

QATAR UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

USING SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS TO PROMOTE QATAR AS A

TOURIST DESTINATION

BY

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Master of Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

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Master of Business Administration

Title: Using Social Media Influencers to Promote Qatar as a Tourist Destination

Supervisor of Project: Dr. Khurram, J, Sharif.

The main objective of this study is to understand the qualities of social media influencers, in the travel and tourism industry, which generate trust in the followers, thereby having an impact on the followers' intention to visit a destination promoted/recommended by the SMIs. The characteristics identified are Quality of Information provided by SMIs, Attractiveness of their Content on social media platforms, Credibility of SMIs, Authenticity of SMIs and Popularity of SMIs and the Engagement with their followers. Additionally, the study also investigates the effect of Trust on the individual's intention to visit a destination.

The results revealed that out of the five characteristics, Quality of Information was shown to have no impact on the trust generated whereas other factors had a significant positive impact on Trust. Furthermore, Trust had a significant positive impact on the follower's intention to visit the destination promoted by the SMIs.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Quality of Information, Attractiveness of Content, Credibility, Authenticity, Popularity, Engagement, Trust, Intention to Visit

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my family for their constant love, encouragement, and support.

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I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Khurram Jahangir for his guidance, time and encouragement towards the completion of this project. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my professors and colleagues from Qatar University as well as the management of Kone Elevators.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In recent times, social media has become one of the most prominent tools for marketing in almost all sectors (Mohsin, 2019). It includes “websites and applications that help users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Stevenson, 2010). In 2018, the internet was being used by more than four billion people around the world. Out of these four billion more than three billion people use social media, which is a thirteen percent rise from 2017 (Underwood et al., 2018). Due to the wide reach and immense persuasive power of online social media platforms, different platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, etc., are being utilized every day to promote brands, products, and other marketing contents. In addition to television and print media, companies have been using sports personalities or celebrities in the entertainment industry to headline their online marketing campaigns as well, in order to reach their consumers.

Over the past decade, a new trend of marketing has emerged known as ‘Influencer Marketing’ or marketing through influencers (Freberg et al., 2010). Influencers are individuals who have the ability to have an effect on the purchase decisions of others (Sudha and Sheena, 2017), which they are able to achieve through their connectedness and relatability with their audiences (Jerslev, 2016). These Influencers ‘influence’ consumers, who are their followers on various social media platforms. Generally, the influence is in the form of making people buy a certain brand or product. These products/brands tend to be from different genres, such as lifestyle, fashion, beauty, technology, travel, etc (Ledbetter, 2016). According to Influencermarketinghub.com (2019), influencers can be divided into four categories such as “1) celebrities, 2) industry experts and thought leaders, 3) Bloggers and content creators 4) Micro-Influencers”.

The emergence of influencer marketing could be attributed to celebrity endorsements, however, using popular celebrities does not come cheaply. This makes it difficult for small businesses to use celebrities for their promotional activities. Industry experts and thought leaders include those who gain respect among their followers due to their position, qualifications, experience or place of work. Bloggers and content creators have been gaining popularity for some time now and have also been connected to influencer marketing. There are a lot of blogs on the internet where if a popular blogger posts positively about a product, it may encourage his/her followers to try out that product. This shows how influential blogs can be on their followers. Finally, micro-influencers are common people who have become recognizable for their knowledge in a particular niche. They tend to have quite a large number of followers, on online social media platforms mainly, but not limited to, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Their followers find them more relatable, approachable and a part of their community when compared to famous celebrities (Qudsi, 2018). This category of influencers has attained considerable fame, of late, so much so that few of them have risen from oblivion to being as popular as a celebrity. Some of the micro-influencers may not have an enormous number of followers, but, are still popular for their relatability and connectedness with their followers (Influencermarketinghub.com, 2019).

Along with the beauty and fashion industry, influencer marketing has also started to gain popularity in the tourism sector. Travel influencers seem to motivate their followers to visit the destinations being promoted through their social media posts (Dickson, 2019)

Thus, a combination of both, i.e., using SMIs in the tourism industry, unlocks immense opportunities for travel brands and tourism organizations or Destination Marketing Organizations.

The objective of this research was to analyze the main characteristics of social media influencers that have an impact on their followers' travel decisions. In this context, Social Media Influencers (SMIs) included bloggers, content creators, and micro-influencers.

1.1 Background

Social media have been playing an important role in the selection of travel destinations. Most consumers (travelers) seek travel information, inspiration, and recommendation, from social media largely for the reason that it serves as a platform to share visuals and experiences (Mangan, 2015). For example, Instagram is used to post pictures of the destination, whereas Blogs and YouTube are used to share extensive details about the travel experience.

Destination Marketing is a form of marketing aimed at promoting tourism to a specific destination such as a city, region or country. The chief objective of destination marketing is increasing the number of visitors to that destination (Promodo.com, 2018). According to Pike and Page (2014), a great number of nations, states, and cities have formed Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to manage its tourism policies and regulations. DMOs have also started to identify the persuasive power of Social Media Influencers. Some of them are already collaborating with the SMIs to promote the respective destination because SMI marketing has been found effective in influencing a consumer's intention to travel to that destination (Ong and Ito, 2019).

Qatar has a large number of tourist attractions that include, natural, historical and cultural landmarks. In addition, there are also several annual festivals and art shows that are held all through the year to entertain visitors and families.

The Qatar National Tourism Council (QNTC), earlier known as the Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA), is the governing body for Qatar's tourism sector (VisitQatar.qa). One

of the main roles of the QNTC is to “promote Qatar as a quality destination for business events and leisure travel, both regionally and internationally”.

In 2014, QNTC launched the Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030 (QNTSS) in line with the objectives of the Qatar National Vision 2030. QNTSS was developed with four underlying guiding principles – Fit with Local Tradition and Moral Values, Alignment with National Agenda, Economic Impact, and Environmental Sustainability. The strategy has set up certain key performance indicators (KPIs) for the years 2022 (FIFA World Cup being hosted by Qatar) and 2030. One of the KPIs of QNTSS is to achieve the arrival of 4.3 to 5 million visitors in 2022 leading up to 7 to 9 million visitors in 2030. Other KPIs include an increase in tourism spend, impact on GDP, tourism jobs, etc. (VisitQatar.qa).

One of the main marketing techniques used by QNTC to propagate Qatar’s tourism message to potential visitors is working with international media. QNTC operates closely with travel publications and editors of national and regional media, lifestyle magazines and other media partners. They collaborate to publicize positive editorial, feature articles and news updates on the various offerings of Qatar’s tourism.

Using public relations (PR) is another activity among others to keep the international lifestyle and travel media updated with the developments in Qatar’s tourism sector. This is done via issuance of press releases, newsletters and press meetings with the journalists.

Other promotional activities of QNTC comprise of media familiarization visits and collateral distribution. The former entails inviting travel and lifestyle journalists to Doha to provide them an experience of Qatar, thereby garnering positive international media coverage. The latter is the distribution of brochures and leaflets to spread information about the offerings of Qatar’s tourism (VisitQatar.qa).

Additionally, Qatar hosted the INFLOW Summit 2019, which was the biggest influencer event conducted in Doha (Marhaba.com, 2019). INFLOW (Influencers Of the World) is a platform that brings influencers and brands together from around the world. The 2019 VisitQatar Inflow summit had forty influencers from the fashion, food, travel and lifestyle industries. The event featured Qatar as an ideal tourist destination and provided a platform for various brands and industries to make use of influencer marketing. This indicates that QNTC is also expanding its marketing activities into the world of social media influencers.

1.2 Problem Statement

Social media influencer marketing has risen as one of the biggest trends in marketing mainly among lifestyle, beauty and fashion brands (Glucksman, 2017). According to Glucksman (2017), consumers follow SMIs who are authentic, engaging and confident during their interactions with their followers. This research investigated the main characteristics of SMIs which impacted the consumers of their content, in the travel and tourism genre.

