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## The Influence of Instagram Influencers Source Credibility towards Domestic Travel Intention

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### Abstract

The usage of social media influencers is growing in tourism, especially during the pandemic. This study examined the direct effects of Instagram influencers' source credibility on domestic travel intention. This study measured five dimensions of influencers' source credibility: attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, entertainment value, and similarity. A total of 283 responses were gathered. The study results indicate that social media influencers' attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise and entertainment value significantly influence domestic travel intention. Moreover, the study discovered that social media influencers' entertainment value was the most important element perceived by Malaysian travellers to measure their travel intention within the country. This study's findings assist tourism policymakers and related tourism stakeholders in understanding the importance of social media influencers in generating tourism demand. This study also makes a unique contribution to product social marketing literature, with evidence highlighting how social media influencer source credibility may be used to increase domestic travel intention effectively.

**Keywords:** Instagram, Influencers, Source Credibility, Travel Intention, Social Media

### Introduction

Tourism has developed over the decades into a favourable business sector, providing significant economic growth for countries worldwide (UNWTO, 2018). According to Malaysia Investment Development Authority (2020), the tourism industry was recorded as the third significant foreign income contributor for Malaysia in 2019 after the manufacturing and agriculture sector. Malaysia welcomed more than 26 million foreign tourists in 2019, with MYR86.14 billion in tourist expenditure. It is important to note that the domestic tourism industry performed well pre-COVID-19 as 239.1 million Malaysian visitors, 332.4 million trips and generated RM 103.2 billion of tourism receipts were recorded in 2019 (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2020). The Visit Malaysia 2020 campaign was launched to reach 30 million visitor arrivals to further capitalise on this industry. However, the campaign has been cancelled prematurely because of the COVID-19 epidemic. As a result, tourist arrivals fell in 2020 as Malaysia closed its borders to overseas travellers and limited admission for non-residents and tourism-related companies suffered a severe drop in revenues (Tourism Malaysia, 2020).

KPMG Malaysia (2020) proposed that the Malaysian tourism industry may take four years to recover from the pandemic fully. Industry players should change their business model into more localise, digitalisation, cost, and data management efficiency. In addition, most researchers and industry experts argue that domestic tourism is the best alternative to revive the industry in Malaysia during the pandemic (Chan, 2021). Hence, with the easing of local social movement, Malaysia aggressively promoted domestic tourism 'Cuti – Cuti Malaysia' campaign to encourage Malaysian citizens to travel within the country frequently (Khalid et al., 2020). Moreover, the Malaysian government actively focuses on social media marketing in the tourism industry. They hosted the Malaysia-ASEAN Tourism Influencers Key Opinion Leaders Programme (MAIKOL) to use regional social media influencers and their fan base to promote Malaysian tourism attractions.

As tourism demand increases, travellers prefer faster, personalised and easier access to information from a digital platform (Hunter et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2018). World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (2020) stated that most travellers use their mobile devices for ground arrangement, flight check-in, information search in the surrounding destination area, and sharing their travel experience through online platforms. Mohsin (2020) reported more than 3.5 billion active social media users globally, spanning major networking apps such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and Bigo. Hence, shifting tourism businesses to digital platforms became essential among tourism operators and destinations. Besides, the growth of social media platforms has led to the emergence of social media influencers, also known as internet celebrities (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Social media communication and marketing practices are important channels to boost the tourism industry, especially during the pandemic crisis (Femenia-Serra et al., 2022).

Abdul Razak and Mansor (2021) claimed that social media influencers are online personalities with many followers and often have some kind of experience in certain fields, such as healthy living, foods, cosmetics, technology, or travel. In their study, Han and Chen (2021) stated that many brands incorporate social media influencer marketing in their strategy to affect consumers' decision-making. Although social media influencer is considered effective microcelebrity marketing (Jaya et al., 2020), online users may have a sceptical mindset about the messages or information delivered by certain influencers (Jang et al., 2021). As experience was emphasised rather than expertise, the credibility of social media influencers is perceived as an important source of information for businesses in conveying messages about products, services and destinations (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). Somehow, influencers' credibility could be questionable compared to traditional word of mouth since the tourism businesses use them as a marketing tool to promote a destination, product or service. Recent researchers proposed that studies on social media influencers' credibility could be interesting, especially during the pandemic crisis, to identify their influence on future travel intention.

