

Persuasion Mechanism of Social Media Influencers in Tourism

Ni Made Wulandari Kusumadewi

Faculty of Economic and Business, Udayana University, Bali, Indonesia

Abstract

Influencer marketing, the practice of taking advantage of key influencers (e.g., social media influencers) to promote or endorse brands' products and services, is attracting increasing attention in both academia and business. Social media influencers are regarded as online opinion leaders who act as important sources of advice for other consumers, especially in the tourism industry where purchases are intangible and considered risky. The study aim to provide an in-depth understanding of the persuasion mechanism trough which social media influencers affect behavioral intentions of Millennials, which represents one of the most promising market segments of the global tourism industry.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing; Social Media Influencers; Tourism; Millennials.

1. PROBLEM DEFINITION

Social media influencers (abbreviated as SMIs) represent a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through social networking sites (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017) defines SMIs as a user of social media who accumulated great following and established credibility and whose high reach and authenticity can lead to impact and persuasion in interaction with their following. SMIs become leading online figures because they perceived as experts in a specific field, and as a consequences they become a reliable source of information (Cassia & Magno, 2019). Their opinions have a powerful impact on people, especially on young generation (Kadekova & Holiencinova, 2018) who are members of particular communities gathered around similar interest (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

In the tourism industry, destinations can be considered as brands or products, and using SMIs as an endorser can mark the distinctiveness of a destination (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Axon Marketing & Communications (2019) stated in their report that tourism is one of the industries developed by influencers. The impact of influencers is increasing in the purchase decision of travelers with more than 80% of tourists believe opinions of the leaders. They chose travel destinations, hotels, airlines and agencies based on the advice of influencers. Followers trust influencers' choice more than advertisements. In addition, 82 % of tourism services users (age 18-35 years) follow social media, travel blogs, fashion and / or lifestyle influencers, whereas more than 85% of social media users follow at least 3 travel, fashion, and / or lifestyle influencers.

Despite the growing popularity of influencer marketing, the adoption of influencer marketing possesses some challenges. Of the major challenges of influencer marketing is how to identify the so-called right influencers (Araujo, Neijens, & Vliegenthart, 2016); Mediakix, 2019) therefore encourage the need to develop a better theoretical understanding of the drivers and effects of SMI communication (Bakker, 2018; Sundermann & Raabe, 2019; Voorveld, 2019) especially in the travel and tourism context (Cassia & Magno, 2019; Gretzel, 2018; Magno & Cassia, 2018) . This research aims to understand on the principal traits of SMIs in tourism that allow them to amass audience in the first place and gain influence over their audiences, what drives the persuasiveness of influencer in their role as online opinion leader.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study specifically examines the impact of source credibility, reach, interaction, and content quality on the perceived opinion leadership and behavioral intention of Millennial. To achieve these aims, the researcher employed the premises of the stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) theory that depicts the effects of environmental stimuli on consumer responses. SMIs related characteristics as environmental factors to which consumers are exposed, might function as a stimulus to customers. The internal reactions of customers might entail responses of (greater or lower) perceived opinion leader, as an organism, inside SOR theory. In turn, perceived opinion leadership likely influences behavioral responses. Response behaviors could include travel intentions and social media WOM. Furthermore this study employ mimicry desire in Consumer Doppelganger Theory (Ruvio, Gavish, & Shoham, 2013) as mediator linking the attitudinal beliefs (perceived opinion leader) to behavioral intention (travel intention).