1.3 Research Objective

This study will emphasize on understanding how Social Media Influencers in the travel and tourism sector may be utilized to influence their followers' intention to visit a destination, in order to promote Qatar as a tourist destination. Therefore, the main objectives of this research are:

- To analyze how consumers', perceive travel and tourism Social Media Influencers (SMIs)
- To investigate the qualities, in a travel social media influencer, that have an impact on the followers' intention to visit a destination promoted by SMIs.

- To examine the relationship between the qualities of the SMIs and followers' emotional response to those qualities.
- To examine the relationship between the followers' emotional response and their intention to visit the destination.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were developed:

- What are the general qualities that the followers look for in SMIs in order to be 'influenced' by them?
- Do those qualities generate a positive emotional response, i.e., trust in the followers?
- How do these qualities have an impact on trust among followers?
- How does the emotional response affect the followers' intention to visit a destination promoted by SMIs?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Previously, many studies have been conducted to understand social media marketing and its effects on consumers' buying decisions (Khan, 2017; Gümüş, 2017; Lim et al.,2017). Since the concept of SMIs is relatively new, there is limited research in this area particularly relating to the tourism industry and specifically related to emerging destinations. Therefore, this study aims to understand the persuasive power of SMIs and how they have an impact on their followers' travel decisions.

Since Qatar is a country that is rich in its culture, traditions, and history, it has a high potential to become a global tourist destination. Hence, it would be an added advantage if this research could be usefully applied in the tourism sector in Qatar.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores the current literature on social media influencers, influencer marketing and its growing effect on the tourism sector.

2.1 Social Media Marketing and Tourism

Barefoot & Szabo, (2010) defined social media marketing as promoting a company and its products via social media platforms. It facilitates users of the internet to network, and share original content as “blogs, videos, wikis, reviews, or photos” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Therefore, social media marketing enables marketers to use social media as a strong platform to produce and propagate viable and affirmative word-of-mouth marketing (Jashi,2013).

Leung, et al. (2013), suggests that in tourism and hospitality management, social media seems to play a vital role as a strategic tool. Travelers use social media to share information and experiences (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010) by writing online reviews of their travel or through pictures, videos, and blog posts. This creates an unbiased and powerful textual and visual impact which leads to motivating individuals to travel.

2.2 Social Media Influencers and Influencer Marketing

Social influence “occurs when one’s emotions, opinions, or behaviors are affected by others” (Surma, 2015). Freberg, et al. (2011) define social media influencers (SMIs) as “a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, videos and the use of other social media”. In the past few years, these key opinion leaders (KOLs) are being deemed as better brand endorsers in comparison with other marketing techniques such as marketing using popular celebrities. Using such KOLs has been deemed effective as well as cost-efficient. (Harrison 2017; Patel 2016; Talaverna 2015). KOLs have been able to display positive results in customer

persuasion (Booth and Matic, 2011). Solis (2012) proposed that there are three pillars that may be used as indicators for influence – Reach, Relevance and Resonance.

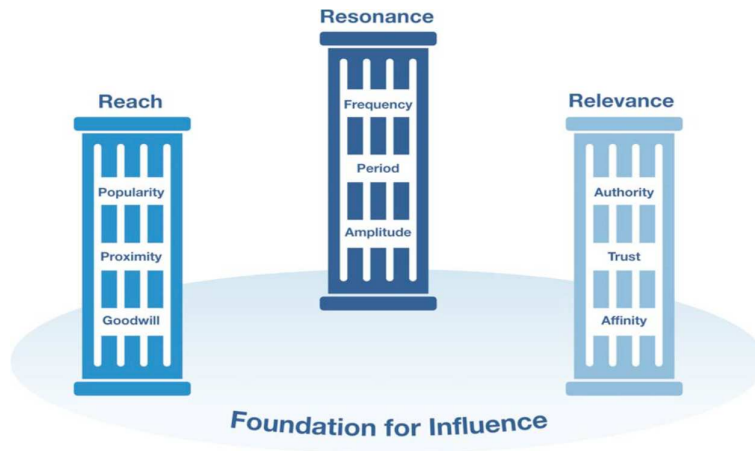


Figure 1. Pillars of Influence (Solis, 2012)

Reach, which is the first pillar, measures the extent to which influencers are known and indicates the popularity, proximity, and goodwill among their followers. Secondly, the Relevance of an influencer lies in the factors of authenticity, trust, and affinity that the followers feel towards the influencers. Resonance is mainly about the engagement and communication between influencers and their followers which are measured through the frequency, period and amplitude of communication between them.

Influencer marketing is a technique that uses these SMIs to market the product for the company or brands. Generally, those that have thousands of followers on their social media platforms are sponsored by companies to advertise their products (Tapinfluence.com, 2018). It has been reported that the consumers have a higher tendency of adhering to the recommendations of their favorite influencers (Talaverna,

2015) as they find the latter more dependable and convincing due to their continuous engagement with the followers (Berger, 2016).

A study conducted by a research company Nielson (Tapinfluence.com, 2017) showed that an influencer marketing program yielded an 11% Return on Investment when it was applied for a company in the food industry (ConvinceandConvert.com, 2016). Another study showed that 72% of the brands had included influencer marketing in their marketing budget in 2018 (Qudsi, 2018). These numbers show that SMIs are becoming of great use to encourage the purchase intentions of customers. Before the rise of social media influencers, advertising to brand consumers was one-sided. The traditional methods of marketing such as television ads, billboards, print and radio ads were one-sided. However, with the advancement in social media and social networking sites, there is now a two-way communication between brands and consumers. Furthermore, consumers now connect more with social media influencers. Hence, using SMIs in their marketing strategy helps the brands to have a positive interaction with their consumers. (Glucksman, 2017).

In the travel and tourism industry, marketers have started to identify the potential of SMIs and how they may be used to get the message across to consumers who follow them (Sigala & Gretzel, 2017).

2.3 Stimulus-Organism-Response Model

The “Stimulus-Organism-Response Model, S-O-R Model”, was proposed by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974. It was first used in the study of environmental psychology which later extended to the field of consumer psychology. This theory explains the inter-relationship between consumers’ emotions and behaviors (Belk, 1975). **Stimulus** in the S-O-R model is described as external elements that affect/stimulate individuals. **Organism** is a result of the stimulus and is the intermediate

factor between the external factors influencing an individual and the resulting behavioral action. Consequently, **Response** is the final outcome, or the decision made by the individual (Bagozzi, 1986). The S-O-R framework has been applied in many studies. For example, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2010) marketing and environmental stimuli have an influence on consumers' intellectual state and resulting decision-making processes. The S-O-R model suggested that the external inputs from the exposed environment (Stimulus) triggers internal emotion (Organism) and lead to resulting behavior (Response). Owing to this philosophy, different consumers may respond in different ways to the stimuli based on their primary internal emotion (Nunthiphatprueksa, 2017).

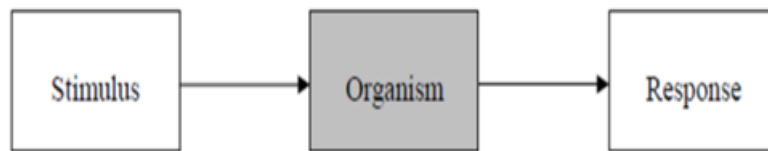


Figure 2. Stimulus-Organism-Response Model (Mehrabian and Russel, 1974)

The S-O-R model was used to develop the theoretical framework of this study. Bagozzi (1986) says that, when the S-O-R system is used to represent consumer behavior, the stimuli are external to the individual. In this study, the characteristics of SMIs are chosen as the stimuli and its impact on the emotional responses of the consumer, in this case, the follower, is the organism. Recently confirmed as “the ultimate goal of brand marketing,” Trust is recognized as one of the main factors in creating a strong bond between a consumer and a brand (Hiscock, 2002; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003).