Theoretically, recent studies have been carried out to investigate the credibility of social media influencers from various perspectives. The source credibility of influencers was evaluated through several dimensions such as attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021), accuracy and reliability (Han & Chen, 2021), similarity, trustworthiness, expertise, entertainment values and attractiveness (Balaban & Mustatea, 2019; Gaber et al., 2019; Muda & Hamzah, 2021). Furthermore, Femenia-Serra et al (2022) emphasised that there is still limited knowledge and scarce empirical evidence on social media influencer influence towards travel or visit intention. They added a need for an

extension in research on the tourism influencers' role, content and engagement. On that note, there is an urgency to examine the effect of social media influencers' source credibility on travel intention.

This study's objectives are twofold. Firstly, this study aims to determine the Instagram influencers' source credibility perceived by Malaysian online users. Second, the researcher proposed to examine the influence of the source credibility of Instagram influencers on Malaysian domestic travel intention. The findings of this study are valuable to tourism stakeholders especially travel businesses and policymakers. They could be used as a reference for travel operators and agencies to help improve their online visibility, especially in the social media realm and post-COVID-19 pandemic period. Besides, there are still limited such studies undertaken in Malaysia's case. The result from this study could support further research on influencers' source credibility from different settings and views.

## Literature Review

### Instagram as Social Media Platform

Instagram is one of the most well-known social media platforms that allow people to acquire tourism information in various ways (Tobias-Mamina et al., 2020). It enables users to share videos or photos and, at the same time, add interesting effects (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). They enhance the user experience by introducing other new interactive features such as stories, Instagram TV, filters, Instagram Live and stickers. Instagram also encourages users to share and endorse promotional posts via tags and likes, resulting in word-of-mouth advertising (Constine, 2018; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Instagram performs best with visually dynamic material to cover travel, photography, fashion, beauty, fitness, food, and other topics and lifestyle influencers and celebrities who post personal details about their lives.

According to Statista (2022), Instagram reached 1.07 billion active users in 2021, and it is forecasted to reach close to 1.18 billion users in 2023. From Malaysia's perspective, the Malaysia Communication and Multimedia Commission (2020) reported that Instagram has significantly increased from 57% in 2018 to 63.1% in 2020 of active users. In 2021, the number of users will keep increasing to 13.8 million (Statista, 2022). The positive number of active Instagram users shows that the social media platform has become an essential channel for people to share their experiences interactively. It simultaneously could inspire others to make purchase decisions.

Recently, research on Instagram as a social media platform has been extensively conducted in tourism and hospitality. For instance, Instagram advertising (Tobias-Mamina et al., 2020), follower's reactions to product posts (Belanche et al., 2020), information sources (Gumpo et al., 2020), Instagram influencers' source credibility (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021), travel-related content exposure (Asdecker, 2022), usage emoji post (Distel et al., 2022) as well as influencers communication and role during COVID-19 crisis (Femenia-Serra et al., 2022). Based on the literature, this study postulates that Instagram influencers' source credibility is one of the study areas to investigate further, as suggested by (Femenia-Serra et al., 2022).

### Source Credibility of Influencers

The rise of social media has given voice to a new type of celebrity known as micro-celebrities or influencers (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018), bloggers and Insta-celebrities (Hwang &

Zhang, 2018; Razak & Mansor, 2021). They are well-known as social media influencers. These individuals significantly influence public decisions about what items they buy, what services they utilise, and what causes they support (Zeljko et al., 2018). According to Haenlein et al. (2020), influencers mostly utilise the Instagram platform to establish niche followers around communities on specific themes. Influencers play an important role in the travel and tourism context by conveying travel and tourism information for exposure (Asdecker, 2022) and showing their credibility as the content creator in which able to influence other's travel intentions (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). With the creativity and accuracy of the information on social media platforms, online users are induced to scroll their news feeds and stream new photos or videos (Abidin, 2018).