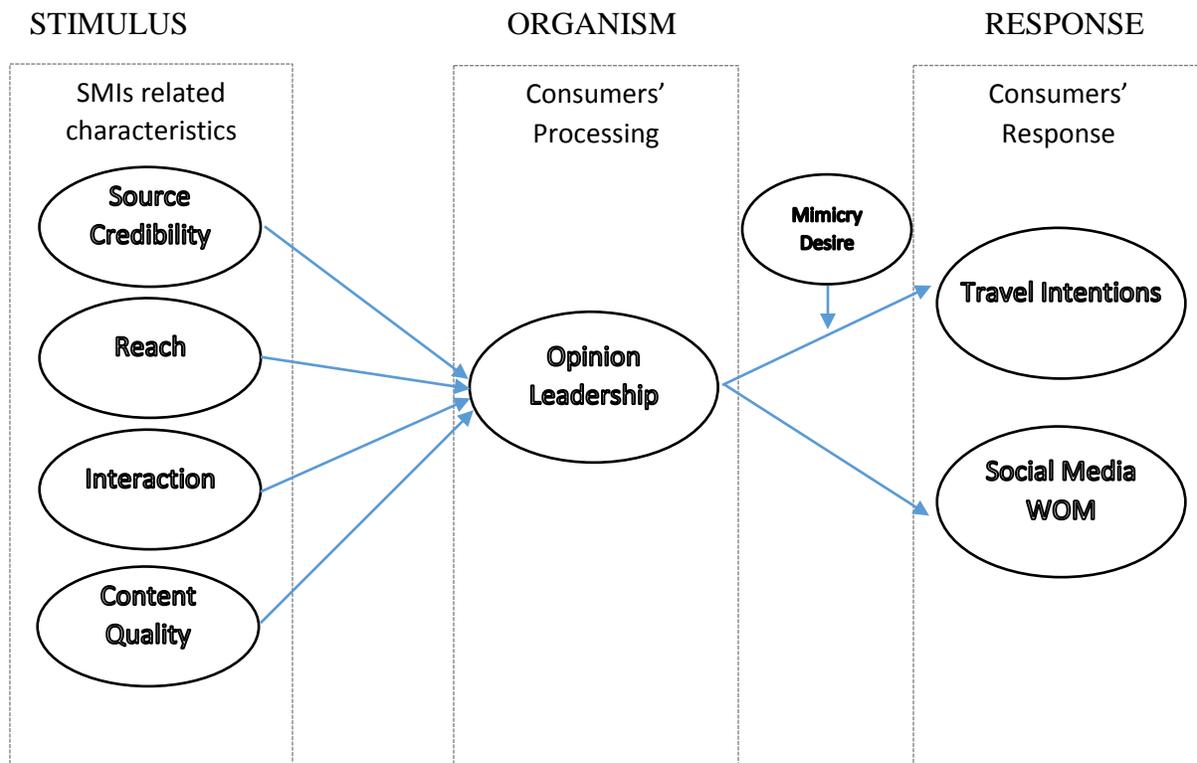
Research questions

RQ1: How source credibility, reach, interaction and content quality of SMIs impact their perceived opinion leadership?

RQ2: How SMIs perceived opinion leadership impact their followers’ behavioral response, both in terms of travel intention and social media WOM.

3. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

To attest the conceptual model the study included both the quantitative approaches (i.e., descriptive, survey research) and qualitative approach (i.e., focus group). The quantitative methods performed to statistically attest the proposed conceptual model and hypothesis this study through the use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The qualitative approach employed a focus group discussion to gain insight as to why users favor and follow certain SMIs.



Proposed Research Framework

Hypothesis

H1a: SMIs trustworthiness has a positive effect on perceived opinion leadership.

H1b: SMIs expertise has a positive effect on perceived opinion leadership.

H2: SMIs reach (number of followers) has a positive effect on perceived opinion leadership.

H3: SMIs interaction has a positive effect on perceived opinion leadership.

H4: SMIs content quality has a positive effect on perceived opinion leadership.

H5: Opinion leadership has a positive effect on followers' social media WOM.

H6: Opinion leadership has a positive effect on followers' travel intention.

H7: Conscious mimicry desire strengthens the influence of opinion leadership on followers' travel intention.

4. EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION

Theoretical contribution

This study offers theoretical contributions to the existing literature on influencer marketing by integrating relevant theories to explain the persuasion mechanism of social media influencers in tourism context, by identifying the principal traits that enable SMI to impact their audiences.

Managerial contribution

Investigating the persuasion mechanism of social media influencers will help brands, marketers, agencies, and influencers in developing successful influencer marketing strategies.

5. REFERENCES

- Axon Marketing & Coomunications (2019). Influencer marketing trends in tourism for 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.axonlatam.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Whitepaper-2019.pdf>
- Araujo, T., Neijens, P., & Vliegenthart, R. (2016). Getting the word out on Twitter: the role of influentials, information brokers and strong ties in building word-of-mouth for brands. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(3), 496-513. doi:10.1080/02650487.2016.1173765
- Bakker, D. (2018). Conceptualising influencer marketing. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management*, 1(1), 79-87.
- Cassia, F., & Magno, F. (2019). Assessing the Power of Social Media Influencers. In *Predicting Trends and Building Strategies for Consumer Engagement in Retail Environments* (pp. 169-186).
- De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 798-828. doi:10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035
- Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 90-92. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.11.001

- Gretzel, U. (2018). Influencer marketing in travel and tourism. In *Advances in Social Media for Travel, Tourism and Hospitality: New Perspectives, Practice and Cases* (pp. 147-156): New York: Routledge.
- Kadekova, Z., & Holiencinova, M. (2018). Influencer marketing as a modern phenomenon creating a new frontier of virtual opportunities. *Communication Today*, Vol. 9(No. 2).
- Magno, F., & Cassia, F. (2018). The impact of social media influencers in tourism. *Anatolia*, 29(2), 288-290. doi:10.1080/13032917.2018.1476981
- Ruvio, A., Gavish, Y., & Shoham, A. (2013). Consumer's doppelganger: A role model perspective on intentional consumer mimicry. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 12(1), 60-69. doi:10.1002/cb.1415
- Sundermann, G., & Raabe, T. (2019). Strategic communication through social media influencers: Current state of research and desiderata. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13(4), 278-300. doi:10.1080/1553118x.2019.1618306
- Uzunoğlu, E., & Kip, S. M. (2014). Brand communication through digital influencers: Leveraging blogger engagement. *International Journal of Information Management*, 34(5), 592-602. doi:10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2014.04.007
- Voorveld, H. A. M. (2019). Brand communication in social media: A research agenda. *Journal of Advertising*, 48(1), 14-26. doi:10.1080/00913367.2019.1588808
- Xu, X., & Pratt, S. (2018). Social media influencers as endorsers to promote travel destinations: An application of self-congruence theory to the Chinese Generation Y. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 35(7), 958-972. doi:10.1080/10548408.2018.1468851