how clients' views of SMIs impact their travel purchase behavior from the first acquaintance with the destination to the ultimate purchase of that travel product. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative means were utilized in gathering data using a self-administered structured questionnaire on a survey and oral interview approach. Survey Monkey was used for the distribution of the surveys, while Arbert Transformer was applied during analysis in the interview phase. About two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they considered SMIs when making a travel decision. The study findings confirm that SMI trust is integral to travel choice behavior. The insights from the study further emphasize the growing need for SMIs in the tourism sector, addressing the issue of SMIs from a marketing perspective and seeking to enhance customer trust through the influencer approach.

Keywords: Social Media; Social Media Influencers; Traveling; Trust; Decision-Making.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, social media has had a profound impact on how organisations and individuals operate. Social media is an internet-based application that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content, and that is rooted in the ideologies and technologies of Web 2.0 (Reference missing). As of October 2018, there were over 250 social networking sites and 3.484 billion people globally. This represents a considerable growth in both social media users and social networking sites. The use of social media has expanded beyond personal use in both public and private sectors (e.g. education, hospitality, tourism, banking, fashion, and retail). These activities include the exchange of information and knowledge, customer service, relationship marketing, sales, cultivating brand awareness and loyalty, developing collaborations, and managing supplies [1]. Social media has a significant impact on travel decisions these days [2]. It is a significant source of information in the process of making travel decisions. For a number of reasons, social media is becoming more and more crucial in the travel planning process. Primarily, the tourist business is the one that requires the most information globally. Moreover, when it comes to creating, sharing, and selecting relevant content for prospective travellers, social media seems to be a highly helpful resource. In addition, social media's simplicity of use makes them a very user-friendly search engine. Visitors and guests can also express their questions, opinions, emotions, and personal experiences on social media platforms by creating their own material [2].

As a marketing technique, tourism marketers are advised to leverage social media influencers (SMIs) to cultivate and pique travellers' interest. Also, a tool for customers to look for information on their next trip. Aside from this, SMIs' dependability is a critical factor in successfully influencing tourists' destination decisions. However, there has been little

research into how SMI-based trust affect consumer travel decisions. Moreover, social media is the primary online interface that influences consumers' choices. These characteristics constitute a gap in the literature that requires further exploration to comprehend how SMIs influence the consumer journey [3].

SM begins to influence travelers during the decision-making process before a trip, such as researching information about the destination, attractions, and flights. During a trip, tourists might refer to up-to-date local news in SM to make or change plans and itineraries. After a trip, they might share travel experiences, videos, and photos that reflect their experience on SM and review websites. Using advancements in mobile technology, such as smartphones, tablets/computers, and smartwatches, tourists can share live content and interact with others while traveling and can share their experiences to revisit later. While viewing and recording this stuff on SM, they can feel more present, encouraging others to travel and explore. [3].

Many researchers across different disciplines have explored trust (References missing). From a marketing viewpoint, trust is intended to be a fundamental aspect in developing and maintaining successful long-term relationships. Consumers need more trust in online information offered by influencers. In IM literature, the concepts of trust and source credibility are extensively discussed [2]. [4] Describe influencers as “active and empowered social media users who is are listened to and seen as trusted sources by other social media users” in light of the growing interest in this topic.

This research will look into how SMI affects individual traveler decision-making, including recommendations for various businesses, including hotels or restaurants. Also, demonstrates if there are effects on SMI trust on the entire travel customer journey of the direct and indirect relationship. That will show if social media can affect people's decisions and it can help tourist companies to take benefit from SMI. The data for this study was collected utilizing a self-administered questionnaire based on a quantitative survey and interviews. Over two-thirds of the participants were influenced by SMI when making travel decisions the present research starts with an introduction, then moves on to relevant research, methodology, data analysis, and conclusions.

Related Work

This section will review the recent studies relevant to social media in travel and Social Media Influencers. We will also review studies on Trust in social media.