Jun and Yi (2020) stated that Instagram influencers work hard to cultivate loyal followers who believe in them and their products. Working with these influencers has the added benefit of generating attractive user-generated content (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The most followed celebrity influencers or Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) on Instagram could have more than 100 million followers that support and shares KOL engaging product review posts (Lee & Kim, 2020). In particular, several well-known names in travel-related influencers have been followed by online users worldwide. The influencers have reached almost five million followers: Murad Osman, Jack Morris, Lauren Bullen, and Loki. It is currently norm for tourism destinations to collaborate with these influencers to tap their target market. Nonetheless, many other freelance KOLs promote destinations without official engagement, highlighting the concern about their sources' credibility.

Source credibility can be described as the key concept that expresses all of the positive features and functions of a message by the recipient and shows how much the recipient believes in the sender (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). Han and Chen (2021) stated that source credibility commonly relates to sources' reliability and the contents' accuracy and consistency. Source credibility dimensions of social media influencers have been employed frequently to evaluate their effectiveness in persuading people's decisions. Most of the studies have adapted attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise as the main dimensions (Balaban & Mustatea, 2019; Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). Taillon et al (2019) stated that attractiveness includes likeability and the physical attractiveness of the influencer. Attractiveness refers to the first impression and corresponds to the physical appreciation of the social media influencers (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Muda and Hamzah (2021) stated that trustworthiness is directly related to persuasion and message effectiveness. Trustworthiness can be measured through trusted endorsement by online users (Mena et al., 2020). The influencer's expertise reflects on their degree of knowledge in a particular area of interest (Muda & Hamzah, 2021), which in this case is travel and tourism.

Besides the three dimensions, some studies focus on the other aspects of social media influencers, such as similarity or homophily. Balaban and Mustatea (2019) claimed that similarity relates to the likeness between social media influencers and their respective followers, especially demographic and ideological factors. Finally, Gaber et al. (2018) define entertainment value on the Instagram advertisements as pleasant, enjoyable, and amusing content gained by online users. Furthermore, influencer presumes' entertainment value is likelier than a traditional advertisement (Balaban & Mustatea, 2019). The researchers propose evaluating the Instagram influencers' source credibility by adapting these relevant



five dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, similarity, and entertainment value. Over the years, the requirement to measure the credibility of social media influencers has been recognised due to the rapid evolution of digital platforms and consumer demand. As stated earlier, a study on Instagram as an information tool is needed since the networking site offers multiple interactive features and applications to their active users to share experiences and moments.

### **Travel intention**

Travel intentions are the subjective likelihood that a consumer will or will not take specific activities linked to a tourism service. Potential consumers' travel intentions are their perceived probability of visiting the place within a given time period (Zhang et al., 2016). In this case, the traveller's intention to visit domestically is assessed through their willingness to travel, the likelihood of future travel, and spending their time and money to travel within the country. Yilmazdogan et al (2021) claimed that travel intention could be derived from travellers reacting to various motivation sources or factors. The higher individual's travel intention is, the more likely they are willing to travel in the future. This result indicates the importance of measuring travelers' intentions to see exactly what they are likely to do. Das and Tiwari (2021) explained that intention could be seen as more effective than actual behavioural in capturing consumers' thoughts. Customers can buy goods based on limitations rather than real preferences, such as time comfort, lack of substitutes, and monetary rewards.

Domestic travel intention refers to the desire of a local citizen or resident to visit within their country that is not at their habitual residence for a period of at least 24 hours but less than that one year. The purpose of domestic travel intention can be for relaxation, vacation, sports, business, meetings, conferences, studies, visits to friends or family, health, mission or religious work (Gössling et al., 2019). However, the competitive nature of the tourism industry requires a destination to position itself differently from competing destinations, especially for the domestic market. Besides, with outbound travel getting cheaper and more affordable, domestic tourism tackles the willingness and ability of people to buy a certain amount of tourism products at different prices during a particular period of time locally rather than internationally (Henderson, 2009), which is influence by many prices and non-price factors (Dwyer et al., 2020). Accordingly, there is a need to understand what factors influence tourist choice.