Therefore, it is considered as a positive emotion generated in the follower. The final outcomes and decisions of followers represent the Response in the S-O-R model. These outcomes can be either “Avoidance or Approach behaviors” (Donovan and Rossiter 1982; Sherman et.al, 1997). The focus of this study is “Approach behaviors which represent positive actions that might be directed toward a particular setting”, i.e., the intention to visit a destination.

Bandura’s (1963) Social Learning Theory validates that an individual derives inspiration by observing other individuals or socializing agents. Previous studies in marketing have used this theory to understand the influence of various socialization agents such as celebrities, family, or peers on consumer consumption behavior (North and Kotze 2001; Clark et al. 2001; Martin and Bush 2000). According to Makgosa (2010), social learning theory is effective in explaining the impact of celebrities or other endorsers on consumers’ behaviors. The persuasive power of social media influencer, who are also third-party endorsers somewhat similar to celebrities, can, therefore, be analyzed using the social learning theory (Makgosa, 2010). This theory suggests that the characteristics of the SMI’s have an influence on the behavioral intentions of an individual

2.3.1 Social Media Influencers as Stimuli

Consumers on several social media platforms are constantly looking out for new content from their favorite influencers. There are numerous qualities that they may find relatable in the SMIs in order to be following them.

- *Quality of Information provided by the SMIs in their content*

According to Magno (2017), the influence exercised by the SMIs partly depends on the information quality provided by the influencers through their blogs, posts or videos.

Wang & Strong (1996) developed a preliminary conceptual framework that put forward

some aspects of data quality (DQ) such as accessibility, relevancy, accuracy, and interpretability. Later, in the course of their study, they found that the above aspects form a part of larger collectives and thus proposed four dimensions for DQ, namely, Intrinsic Data Quality, Contextual Data Quality, Representational Data Quality, and Accessibility Data Quality, wherein, each dimension constitutes of its own underlying characteristics.

Intrinsic DQ measures the extent to which data provided conforms with the actual situation and includes believability, accuracy, objectivity, and reputation. Contextual DQ is about the data that is relevant to the consumers. Thus, in addition to relevancy, it also consists of timeliness, completeness, appropriateness and value addition. Representational DQ relates to the manner in which information or data is presented to the consumers and Accessibility DQ is about the ease of access or availability of information.

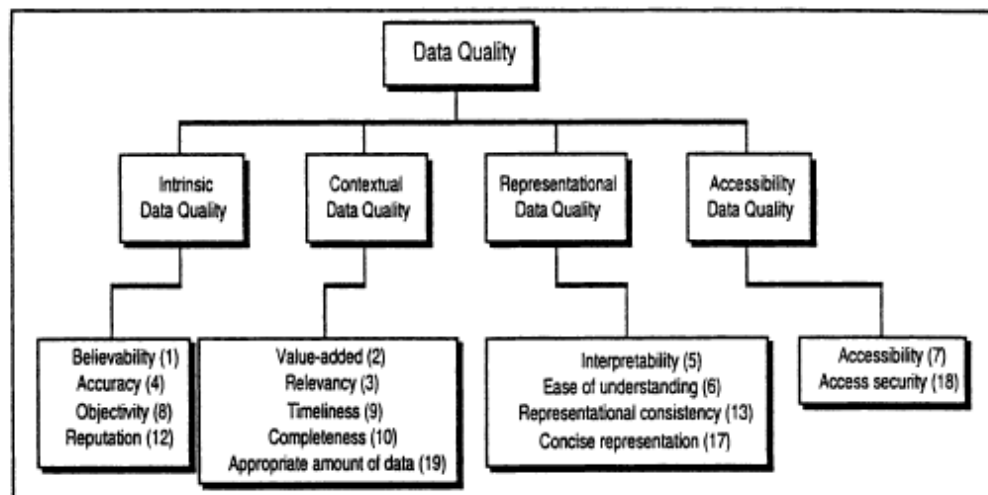


Figure 3. Data Quality (Wang and Strong, 1996)

- *Attractiveness of Content*

The creation of content for initiating awareness about products and services is known as content marketing. This helps brands to have a wider reach to their target audience and establish a relationship with them (Penpece, 2013). Content Marketing is primarily done through social media platforms as it helps to create a personal and efficient communication with the consumers (Ahmad et al., 2016).

To garner consumers' brand loyalty and support, SMIs should strive to establish an emotional connection with their followers. In order to achieve an emotional connection, SMIs should create valuable and attractive content (Turri et al., 2013). Content created by SMIs must be in line with the expectation of their audience (Gümüş, 2017). The content displayed should be visually appealing, as well as informative at the same time. Ultimately, influencer content should be memorable, helpful, or otherwise make a lasting impact on audiences (Subramanian, 2019).

- *Credibility*

One of the most widely used measures to analyze the effectiveness of marketing endorsements is credibility (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Taghipoorreyneh and De Run, 2016). Goldsmith et al. (2000) emphasize that the credibility of brands affects consumers' perceptions positively. Two key elements of credibility are trustworthiness and expertise (Friedman and Friedman, 1979). A credible source has the power to affect consumers' beliefs, opinions, approaches and actions (Wang et al. 2012). Expertise is found to play a major part in consumers' responses and behaviors (Wilson and Sherrel, 1993). It also has an impact on the attitude and purchase intentions of consumers as pointed out by Till and Busler (2000).

Erdogan (1999) describes that dignity, believability, and honesty are represented by trustworthiness. Metzger et al. (2003) noted that an endorser who is seemingly

trustworthy, as well as an expert in their field, would lead to consumers' acceptance of the message being delivered by the endorser. Therefore, social media influencers who are considered as experts and trustworthy have more influence on their followers' behaviors.

- *Authenticity*

SIMs are able to resonate more with their followers through the creation of original and authentic content (#Hashoff.com, 2017). Glucksman (2017) defined authenticity as the relatability, candidness, and genuineness that the influencers have with their followers. With the increase in social media marketing, consumers expect authenticity from brands and products (Chronis & Hampton, 2008). Authenticity has also been shown to have an impact on the consumers' message acceptance (Labrecque et al., 2011) and behavioral intentions (Napoli et al., 2014). Decisions to follow a given influencer on YouTube or Instagram are often based on the influencer's degree of authenticity (Piskorski, 2016). Some of the attributes of authenticity that have been identified are "Consistency, customer orientation, congruency, morality, and originality" (Eggers et al. 2013; Moulard et al. 2015). Eggers et al. (2013) also found that authenticity is a key factor that aids in driving and building trust among consumers.

- *Perceived popularity of the Influencer and Engagement with followers*

Presently, the popularity of an influencer is mainly defined by the number of followers. This reflects the size of the SIM's network. Consequently, the higher the number of followers, the larger is the reach of the endorsement message (De Vierman et al., 2017). The study conducted by De Vierman et al. (2017) also revealed that a large number of followers create a positive attitude towards the influencers. Followers assign more opinion leadership to those SIMs who are considered as popular.

As per the annual report from #Hashoff.com (2017) social media influencers tend to drive engagement rates that are ten times those of celebrity sponsored posts. When there is a high rate of interaction or engagement between the influencers and their followers, trust is developed between the two. Engagement/interactivity with followers is achieved primarily by soliciting feedback (Glucksman, 2017). It is based on collaborative communication and the exchange of information. SMIs engage with their followers mainly through the comments on the content posted by them. Followers provide their feedback and opinions positively or negatively and when they see that the SMIs value their constructive criticisms, there's a stronger bond that develops between them. This results in a higher influential power over the followers (Wang and Li, 2016).