Social Media Influencers

Social media is a valuable tool for sharing experiences and knowledge (pictures and videos). Social media provides an effective “tool” for SMI to travel experience. Compared with the original sharing form, social media shows its strengths of higher propagation speed and larger coverage. SMI sharing on social media adds a new sharing experience element to the tourism experience and grants a new connotation to the tourism experience. [3] Examined the factors that influence tourists to share their travel experiences on social media (SM). A PLS-SEM model showed that posts influencer sharing positively influence tourists' social media sharing of travel experiences. The points of view of altruism, self-

actualization, and personal fulfillment were positively influenced by travel-experience sharing, while environmental and relational concerns negatively influenced it. Furthermore, an Rakuten Marketing survey conducted by [5] in five countries and among 3,600 consumers suggests that 88% of respondents were influenced by an influencer when choosing their favorite destination. As a result, social media provides SMIs with a powerful and efficient way to tell their friends about their travel experiences, which is crucial information for prospective travellers. SM and SMIs can be powerful tools in terms of engaging consumers in various ways. Also, the study's major premise for this paper [6] was that people are impacted by social networks in their travel decisions. Conducted a quantitative study using a questionnaire with 18 questions covering various aspects of the interaction between social media and tourism. They collected data from 104 respondents and analyzed it using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. As a result, 91.35% of the total participants were enticed to travel because of photo seen on a social network, and 82.69% visited a tourist attraction after seeing a photo posted on a social network.

Trust in Social Media

In the context of tourism and travel decisions, trust has been studied by a few researchers such as [2] presented a model based on the customer journey concept to investigate the direct impact of SMI trust on each stage (including wish, information seeks, evaluation of alternatives, purchasing decision, pleasure, and sharing of experience). The data for this study was collected utilizing a self-administered questionnaire in a quantitative survey. The result shows that customer trust in SMIs has a positive effect on every stage of the travel decision-making process. Additionally, every decision-making phase mediates the trust effect on the following step, producing constant SMI input. [7] Investigate the reasons for using user-generated content to get tourist information and how it affects tourists' expectations. A multiple indicators multiple causes model and a structural equation model were used to analyze the empirical work. In addition, a survey was created with questions concerning tourists' travels and social media usage. In addition, a face-to-face interview was held to finish the questionnaires. The main findings show that when users receive UGC connected to tourism places, they form expectations about the destination by placing their trust in the obtained contents. [1] Examined the factors that influence travel planning through social media (SM). Several constructs originating from multiple theoretical frameworks, such as perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, trust, perceived risk, and technological convenience, have been investigated to test a theoretical framework that predicts social media usage for travel planning. To validate the hypothesized relationships between constructs, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied. Specifically, technology convenience and perceived enjoyment had a positive influence on perceived ease of use, and media richness had a positive influence on perceived usefulness. In addition, trust negatively impacts perceived risk, while perceived ease of use positively impacts perceived usefulness. Further, the study findings confirmed the negative influence of perceived risk and the positive influence of perceived usefulness on behavioral intentions. Lastly, the findings affirmed that behavioral intentions positively influence the actual use of social media for travel planning. The study results provide a deep understanding of the role of different constructs in predicting the actual use of social

media for travel planning. The study findings demonstrated media richness, trust, perceived ease of use, and reduced perceived risk as important factors predicting the perceived usefulness of social media.

Based on previous studies the tourism information collected from social media will later generate people's expectations about their next trip. For these reasons, we formulate the following hypothesis trust was the motive for the effect of SMI on the entire travel customer journey. Additionally, a review of the literature reveals that there is a dearth of studies on how SMI affects travellers' decisions, which motivates more research in this area.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers used a strategy that was used in this study [8]. Figure 1 shows the process steps in this study. Performed quantitative research using a survey with 12 questions about the impact of social media on travel. We asked closed and semi-closed questions, such as:

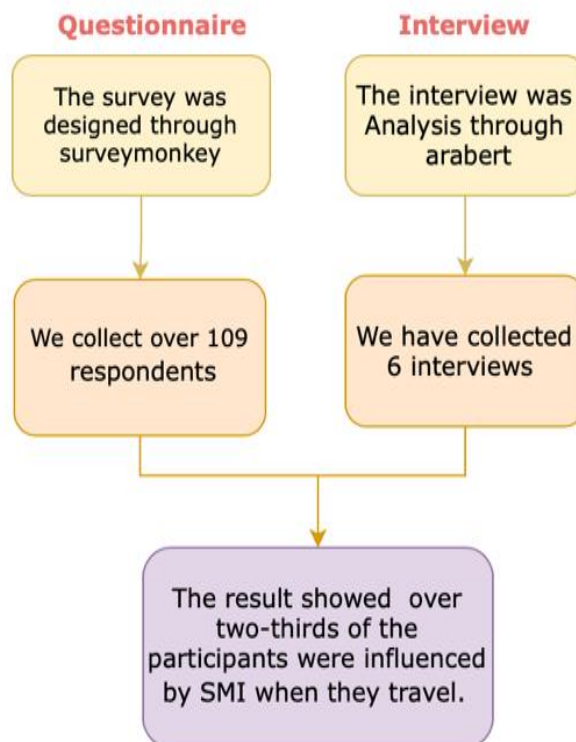


Figure 1: The four basic steps of the analysis process

Personal information:

- 1) Gender?
- 2) Age range?
- 3) Education?

The impact of social networks on their lives and consumer behavior:

- 1) How much time are you using SM within a day?
- 2) How many SMIs do you follow?
- 3) What type of SMI have you followed?
- 4) Do you use SM to help you with your travel decisions?
- 5) When you plan to travel do you trust SMI recommendations?
- 6) How many times do you try the SMI recommendation?
- 7) What type of recommendations do you follow (hotels, restaurants, shopping stores)?
- 8) Do you publish your trip on SM?
- 9) Do you publish a trip photo, and write your experience?

Interview

- 1) Do you use SM to help you with your travel decisions?
- 2) What influenced your decision?
- 3) Which influencer did you take his advice?
- 4) How was your experience?
- 5) Would you take his advice again? And why?

To test our hypothesis, "People are influenced by social media influencers in their travel decisions," we disseminated the questionnaire to family, friends, friends of friends, and virtual friends on social media.

The survey was created using Survey Monkey; thus, it was distributed entirely online, to reach at least 50 responders analyzed them with SurveyMonkey¹ and for our interview we used Arabert transformer [9]. Moreover, we used Hugging face and GitHub² implementation to predict the sentiment using Arabert transformer [10]. Arabert is a new state-of-the-art for several downstream Arabic language tasks. It publicly releasing models.

Furthermore, model has been trained on 6.2 billion tokens of primarily Modern Standard Arabic text. Thus, it can be used for various Arabic NLP tasks such as: sentiment analysis from Arabic text [10].

However, the interview transcripts were written by the researchers and do not require preprocess step. Since Arabert is pre trained model, researchers only pipeline the text on model.

Data personal analysis

In order to obtain some essential characteristics regarding the influence of social media on travel decisions, researchers gathered information from 109 respondents. This allowed researchers to generalize the findings.

The sample's findings are as follows:

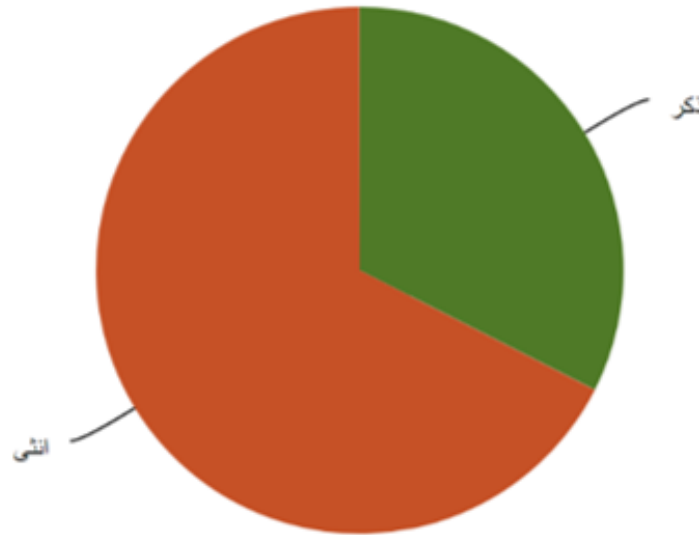


Figure 2: Gender of the respondents

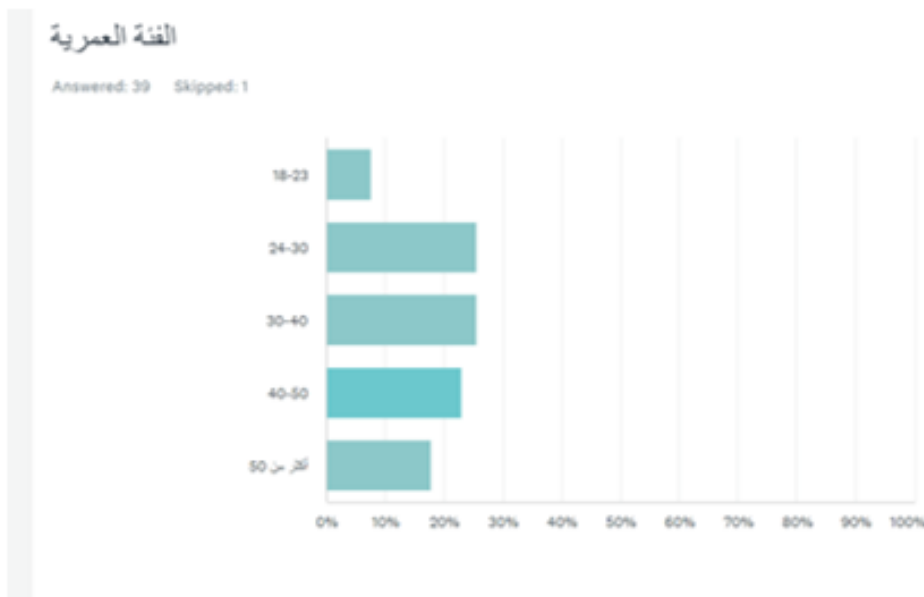


Figure 3: Age of the respondents

المستوى التعليمي

Answered: 39 Skipped: 1

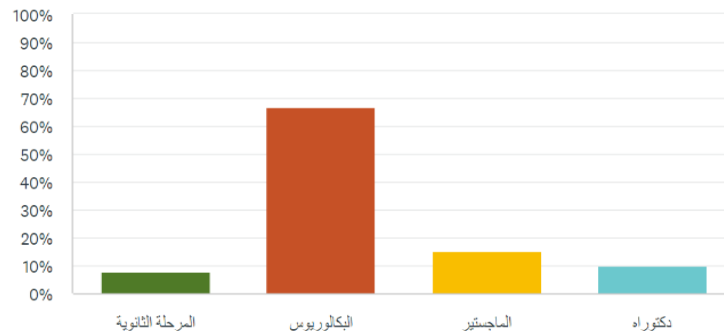


Figure 4: Educational Level of the respondents

The majority of respondents, approximately 25% of the total, are between the ages of 24 and 40, as the above Figure 4 illustrates. 19% are over 50, while 20% are between 40 and 50. In terms of gender, 67.50% of respondents were women compared to men on social media. But in terms of education, we found that 67% of the population held a bachelor's degree, and 15% held a master's degree. Within According to these statistics, the majority of responders hold a university degree, while only 3% have recently completed their high school education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, researchers provided a synthesis of the key findings from the study. These are intended to provide insight into the impact of social media on travel decisions.

كم عدد المؤثرين الذي تتابعهم في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي؟

Answered: 40 Skipped: 0

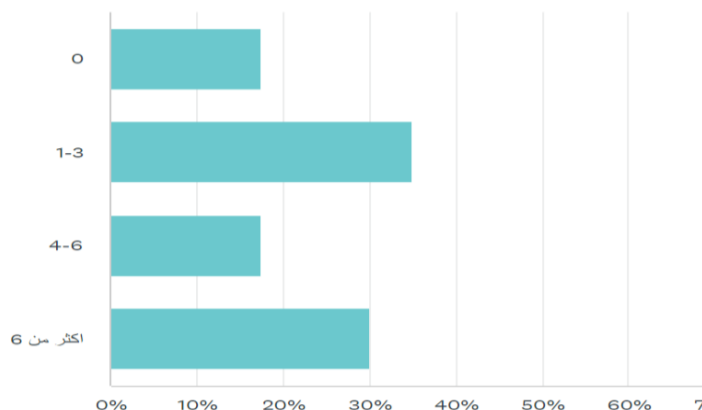


Figure 5: Average time spent on social media

The majority of respondents—42%—spend one to three hours on social media per day, with the next highest percentage—32.50 percent—spending three to six hours per day. In addition, 15% of respondents reported using social networks for more than six hours a day. Considering the issue, these individuals are more knowledgeable and engaged with social media than those who use it for less than an hour a day.