To gain a competitive edge, a tourism destination has to ascertain the correct image indicating the type of tourism offering to the potential target. Notably, KOLs can influence this via social media platforms. However, to date, a limited study has been done on understanding the impact of social media and its source credibility in generating domestic tourism demand. This limitation could have a significant impact on domestic tourism revenue. Hence, empirical assessments are needed due to understand the effectiveness of the domestic tourism campaign remains unknown to all, even though a tremendous amount of budget has been invested in promoting domestic tourism activity in Malaysia. Taking the source credibility of Instagram influencers that provide travel information about Malaysia into account, this study aims to examine the dimensions of influence on domestic travel intention among Malaysians.

### Source Credibility and Travel Intention

Nascimento (2019) highlights that social media influencers' credibility in Portugal can influence users' purchase intention. However, they also found that the influence depends on the user involvement on social media platforms. Meanwhile, Tobias-Mamina et al (2020) discovered the stimulating effect of media content. Instagram influencer advertising can encourage affective responses, influencing consumer intention to attend or not visit the advertised destination. Within the tourism context, the influencer content creates visitors' perception of a destination, particularly for first-timers.

Lou and Yuan (2019); Taillon et al (2019); Yilmazdogan et al (2021) proposed the attractiveness attributes of social media influencers commonly evaluated from various perspectives, such as his or her glamorous, attractiveness, good-looking, charming and even sexy. Similarly, Balaban and Mustatea (2019) revealed that most European respondents agreed that to be a successful social media influencer, an individual must be attractive enough to persuade others. However, empirical results found an insignificant relationship between influencer attractiveness and behavioural intentions. For instance, Yilmazdogan et al (2021) perceived attractiveness could not influence travel intention among Turkish. It shows that the physical appearance of social media influencers does not change their perception and intention. Although Nascimento (2019) identified that Portuguese perceived social media influencer attractiveness could influence consumers' purchase intention, but not for individuals with a high level of involvement with social media influencers.

According to Mena et al (2020), the perceived trustworthiness of the individual or group that developed the message or content might influence credibility. The perception of trustworthiness of people who promote the content, either through sharing or liking the content, may provide a higher judgment of reliability than the actual source of some online content. The trustworthiness of influencers' credibility can be examined through their honesty, dependability on the actual fact, sincerity, consistency and accuracy of the information provided (Han & Chen, 2021; Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). From business's view, a trustworthy source ensures that customers receive marketing messages better, making travel intent that may occur as a result easier to foresee (Weismueller et al., 2020). Han and Chen (2021) also claimed that the source credibility of influencers that involves trustworthiness elements could influence online users' attitudes and travel intentions.

Influencers publish regular social media updates in their area of expertise, delivering generally persuasive messages to their followers that are both informative and entertaining (Lou et al., 2019). Hence, online users' trust in Instagram based on the reviews was formed by the celebrities' and influencers' expertise and their knowledge pertaining to those products (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). A previous study in Romania claimed that expertise is perceived as a gender-related element (Balaban & Mustatea, 2019). Men are probably experts in car and gadgets, while women are more influential in fashion and lifestyle. The expertise of social media influencers can be assessed in several attributes, such as their experience, knowledge and qualification on certain products or services (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). They have discovered that the expertise of social media influencers on travel and tourism positively influences travel intention. On that note, it can conclude that experts in certain areas or fields may have a powerful impact on people's perception and future intention.

Influencers bring personal aesthetic elements and personality twists to their posts, normally leading to an entertaining experience (entertainment value) for their followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Both researchers also added that followers might react to any specific branded posts if they found out the content published was perceived as informative and had entertainment value. Xu and Pratt (2018) stated that organisations or brands had used entertainment celebrities or influencers as their effective marketing endorsers. Entertainment values could catch the attention of online users with interesting and informative content. In this study context, the entertainment value is adapted from Gaber et al (2019) which Instagram influencers must be amusing, enjoyable and entertaining to influence other online user's travel intentions. Entertainment value could be from the physical appearance as well as the content of information itself.