2.3.2 Trust as Organism

Lau and Lee (1999) describe trust as the willingness to rely on another when faced with risk and this happens when the parties involved have an understanding among each other. Trust is an expectation within specific constraints and parameters and it involves confident positive expectations about other people's motives (Boon and Holmes, 2001). In the digital era, online trust is being discussed widely, as it plays an important role in online transactions (Pavlou, 2003). Consumers provide key financial information to process their online transactions which necessitates that there must be sufficient trust existing between the stakeholders involved (Egger, 2006).

It is also vital to have trust in an influencer-follower relationship because the SMIs can persuade their followers to listen to their recommendations only if the latter has faith in the former (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Even though the motive of SMIs is to generate more sales for a brand, consumers tend to trust their opinions more than the traditional advertisements through print media, for the same brand. Therefore, gaining the trust of followers is an important factor that determines the influence of SMIs on

the purchasing decisions of their followers (Grin.co, 2018). Followers believe their influencers when the latter gives them genuine reviews of products, positive or negative, even if it is a sponsored content (Piskorski, 2016).

2.3.3 Intention to Visit as Response

The behavioral intention of a consumer is a reflection of their future buying behavior and could be used as a suitable indicator of that behavior (Murray,1991). Influencer marketing is primarily aimed to have a positive effect on the purchase decisions of consumers (Che et al., 2017; Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen 1991; Brown et al., 2003)

Che et al. (2017) defined purchase intention as “the great desire to buy a product in the very near future”. However, the relationship between the intention to purchase and the final buying behavior depends on the decisions made by the consumers. Che et al., (2017) has also posited that trust has a significant impact on consumers’ purchase intentions. In this research, the purchase intention of consumers is the intention to visit the destination. According to Xu and Pratt (2018), there needs to be a congruence between the social media influencers and the destination being promoted by them to increase the likelihood of their followers' visit intentions. Magno and Cassia (2018) that the followers’ intention to accept the recommendations made by SMIs significantly depended on trustworthiness and quality of the information provided by the SMIs.

2.4 Research Model

Based on the above literature and applying the SOR Model, the below research model was developed. Here, the characteristics of social media influencers, such as quality of information provided by the SMIs, Attractiveness of their content, credibility, authenticity, popularity, and engagement with the followers, were used as stimuli. Trust was the organism and intention to visit the destination was considered as the response.

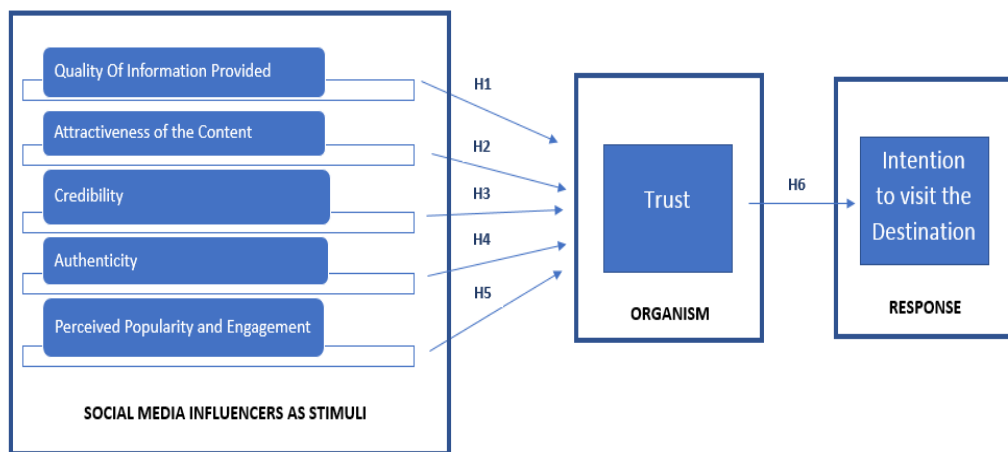


Figure 4. Research Model with Hypothesized Pathways

2.5 Hypotheses Formulation

- H1: Quality of Information provided by the SMIs has a significant and positive impact in generating trust
- H2: Attractiveness of the Content displayed by the SMIs has a significant and positive impact in generating trust
- H3: Credibility of the SMIs has a significant and positive impact in generating trust
- H4: Authenticity of the SMIs has a significant and positive impact in generating trust

- H5: Perceived Popularity and Engagement of the SMIs with their followers have a significant and positive impact in generating trust
- H6: Trust in the SMIs has a significant and positive impact on the intention to visit the destination

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides details regarding the research design, sampling, data collection method and data analysis techniques used in this study in order to test the proposed hypotheses.

3.1 Research Design

The main aim of this study was to understand what the characteristics of SMIs in the travel industry were that are most liked by their followers leading them to trust the former and thus increasing the intention to visit the destination that is being promoted by the SMIs. For this purpose, the primary data collection was done by means of an online survey. Collected data were analyzed and the results of hypotheses testing are presented.

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The target population for this research included all those who were 18+ years of age, residing in or outside Qatar, and following at least one SMI in the travel industry across different social media platforms. The sampling frame consisted of active members on social media platforms, namely, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Blogs who follow at least one social media influencer. The survey questionnaire (Appendix A) was developed in English. It was distributed to the potential respondents via Survey Monkey. Additional respondent touchpoints were created through email, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. Given the wide dispersion of the target population, it was decided to raise an online data collection method.

A pilot study was conducted with 8 participants in order to understand the clarity of questions in the survey. Based on the feedback from the pilot study, the questionnaire was modified to correct grammatical errors. Some of the questions were rephrased to

improve its clarity. In total, 288 responses were collected out of which 104 responses were excluded as they did not follow any SMI in the travel industry. Further, 60 responses were excluded owing to questionnaire incompleteness and display of potential bias in the responses given. The final response count was 124 which showed a completion rate of 82%.

3.2.1 Questionnaire Structure

The survey questionnaire was divided into 3 main sections.

- Questions 1 – 4 were used to collect demographic information
- Questions 5 – 8 asked about the most used social media platforms and most followed travel-related social media influencers. This section also filtered the respondents based on whether they follow at least one SMI in the travel genre or not.
- Question 9 was further divided into 24 sub-questions.

These included statements used to measure the various characteristics of SMIs (Q1 to Q16), Trust generated (Q17 to Q20) and the impact on Intention to Visit (Q21 to Q24). The respondents were asked to select an answer ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) on a 5-point Likert Scale.

3.2.2 Measurement Variables

The variables measured in this study were Quality of Information, Attractiveness of Content, Credibility, Authenticity, Popularity, and Engagement, Trust and Intention to Visit. Table 1 presents the items that were used in the multi-item constructs.

Table 1. Source of Questions Used to Measure Variables

Constructs	Items	Source
Quality of Information	1. I get detailed and accurate information about a particular destination 2. They help me get an insight into the culture and lifestyle of the people 3. I can easily access the information provided by them	Ahmad et al., 2016
Attractiveness of Content	4. I find their content reliable in helping me to plan my travel 5. Their social media page is visually appealing 6. I like their appearance and presentation on the Social Media	Ki and Kim, 2019
Credibility	7. I get honest information from them 8. They have the expertise in this field 9. I find them trustworthy	Metzger et al., 2003
Authenticity	10. I find them genuine 11. I feel a sense of similarity between our personalities 12. I feel they do their job morally and ethically	Glucksman, 2017
Popularity and Engagement	13. They have a large number of followers 14. They frequently interact with their followers on social media 15. They are warm and welcoming towards their followers 16. They listen to their followers' feedback and make improvements	Ki and Kim, 2019
Trust	17. I believe that the information provided by the travel influencers is true 18. I believe their recommendations are reliable 19. Based on their posts and updates on social media, I believe they are honest in their work. 20. I believe my favorite travel influencers care about their followers' interests while posting their content online.	Butler (1991); Liu et al., 2015
Intention to visit the Destination	21. Browsing through the social media page of the travel influencer, makes me want to travel 22. It is likely that I would visit the destination based on the travel influencers recommendation 23. It is likely that I would visit the same locations and follow a similar itinerary as recommended by the travel influencer 24. It is likely that I would keep in mind some of the tips recommended by the travel influencers when I visit the destination	Ki and Kim, 2019

3.3 Data Analyses Methods

The results obtained from the survey were analyzed using the SPSS 26 software. The data analysis methods used comprised both descriptive, and inferential analyses. The descriptive analysis comprised of the demographic information of the respondents (such as age, gender, education, and nationality) and descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviations, validity and reliability tests. The inferential analysis consisted of the Exploratory Factor Analysis, Correlation Matrix, and Multiple Regression Analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this section, the results obtained from the aforementioned data analysis are presented.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Profile of Respondents

The first section consists of the demographic data of the participants. It includes the age group, gender, education level, and social media choices of the respondents. This part also gives information about the usage of various social media platforms that are being used to follow the travel influencers. Table 2 shows a summary of the respondents' demographics.