هل تستخدم مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي لمساعدتك في قرارات السفر الخاصة بك؟

Answered: 40 Skipped: 0

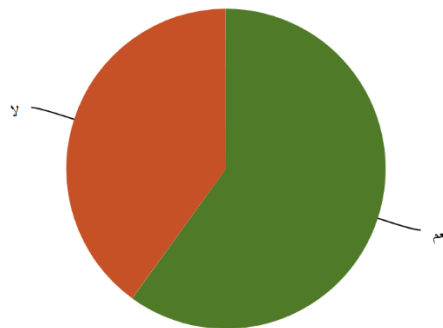


Figure 6: How many influencers do you follow on social media?

Another important part of the study is whether respondents follow social media influencers. Figure 6 demonstrates that, more than 35% of respondents follow 1-2 influencers. 30 % of respondents prefer to follow more than 6 influencers on social media. However, 7% of the respondents do not follow any of the social media influencers.

عندما تخطط للسفر هل تثق في توصية مؤثر في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي؟

Answered: 40 Skipped: 0



Figure 7: Use social media to help you with your travel decisions

According to the Figure 7 above, 60% of the respondents use social media for travel decisions. While only 40% do not use it.

كم مرة جربت توصية مؤثر في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي؟

Answered: 40 Skipped: 0

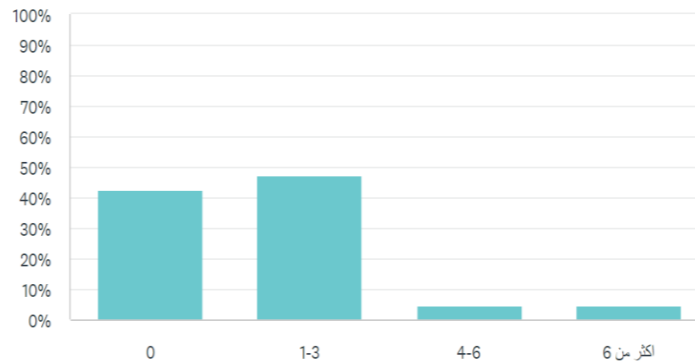


Figure 8: Trust the recommendation of a SMI

A really important question to ask in the study was” Do you trust the recommendation of a social media influencer?” and the answers are up to interpretation. First, it should be noted that 30% of respondents trust the SMI, compared to 70% who do not. In researchers’ opinion, the rationale could stem from a prior instance in which they followed SMI advice—such as avoiding unclean restaurants or maintaining proper hygiene—and the outcome was unsatisfactory.

ما نوع التوصية التي تتبعها

Answered: 36 Skipped: 4

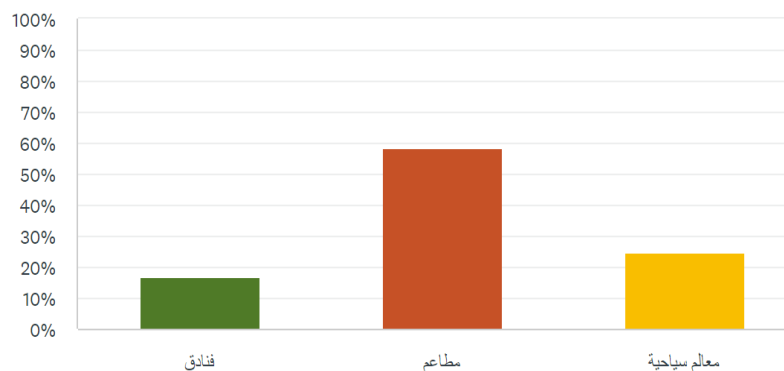


Figure 9: How many times you tried the recommendation from SMI

The first thing is that 47.50% were trying between 1-3 times the recommendation. Then, 42.50% of respondents did not even try the recommendation from SMI. Through the interview, some respondents explained that they believe that SMI is lying and marketing for advertising money.

85.33% of respondents consult SMI for restaurants and 25% for Tourist Attractions. From our perspective, it could be the prices of restaurants are lower than hotels. If the result is not good, the loss will be less. Also, the restaurant may be in the same city, so the number of times to try restaurants is greater.