One of the most popular and perceived advantages of digital influencers is that they are regular users on social media like everyone else (Grave, 2017). The extent followers develop a good relationship with influencers impacts how they are persuaded by the latter's social media advertisements (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). The similarity of the Instagram influencer and the audience is very important to increase their trust because people usually trust individuals similar to them. For example, the audience places far more faith in them than when the influencer belongs to a totally different perspective (Jamil & Hassan, 2018). Balaban and Mustatea (2019) stated that people feel so close with the influencers with a high degree of identification with theirs. Muda and Hamzah (2021) revealed that source homophily or similarity indirectly relates to e-word of mouth and purchase intention in Malaysia. They explained that the young generation especially would trust the User Generated Content (UGC) source credibility with a similar ideology and demographic profile.

In short, previous research shows that the source credibility of social media influencers, which are attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, entertainment value, and similarity, is presumed to significantly influence travel intention. This study adapted the credibility dimensions of social media influencers; attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, entertainment value and similarity, which is widely acknowledged in literature (Balaban & Mustatea, 2019; Gaber et al., 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed in Instagram source credibility, and Malaysian user domestic travel intention based on the literature discussed.

- H<sub>1</sub>: Instagram influencer attractiveness significantly influences domestic travel intention.*
- H<sub>2</sub>: Instagram influencer trustworthiness significantly influences domestic travel intention.*
- H<sub>3</sub>: Instagram influencer expertise significantly influences domestic travel intention.*
- H<sub>4</sub>: Instagram influencer entertainment value significantly influences domestic travel intention.*
- H<sub>5</sub>: Instagram influencer similarity significantly influences domestic travel intention.*



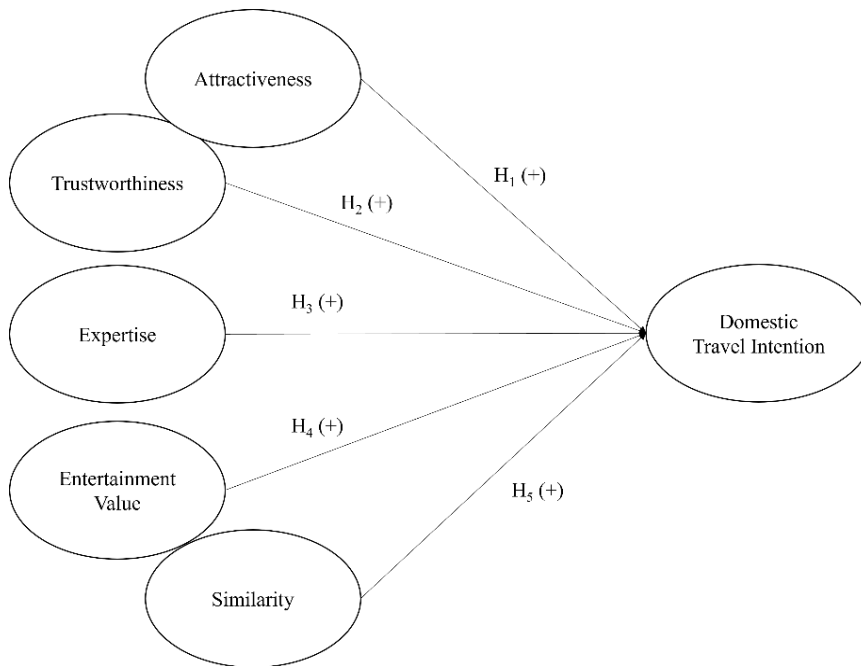


Figure 1: Study Framework

### Research Methodology

This study is a cross-sectional study based on the positivism paradigm. The study population includes Malaysians who have experience using Instagram and were exposed to travel and tourism influencers' content on Malaysia in the social media platform before. The study respondents were purposely selected using the inclusion criteria include: ii) the respondent has experienced using Instagram and has been exposed to travel and tourism content from Instagram influencers. The research instruments were adopted from (Gaber et al., 2019; Yilmazdogan et al., 2021; Muda and Hamzah, 2021). The twenty-five survey items have been paraphrased in English as clearly as possible with simple words and language to reduce potential ambiguities. Section A assessed the demographic profile of respondents. Meanwhile, section B assessed the Instagram influencers' source credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, entertainment value, similarity and domestic travel intention), respectively. The questionnaire was measured 7- points Likert scale (1 – Strongly Disagree & 7- Strongly Agree).