Table 2. Profile of Respondents

Item	Frequency	Percent	
Age	18-20 Years	14	11.3
	21-25 Years	29	23.4
	26-30 Years	24	19.4
	31-35 Years	41	33.1
	36-40 Years	11	8.9
	Above 40 Years	5	4
Education	High School or Below	5	4
	Bachelor's Degree	76	61.3
	Master's or Above	43	34.7
Gender	Male	34	27.4
	Female	90	69.2
Choice of Social Media Platform to follow SMIs	Instagram	93	75
	Facebook	27	21.77
	YouTube	46	37.1
	Snapchat	31	25
	Twitter	7	5.65
	Blogs	8	6.45
	Other (please specify)	0.0081	0.81

The results showed that 69.2% of the participants were Females and only 27.4% were Males. Respondents were mostly aged between 21 to 35 years. When asked about their most used social media platform to follow their favorite travel influencer, 75% responded with Instagram, 37.1% responded with YouTube followed by other social media choices. This study was aimed at potential tourists who may be interested in traveling to Qatar or maybe considering Qatar as a prospective destination to visit in the future. Hence, most of the respondents were from outside of Qatar. 63.89% of the respondents were Non-Qataris and 36.11% were Qataris.

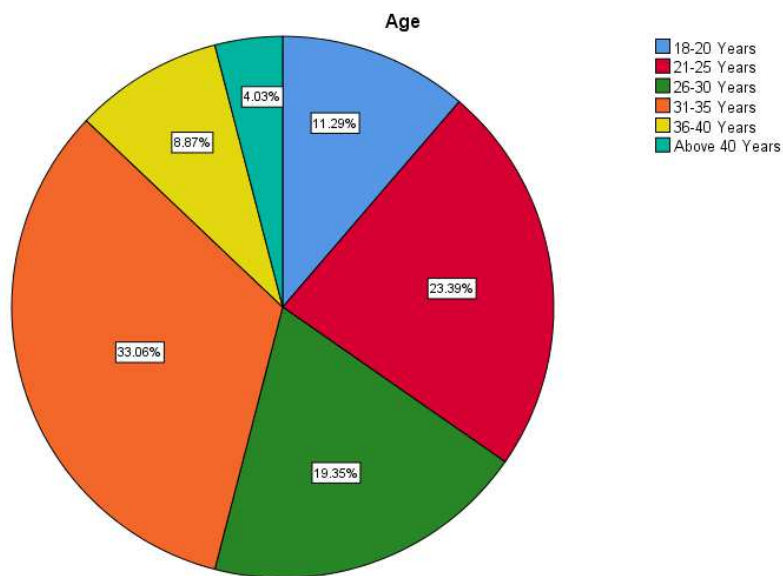


Figure 5. Respondents' profiles based on age

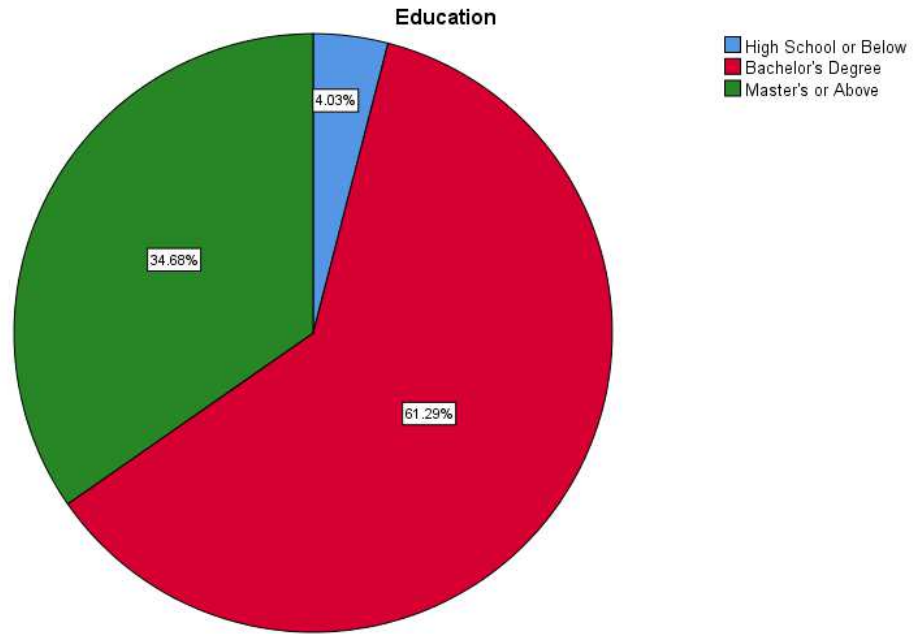


Figure 6. Respondents' profiles based on education

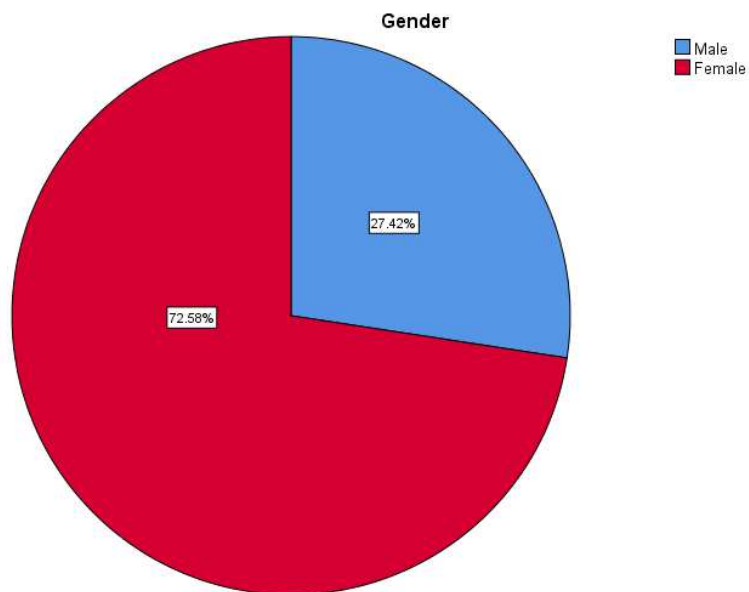


Figure 7. Respondents' profiles based on gender

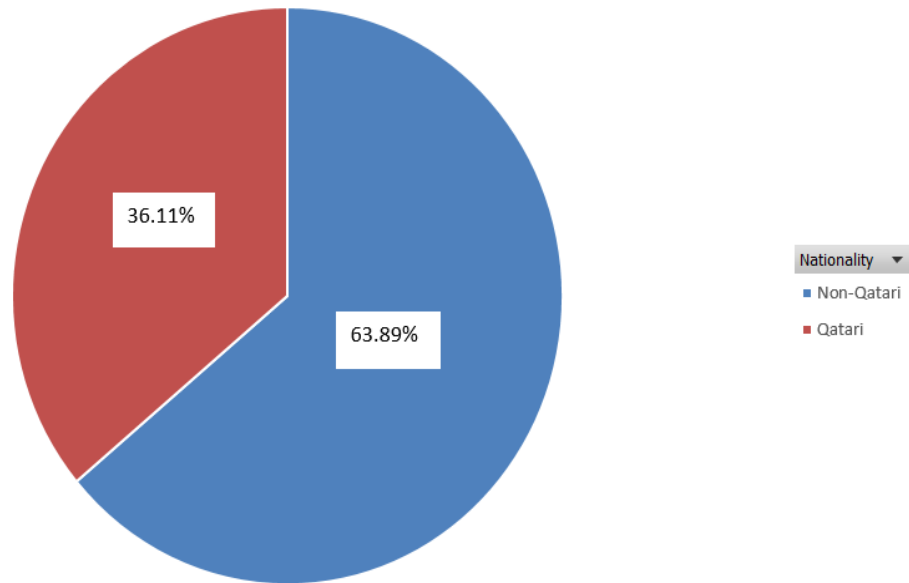


Figure 8. Respondents' profiles based on Nationality

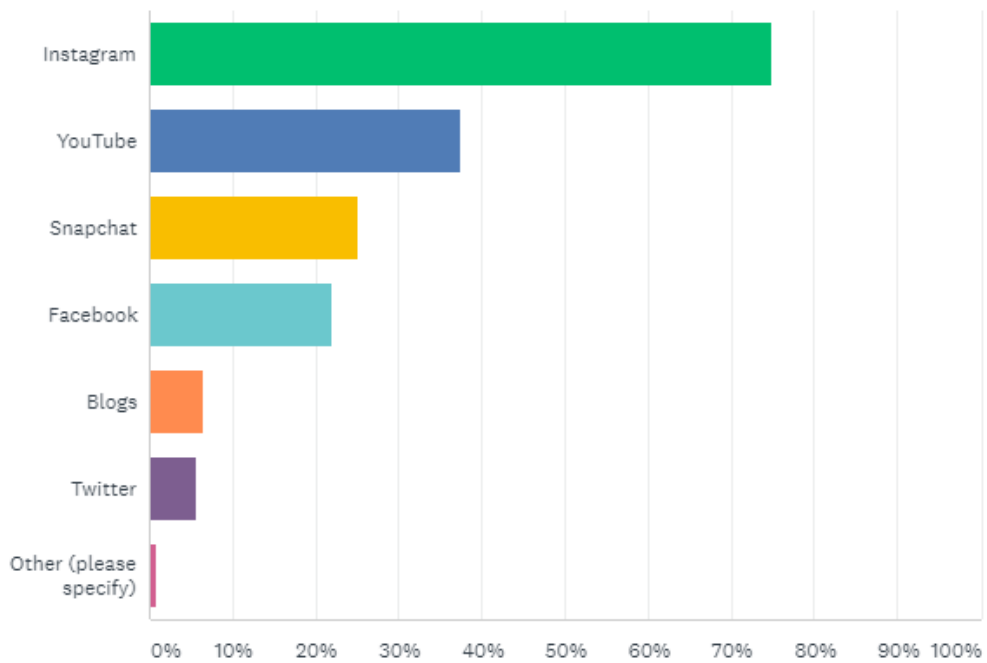


Figure 9. Respondents' profiles based on the choice of social media platform used to follow travel influencers

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics – Mean and Standard Deviation

Table 2 below gives a summary of descriptive statistics. Among the independent variables, Statement 1 – “I get detailed and accurate information about a particular destination” with a mean of 4.01, Statement 2 – “They help me get an insight into the culture and lifestyle of the people” with a mean of 4.01 (which are items measuring the quality of information) and Statement 6 – “I like their appearance and presentation on the Social Media” with a mean of 4.10 (which is an item measuring the attractiveness of content), have the highest mean score. This indicated that the participants were likely to agree that the quality of the information provided by the SMIs and the attractiveness of their content played an important role in choosing their favorite SMI.

Proceeding to the dependent variables, the statements 21 – “Browsing through the social media page of the travel influencer, makes me want to travel” (mean – 4.26) and 24 – “It is likely that I would keep in mind some of the tips recommended by the travel influencers when I visit the destination” (mean – 4.18) which measure the intention to visit the destination, have the highest mean scores, which showed that the respondents were likely to agree that following the travel SMIs generated an intention to visit the destination promoted by the influencers.

Highest standard deviations were showed by the statement 5 – “their social media page is visually appealing” (.936), statement 8 – “they have expertise in this field” (.916) and statement 13 – “they have a large number of followers” (1.009).

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables

Descriptive Statistics			
Variables	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Quality of Information	1. I get detailed and accurate information about a particular destination	4.01	.860
	2. They help me get an insight into the culture and lifestyle of the people	4.01	.841
	3. I can easily access the information provided by them	3.96	.769
Attractiveness of Content	4. I find their content reliable in helping me to plan my travel	3.97	.785
	5. their social media page is visually appealing	3.97	.936
	6. I like their appearance and presentation on the Social Media	4.10	.784
Credibility	7. I get honest information from them	3.78	.851
	8. they have the expertise in this field	3.72	.916
	9. I find them trustworthy	3.82	.766
Authenticity	10. I find them genuine	3.82	.776
	11. I feel a sense of similarity between our personalities	3.24	.949