However, in the question, do you trust the travel of 70 % of the respondents who did not trust SMI, we can see here that 85.33 % of the advice of the respondents trust restaurants. Therefore, in our opinion, they answered the restaurant's question, regardless of the travel status or not, even though the intention of inquiry is the event of travel.

Sentiment (Interview)

To understand the people's Sentiment about trusting the SMI in the travel decision. To understand the people's Sentiment about trusting the SMI in the travel decision. We performed analysis on the sentiment on the users' interview using Arabert transformer. However, the model will predict the sentiment (positive, negative, neutral) from the text.

Table 1: sentiment interview examples

text	class
<p>استمعت لنصيحة الأستاذة سمر المقرن والاخ فيحان فتى الصحراء فقد سافروا الي جورجيا وكانوا يصورن المدن التي ذهبو اليها مثل تبليسي وباتومي والمنتجعات والفنادق التي سكنوا فيها والمطاعم التي تحدثو عنها وان شاء الله سنذهب الصيف القادم الي تلك البلاد الجميلة فهم يقولون انها متنوعة باجوائها وطبيعتها بالاضافة الي اسعارها المناسبة.</p> <p>I listened to the advice of Mrs. Samar Al-Muqrin and Brother Faihan, the desert boy. They traveled to Georgia and photographed the cities they went to, such as Tbilisi and Batumi, the resorts and hotels in which they lived, and the restaurants they talked about, and God willing, we will go next summer to those beautiful countries. They say that they are diverse in their atmosphere and nature in addition to their prices occasion.</p>	Positive
<p>بعض من المطاعم التي كانت تجربتها من المؤثرين لم تكن في المتوقع من ناحية ما تم التسويق عنه من قبل المؤثر.</p> <p>أفضل تجربة صديق او قريب حيث يكون نقل التجربة صادقه وواضحة بدون دوافع ماليه او غيرها.</p> <p>Some of the restaurants that were experienced by influencers were not expected in terms of what was marketed by the influencer. I prefer the experience of a friend or relative where the transfer of the experience is honest and clear without financial or other motives.</p>	Negative

Table 2: Arabert result

	Positive	negative	neutural
Total interviews	5	1	0

The interview results of the study presented the impotent and the impact of SMI trust on tourist decision-making. Through the interviews, we found that most of the participants listen to influencers in restaurants because through their experiences, some advice is good and some of it is good. But for hotels and travel, the majority can take the opinion of the influencer but do not rely on it completely. There is a need for other sources to verify the information and its credibility. One of the participants took the influencer's advice in travel, his experience was wonderful, and another participant also took the advice of the influencer, but his experience was not good.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, researchers investigate the impact of SMI trust on customer tourist decision-making. Also, to demonstrate the effects of SMI trust on the entire travel customer journey of the direct and indirect relationship.

The data for this study was collected via a self-administered questionnaire based on a quantitative survey. In survey, SurveyMonkey is used to collect data while for interviews, Arbert Transformer was used to analyze the data.

Over two-thirds of the participants were influenced by SMI when making travel decisions. Based on the results of the study, 42% of participants used social media for one to three hours a day, 32.50% for three to six hours, and 15% for more than six hours. Thus, it is opiniated that there is a strong promotional opportunity for travel companies.

SMI helped the establishment of a closer relationship with customers, who can then participate in promoting tourist destinations or vacation packages. Also, 90% of the interviews were positive sentiments about taking advice from influencers. This illustrates how a well-thought-out post utilising SMI may benefit travel agencies in both business and consumer interactions.

The study has certain limitations, and because the data were gathered through in-person interviews, the sample size is limited. Another limitation is that the survey was conducted over a specific time, whereas a longitudinal study would yield much better results. The study's findings are only intended to discover the impact of social media on people's travel decisions.

In the end it will be intriguing to investigate other samples in subsequent studies and it is recommended to create a procedure that completes the travel experience from start to finish.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to Norah AITwajiri and Dr. Hend Alrasheed for their effort in this paper.

Footnotes

- 1) <https://www.surveymonkey.com/>
- 2) <https://github.com/Reemakhr/The-Impact-of-social-media-.git>

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