The variable's reliability and internal consistency were tested to check that all instrument parts were reliable and understandable. First, several tourism methodology experts were involved during the pretesting stage and served as assessors to ensure the face and content validity of the items. Next, a pilot study was conducted on a small sample to identify problems or deficiencies in the instruments. Each construct's Cronbach's Alpha value exceeded the minimum value (0.70), which can be considered reliable. The surveys were collected through online surveys via Google Forms.

The survey links were shared through social media via the snowball approach to ensure respondents' strong distribution and participation. As participation was voluntary, the data collection took two months. A total of 283 valid responses were collected. The majority of the respondent are females (n=158, 55.8%). Most of them are between 25 - 34 years old (n=132, 46.6%), most of their occupation are students (n=152, 53.7%), monthly income is MYR1000

and below ( $n=148$ ; 52.3%), state of residence and most of them ( $n=60$ , 21.2%) and their main purpose of travelling are ( $n=133$ , 47.0%) visiting friends and relatives.

The descriptive analysis was used to report the respondents' demographic results. Next, the perception of Malaysians on Instagram influencer source credibility and their domestic travel intention were reported descriptively. Next, the study hypotheses were tested using Multiple Linear Regression via the SPSS version 24 software.

## Findings

### Reliability Test

Table 1 reports the descriptive analysis. Looking at the respondents' responses on the attractiveness of Instagram influencers' source credibility, they perceived Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are good looking ( $M=5.43$ ,  $SD=1.178$ ). Secondly, the attractiveness attribute was perceived positively by the respondents. They agreed that Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are attractive. ( $M=5.40$ ,  $SD=1.130$ ), glamorous ( $M=5.38$ ,  $SD=1.275$ ) and elegant/charming ( $M=5.36$ ,  $SD=1.189$ ). Based on the descriptive analysis of trustworthiness, most respondents positively perceive the source credibility dimension. Overall, they agreed that the Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are dependable ( $M=5.28$ ,  $SD=1.186$ ) and trustworthy ( $M=5.10$ ,  $SD=1.281$ ). They also deemed the Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are sincere ( $M=5.05$ ,  $SD=1.267$ ), reliable ( $M=5.04$ ,  $SD=1.193$ ) and honest ( $M=4.93$ ,  $SD=1.257$ ).

Focusing on the expertise dimension, most respondents agreed that the Instagram influencers who provide travel information are experienced in travelling to tourism destinations in Malaysia ( $M=5.60$ ,  $SD=1.223$ ) and experts in tourism products and services in Malaysia ( $M=5.00$ ,  $SD=1.385$ ). They also agreed that these Instagram influencers are knowledgeable in tourism products and services in Malaysia ( $M=4.99$ ,  $SD=1.315$ ) and qualified to offer travel and tourism advice ( $M=4.90$ ,  $SD=1.396$ ). In term of entertainment value, the majority of the responses agreed that the Instagram influencers are enjoyable ( $M=5.48$ ,  $SD=1.134$ ), amusing ( $M=5.46$ ,  $SD=1.171$ ), entertaining ( $M=5.43$ ,  $SD=1.184$ ) and exciting ( $M=5.41$ ,  $SD=1.201$ ). It shows that influencers were really entertained in creating travel and tourism content on Instagram.

Based on the descriptive analysis of the similarity construct, the respondents perceived the Instagram influencers who provide travel information have the same viewpoints ( $M=5.15$ ,  $SD=1.300$ ), preferences ( $M=4.99$ ,  $SD=1.388$ ), values ( $M=4.93$ ,  $SD=1.363$ ) with them on tourism destinations in Malaysia. Regarding the domestic travel intention, the respondents agreed that if given the opportunity, they willing to travel within Malaysia ( $M=6.41$ ,  $SD=0.835$ ). Furthermore, they are planning to travel domestically within Malaysia in the future ( $M=6.34$ ,  $SD=0.870$ ) and certainly to invest time and money to travel domestically soon ( $M=6.08$ ,  $SD=1.121$ ). In brief, the Malaysia intends to travel domestically in the future.