	12. I feel they do their job morally and ethically	3.70	.826
Popularity and Engagement	13. they have a large number of followers	3.72	1.009
	14. they frequently interact with their followers on social media	3.76	.840
	15. they are warm and welcoming towards their followers	3.78	.861
	16. they listen to their followers' feedback and make improvements	3.70	.796
Trust	17. I believe that the information provided by the travel influencers is true	3.81	.810
	18. I believe their recommendations are reliable	3.89	.757
	19. Based on their posts and updates on social media, I believe they are honest in their work.	3.79	.858
	20. I believe my favorite travel influencers care about their followers' interests while posting their content online.	3.80	.754
Intention to visit the Destination	21. Browsing through the social media page of the travel influencer, makes me want to travel	4.26	.845
	22. It is likely that I would visit the destination based on the travel influencers recommendation	3.89	.746
	23. It is likely that I would visit the same locations and follow a similar itinerary as recommended by the travel influencer	3.58	.903
	24. It is likely that I would keep in mind some of the tips recommended by the travel influencers when I visit the destination	4.18	.687

4.1.3 Reliability Analysis

Reliability tests the consistency and stability of the used constructs (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Cronbach's alpha coefficient is one such test that gives the internal consistency of the constructs used (Cronbach, 1951). According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), the Cronbach's alpha value of below 0.6 is considered as poor, 0.6 to 0.7 range is acceptable and above 0.8 is good.

Hinkin, (1998) says that at least 3 items should be used in order to measure a particular construct. In this study, the constructs being measured were Quality of Information consisting of 3 items, Attractiveness of Content consisting of 3 items, Authenticity consisting of 3 items, Credibility consisting of 3 items, Popularity and Engagement of influencers having 4 items, Trust having 4 items and Intention to Visit the Destination consisting of 4 items.

As summarized in Table 3, the Cronbach's alpha value ranged from 0.648 for the Attractiveness of Content to 0.836 for Credibility. This suggested that the constructs used attained the acceptable level of 0.6 and above in terms of reliability.

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha for Constructs

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Quality of Information	3	0.784
Attractiveness of Content	3	0.648
Authenticity	3	0.765
Credibility	3	0.836
Popularity & Engagement	4	0.815
Trust	4	0.859
Intention to Visit	4	0.744

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation Analysis was performed using Pearson's Correlation in order to test the strength of the relationship between the variables. Additionally, Correlation Matrix serves as an indication (measure) of discriminant validity. When the items of a construct correlate higher among themselves than their correlation with items from other constructs, they are assumed to have discriminant validity (Zait and Berteau, 2011.) Table 4 gives the correlation between the measures used in this study. The results showed that all the independent variables namely Quality of Information (IV1), Attractiveness of Content (IV2), Authenticity (IV3), Credibility (IV4) and Popularity and Engagement (IV5) were positively correlated with the dependent variable Trust (DV1) with the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ranging from $r = 0.577$ (between Quality of Information with Trust) to $r = 0.750$ (between Credibility with Trust). Furthermore, the correlation between Trust (DV1) and Intention to Visit (DV2) was also shown as correlated positively with $r = 0.680$. All the results were significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Moreover, as none of the correlation coefficients approached 1, the matrix suggested an adequate level of discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). On the strength of the above statistical evidence, the analysis presented satisfactory justification for the appropriate validity and reliability of the measures used.