Table 1

*Descriptive Analysis*

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Attractiveness</b>				
AT1	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are good looking.	283	5.43	1.178
AT2	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are attractive.	283	5.40	1.130
AT3	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are elegant/charming.	283	5.36	1.189
AT4	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are glamorous.	283	5.38	1.275
<b>Trustworthiness</b>				
TR1	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are dependable	283	5.28	1.186
TR2	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are honest	283	4.93	1.257
TR3	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are reliable	283	5.04	1.193
TR4	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are sincere	283	5.05	1.267
TR5	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are trustworthy	283	5.10	1.281
<b>Expertise</b>				
EX1	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are experienced in travelling to tourism destinations in Malaysia	283	5.60	1.223
EX2	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are expert in tourism products and services in Malaysia	283	5.00	1.385
EX3	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are knowledgeable in tourism product and services in Malaysia	283	4.99	0.315
EX4	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are qualified to offer travel and tourism advice about Malaysia	283	4.90	1.396
<b>Entertainment Value</b>				
EV1	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are entertaining	283	5.43	1.184
EV2	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are enjoyable	283	5.48	1.134
EV3	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are amusing	283	5.46	1.171

EV4	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are exciting	283	5.41	1.201
<b>Similarity</b>				
SM1	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia are having same viewpoints with me on tourism destinations	283	5.15	1.300
SM2	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia likes or dislikes same things with me	283	4.84	1.343
SM3	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia have the same value as I do	283	4.93	1.363
SM4	The Instagram influencers who provide travel information about Malaysia have same preferences with me on travelling in Malaysia	283	4.99	1.388
<b>Domestic Travel Intentions</b>				
TI1	If given opportunity, I am willing to travel within Malaysia	283	6.41	0.835
TI2	I am planning to travel domestically within Malaysia in the future	283	6.34	0.870
TI3	The likelihood of my travel intention within Malaysia is high	283	6.28	0.917
TI4	I will certainly invest time and money to travel domestically in the near future	283	6.08	1.121

### Hypotheses Testing

The study hypotheses were tested using multiple linear regression analysis, a common statistical technique utilised to predict the cause-and-effect phenomenon. The multiple regression analysis reports the linear relationship between the explanatory (independent) variables and the response (dependent) variable. Table 2 reports the multiple regression analysis outputs.

Table 2

#### *Multiple regression analysis output*

Hypotheses	Std. $\beta$	T-statistics	P-value	Result
H <sub>1</sub> : Attractiveness > Travel Intention	.155**	3.057	.001	Supported
H <sub>2</sub> : Trustworthiness > Travel Intention	.003**	.061	.001	Supported
H <sub>3</sub> : Expertise > Travel Intention	.058**	.998	.001	Supported
H <sub>4</sub> : Entertainment Value > Travel Intention	.187**	3.135	.001	Supported
H <sub>5</sub> : Similarity > Travel Intention	-.119	-2.420	.070	Not Supported

Table 2 depicts that attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, entertainment value and similarity can explain 13.6 percent of the variances in domestic travel intention. The five independent variables can predict domestic travel intention (F-Change=8.695\*\*\*). The first

hypothesis posited a positive relationship between Instagram influencers' attractiveness and domestic travel intention among Malaysians. The regression beta coefficient of the attractiveness showed a positive and significant value ( $\beta=0.204^{***}$ ). The result aligns with other previous studies that the attractiveness of social media influencers could stimulate travellers' perception and intention to travel (Balaban & Mustatea, 2019; Nascimento, 2019; Taillon et al., 2019). In general, the finding shows that social media influencers can easily influence Malaysian citizens if they find the influencers attractive, glamorous or popular and charming enough. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H1) is supported.

The second hypothesis proposed that Instagram influencers' trustworthiness significantly influences domestic travel intentions among Malaysians. The reliability regression beta coefficient reported a positive and significant value ( $\beta=0.005^{***}$ ). Similarly, the finding is consistent with the perception of trustworthiness of people who promote the content, either through sharing or liking the content, which may provide a higher judgment of reliability than the actual source of some online content (Mena et al., 2020). The result is also supported by other recent studies that revealed that honesty, dependability, reliability and consistency and accuracy of the information the influencers gave could influence travel intention (Han & Chen, 2021; Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). This indicates the trustworthiness of the Instagram Influencer is positively and significantly influences their followers' domestic travel intentions. On that note, the second hypothesis (H2) is supported.