Table 5. Correlation between the Variables

		Correlations						
		IV1	IV2	IV3	IV4	IV5	DV1	DV2
IV1	Pearson Correlation	1						
IV2	Pearson Correlation	.817**	1					
IV3	Pearson Correlation	.655**	.646**	1				
IV4	Pearson Correlation	.562**	.604**	.667**	1			
IV5	Pearson Correlation	.596**	.592**	.476**	.530**	1		
DV1	Pearson Correlation	.577**	.644**	.682**	.750**	.624**	1	
DV2	Pearson Correlation	.654**	.675**	.608**	.564**	.633**	.680**	1

Level of Significance ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

4.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used in order to identify and understand the relationship between the items in the dataset. It was considered useful to perform EFA to further test the fitness of items in terms of their association with a particular construct. EFA was run so as to let items load onto a specific construct (Yong & Pearce, 2013). As a result of the conducted EFA (shown in Table 7), five components were identified. These formed the exogenous and endogenous variables of the research model.

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used on the twenty-four items which include the independent and dependent variables. First, EFA was performed on sixteen items for Quality of Information, Attractiveness of Content, Credibility, Authenticity and Popularity and Engagement, respectively. Table 6 shows the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value to be 0.893 which is above the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser 1970; 1974) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was shown to be significant at p-value less than .001 (Bartlett, 1954). As represented in Table 7, the presence of five components was

exposed. Factor 1 had three loadings which corresponded to the variable Credibility (Questions 7 to 9). Four items were loaded on Factor 2 representing the Popularity and Engagement variable (Questions 13 to 16), while three items each were loaded on Factor 3 representing Attractiveness of Content (Questions 4 to 6), Factor 4 representing Quality of Information (Questions 1 to 3) and Factor 5 representing Authenticity (Questions 10 to 12).

The second EFA was performed on eight items which represented Trust and Intention to Visit. Here, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was 0.876 which is again well above 0.6 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was shown to be significant at a p-value of less than .001. Factor 1 had four loadings that corresponded to the variable Trust (Questions 16 to 20), whereas four items were loaded on Factor 2 as well which represented the Intention to Visit variable (Questions 21 to 24). The results are presented in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 6. KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.893
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1064.660
	df	120
	Sig.	.000

Table 7. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Independent Variables

		Component				
		1	2	3	4	5
Credibility	they have the expertise in this field	.907				
	I find them trustworthy	.821				
	I get honest information from them	.806				
Popularity and Engagement	they frequently interact with their followers on social media		.702			
	they are warm and welcoming towards their followers		.617			
	they have a huge number of followers		.665			
	they listen to their followers' feedback and make improvements		.556			.518
	their social media page is visually appealing			.979		
Attractiveness of Content	I find their content reliable in helping me to plan my travel			.905		
	I like their appearance and presentation on the Social Media			.880		
	I can easily access the information provided by them				.608	
Quality of Information	They help me get an insight into the culture and lifestyle of the people				.572	
	I get detailed and accurate information about a particular destination				.590	
	I feel a sense of similarity between our personalities					.717
Authenticity	I feel they do their job morally and ethically	.874				.726
	I find them genuine					.653

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.^a

a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.

Table 8. KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.876
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	449.474
	df	28
	Sig.	.000

Table 9. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Dependent Variables

		Component	
		1	2
Trust	Based on their posts and updates on social media, I believe they are honest in their work.	.896	
	I believe that the information provided by the travel influencers is true	.888	
	I believe their recommendations are reliable	.862	
	I believe my favorite travel influencers care about their followers' interests while posting their content online	.606	
Intention to Visit the Destination	It is likely that I would visit the same locations and follow a similar itinerary as recommended by the travel influencer		.901
	It is likely that I would visit the destination based on the travel influencers recommendation		.861
	Browsing through the social media page of the travel influencer, makes me want to travel		.750
	It is likely that I would keep in mind some of the tips recommended by the travel influencers when I visit the destination		.612
		Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization. ^a a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.	

4.4 Regression Analysis

Regression Analysis was carried out to test the proposed hypotheses. This was done in two parts. First, the regression analysis was done to analyze the impact of the independent variables (Quality of Information, Attractiveness of Content, Credibility, Authenticity, and Popularity and Engagement) on Trust, which was the dependent variable. In the next regression analysis, Intention to Visit was the dependent variable while Trust as the independent variable.

4.4.1 Regression Analysis I

The first regression analysis was performed with Quality of Information, Attractiveness of Content, Authenticity, Credibility and Popularity and Engagement as Independent Variables and Trust as the Dependent Variable.

Results obtained from the regression analysis I are represented in Tables 10, 11 and 12.

Table 10 shows the R square value of .682 and this suggests a satisfactory model fit.

Furthermore, this implies that the independent variables, namely, the Quality of Information, Attractiveness of Content, Authenticity, Credibility and Popularity & Engagement can explain 68.2% of the variance in the tested part of the research model.

Table 10. Model Summary of Regression

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.826 ^a	.682	.668	.38409

a. Predictors: (Constant), Popularity, Credibility, Authenticity, information quality, Attractiveness of Content

The Anova test (Table 11) showed that the model had a statistically significant predictive ability with a p-value of less than 0.001. This implied that Trust was impacted by at least one of the independent variables. From the variables of the model (Table 12), it could be verified that the Quality of Information was not significant statistically, as it had a non-significant p-value. Thus, Hypothesis H1 was not supported and hence, rejected. However, all the other variables were found to be significant with p values less than 0.001 for Authenticity and Popularity & Engagement; p = 0.002 for Credibility and p = 0.047 for Attractiveness of Content, thereby supporting and retaining the Hypotheses H2, H3, H4, and H5.

Table 11. Anova for the Model

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	37.314	5	7.463	50.588	.000 ^b
	Residual	17.408	118	.148		
	Total	54.722	123			

a. Dependent Variable: Trust

b. Predictors: (Constant), Popularity, Credibility, Authenticity, information quality, Attractiveness of Content

Table 12. Regression Analysis I Outcomes

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		β	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	.398	.237		1.683	.095
	Information Quality	-.110	.097	-.110	-1.140	.257
	Attractiveness of Content	.189	.100	.182	2.189	.047
	Credibility	.226	.072	.249	3.156	.002
	Authenticity	.382	.071	.403	5.369	.000
	Popularity	.236	.065	.249	3.643	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Trust

4.4.2 Regression Analysis II

The second regression analysis was performed with Trust as the Independent Variable and Intention to Visit the Destination as the Dependent Variable.

The R square value was .462 (Table 13) which suggested that 46.2% of the variance in the Intention to Visit was explained by Trust. Table 14 showed that the model's predictive ability was statistically significant with a p-value of less than 0.001. Lastly, Table 15 revealed that the model was also statistically significant as Trust has a significant p-value less than 0.001. This result supports the Hypothesis.

Table 13. Model Summary of Regression

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.680 ^a	.462	.458	.44244

a. Predictors: (Constant), Trust

Table 14. Anova for the Model

ANOVA^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.545	1	20.545	104.954	.000 ^b
	Residual	23.882	122	.196		
	Total	44.427	123			

a. Dependent Variable: Intentiontovisit

b. Predictors: (Constant), Trust

Table 15. Regression Analysis II Outcomes

Coefficients^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		β	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.634	.232		7.039	.000
	Trust	.613	.060	.680	10.245	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Intentiontovisit

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This section of the study examines the results obtained in the last chapter.

The regression analysis I revealed that the quality of the information provided had no effect on generating trust among the followers of travel influencers. This was contradicting a previous study conducted by Magno (2017) which said that the quality of information presented in the posts of the influencers had an impact on the influence they have on their followers. One of the possible reasons for this finding could be that most of the people involved in this study followed travel influencers on Instagram (Section 4.1.1, Figure 8), which is primarily a platform used to post and share photographs and videos. Hence, it is possible that the individuals focused more on the visual appeal of the content rather than the overall quality of information that the posted content generated.

The other factors such as the attractiveness of content, authenticity, credibility and popularity and engagement of SMIs had a significant positive impact on generating trust. These findings were in line with the previous research (Turri et al., 2013; Metzger et al., 2003; Eggers et al., 2013; De Vierman et al., 2017). The research model showed that the characteristics of social media influencers in the travel and tourism genre, which are most liked by their followers, act as stimuli and generate a sense of trust in these influencers.

Furthermore, the model also revealed that the trust generated had a significant positive impact on the intention to visit the destination. This result also agreed with the previous literature (Che et al., 2017). It could be said that trust in the SMIs, which is the organism as per the proposed research model, led to a response among the followers, which is the intention to visit the destination that is recommended by their favorite SMIs.

Table 16 represents a summary of the results of the hypotheses testing used in this

study.

It can be noted that from six proposed hypotheses, five were supported (H2, H3, H4, H5, and H6) and one was not supported (H1). This suggests that followers trust those travel SMIs who put up visually attractive content, who are credible, original, popular and interact/engage with their followers.

Table 16. Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Result
H1: Quality of Information provided by the SMIs has a significant positive impact in generating trust	Not Supported
H2: Attractiveness of Content displayed by the SMIs has a significant positive impact in generating trust	Supported
H3: Credibility of the SMIs has a significant positive impact in generating trust	Supported
H4: Authenticity of the SMIs has a significant positive impact in generating trust	Supported
H5: Perceived Popularity of the SMIs and Engagement with their followers has a significant positive impact in generating trust	Supported
H6: Trust in the SMIs has a significant positive impact on the intention to visit the destination	Supported

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1 Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to understand the qualities of social media influencers, in the travel and tourism industry, which generate trust in the followers, thereby having an impact on the followers' intention to visit a destination promoted/recommended by the SMIs. The characteristics identified for the purpose of the study were Quality of Information provided by SMIs, Attractiveness of their Content on social media platforms, Credibility of SMIs, Authenticity of SMIs and Popularity of SMIs and the Engagement with their followers. Out of the five, Quality of Information was shown to have no impact on the trust generated whereas other factors had a significant positive impact on Trust. Additionally, the study also investigated the effect of Trust on the individual's intention to visit a destination. The results showed that trust had a significant positive impact on the follower's intention to visit the destination promoted by the SMIs.

Identifying the appropriate travel social media influencers who have an impact on the followers' travel choices can be useful to promote Qatar as a tourist destination. In addition to the already existing promotional tools such as advertising and media familiarization visits, QNTC can also incorporate influencer marketing into their marketing strategy. This could aid in further expanding Qatar as a popular destination for travel and tourism.

6.2 Limitations

One of the main limitations encountered in this study was the low sample size. Even though 288 participants responded to the survey, only 124 responses could be retained. Larger sample size could have given a more accurate data. Additionally, in this

research, there were only 4.03% of participants aged 40 and above. The results could have been different had the distribution of respondents based on age been somewhat close to each other. Furthermore, the study was limited only to the followers' perspective and not from the SMI's perspective as to how they are able to have an influence on their followers.

6.3 Future Research

In the future, this research could be conducted to analyze individually, the impact of each quality mentioned in this study (such as authenticity, popularity) on the followers' intention to visit a destination.

Also, another approach could be to study how the impact of social media influencers varies across different social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Blogs.

Furthermore, SMIs are also active in various other industries to include food, beauty, fashion, lifestyle, and consumer technology. Hence, it is recommended that more studies be conducted on how SMIs can be used to promote these particular industries.

In addition, small businesses in a country such as restaurants, independent fashion stores could also be a target of a study that evaluates the impact of influencer activity on their promotional effectiveness.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

This study is approved by the Qatar University Institutional Review Board with the approval number.....; If you have any questions related to ethical compliance of the study you may contact them at QU-IRB@qu.edu.qa.

The survey is conducted as part of the Applied Graduation Project for MBA at Qatar University and your participation in this is highly appreciated. The study aims to understand the importance of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in promoting Qatar as a tourist destination. The research investigates the participants' perspective on choosing their favorite SMI within the travel industry, and how the former's travel choices are affected by these SMIs.

This study is targeted only at those who are of 18 years of age and above and are active on social media platforms. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and does not involve any cost or financial benefits. By participating, you offer great help and benefit to research within the field. Moreover, participants can withdraw from the study at any given time with no explanation required for such withdrawal. All possible considerations were given to guarantee and ensure the safety of the participants, avoid any harm, and maintain their well-being. Your response will be used solely for research purposes. Participants' identities will remain anonymous, and all the collected data will remain strictly confidential. The collected data will be only accessed by the student and the supervisor, will not be shared with any third party and will be stored in safely protected media and/or place.

The research questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes of your time. The results of the study will be available to the participants through the thesis, on its completion, or related publication.

If you have any questions regarding the survey or research study, please feel free to contact;

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Please indicate that you have read, understood and if you agree to participate.

Kindly click on “Yes” to start the survey.

If you do not wish to participate, kindly exit the survey.

Thank you for your valuable time.

1. Age

- Below 18
- 18 – 20
- 21 – 25
- 26 – 30
- 31 – 35
- 36 – 40
- Above 40

2. Nationality

3. Gender

- Male
- Female

4. Education

- High School or below
- Bachelor’s Degree
- Master’s or above

5. Which of the following social media platforms do you use the most?

- Instagram
 - Facebook
 - YouTube
 - Snapchat
 - Twitter
 - Blogs
 - Others (please specify)
-

6. Do you follow any travel influencers on social media?

- Yes
- No
-

*(If No, thank you for your time, you may exit the survey)

*(If yes, please continue with the rest of the questionnaire)

7. Please name some of the travel influencers that you follow on social media.

8. On which social media platform do you follow your favorite travel influencers the most? (you may choose more than one social media platform)

- Instagram
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Snapchat
- Twitter
- Blogs
- Others (please specify)

9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements

I like to follow my favorite travel influencers because

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I get detailed and accurate information about a particular destination					

2. They help me get an insight into the culture and lifestyle of the people					
3. I can easily access the information provided by them					
4. I find their content reliable in helping me to plan my travel					
5. I like their appearance and presentation on the Social Media					
6. their social media page is visually appealing					
7. I get honest information from them					
8. they have the expertise in this field					
9. I find them trustworthy					
10. I find them genuine					
11. I feel a sense of similarity between our personalities					
12. I feel they do their job morally and ethically					
13. they have a huge number of followers					
14. they frequently interact with their followers on social media					
15. they are warm and welcoming towards their followers					
16. they listen to their followers' feedback and make improvements					
17. I believe that the information provided by the					

travel influencers is true					
18. I believe their recommendations are reliable					
19. Based on their posts and updates on social media, I believe they are honest in their work.					
20. I believe my favorite travel influencers care about their followers' interests while posting their content online.					
21. Browsing through the social media page of the travel influencer, makes me want to travel					
22. It is likely that I would visit the destination based on the travel influencers recommendation					
23. It is likely that I would visit the same locations and follow a similar itinerary as recommended by the travel influencer					
24. It is likely that I would keep in mind some of the tips recommended by the travel influencers when I visit the destination					