Meanwhile, the third hypothesis posited that the Instagram influencers' expertise positively influences Malaysian's domestic travel intentions. The regression beta coefficient showed a positive and significant value ( $\beta=0.087^{***}$ ). This indicates that the expertise of the Instagram Influencer is positively and significantly influences their followers' domestic travel intentions. The result of this study is in line with the findings by Yilmazdogan et al (2021), as influencers' expertise that consists of their knowledge, experience, and qualification significantly relate to travel intention among Turkish. Similarly, in Malaysia, Instagram influencers who have various travel experiences could be perceived as an important person in persuading people's travel intention. Thus, the third hypothesis (H3) is supported.

Next, the fourth hypothesis posited a positive relationship between Instagram influencers' entertainment value and domestic travel intentions among Malaysians. The regression beta coefficient reported a positive and significant value ( $\beta=.257^{**}$ ). This indicates the Instagram Influencer's entertainment value significantly influences their followers' domestic travel intentions. Notably, respondents agreed that the entertainment value influences their travel intention. Similarly, the result obtained is supported by previous studies that found influencers publish regular social media updates in their area of expertise. They deliver generally persuasive messages to their followers that are both informative and entertaining (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The result is also consistent with (Gaber et al., 2019). They also found that Instagram users in Egypt perceived entertainment values of source credibility as important in delivering amusing, enjoyable, and entertaining content to influence people's attitudes. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis (H4) is supported.

Lastly, the fifth hypothesis of the study showed that Instagram influencers' similarity insignificantly influences domestic travel intentions among Malaysians. The regression beta coefficient reported a negative and significant value ( $\beta= -.119$ ). This indicates that the



similarity of Instagram influencers and their followers is not perceived as an important aspect in term of sharing the same value, preferences and viewpoints. This is consistent with Taillon et al (2019) as followers' purchase intentions for products decreased when they felt similar to the influencer. However, the result contradicts other previous studies that directly and indirectly relate to source similarity, also known as homophily, influencing behavioural intention components (Jamil & Hassan, 2018; Muda & Hamzah, 2021). Hence, the third hypothesis ( $H_3$ ) is not supported.

### **Implications**

There are several implications worth mentioning in this study. First, this study provides insightful information to policymakers, tourism promotional boards and stakeholders on the role of Instagram as an effective marketing tool to reach wider audiences. Unlike other social media or networking sites, Instagram has evolved rapidly by introducing a few new features and interactive applications for its users. Instagram could assist online users or travellers decrease waiting time and providing accurate information on tourism products or destinations anytime and anywhere.

From the tourism supply perspective, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), Tourism Malaysia and even travel agencies should use Instagram optimally in promoting Malaysia as a tourism destination, especially during the pandemic phases. Tourism stakeholders may also consider shifting their marketing strategies into social media influencers marketing in line with the current demand. Social media influencers' credibility is proven through their power in influencing people's perceptions and behaviour. They can create creative content on travel destinations and share it with their loyal followers virtually on online platforms. With proper collaboration, tourism stakeholders in Malaysia and social media influencers can generate amazing travel content either photos, videos, or stories to attract people to the country.

In theoretical terms, this study adds new literature resources on social media influencer source credibility influences on the visit intention and Malaysia perspective. Overall, the attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and entertainment value of Instagram influencer source credibility positively and significantly influence Malaysian's domestic travel intention. Contrarily, the similarity of viewpoints between Instagram influencers and their followers did not play a crucial role in persuading the travel intention of Malaysian within the country. Notably, the result indicates entertainment value greatly impacts domestic travel intention. An entertaining and enjoyable Instagram influencer is required in influencing people's perceptions and travel intentions.

On the other hand, the trustworthiness of Instagram influencers is perceived as the lowest rank in source credibility and has the least effect on travel intention. The trustworthiness of social media influencers could be questionable due to the paid advertisements published by tourism businesses to promote their products or services. Although trustworthiness is perceived as a positive dimension, Instagram influencers could improve their credibility by showing honesty, reliability and sincerity in conveying messages or content.

## Conclusion

The study confirms that Instagram influencers' source credibility is crucial for social media platforms that profoundly impact travel intention. With the latest features offered, Instagram is an exceptional social media or networking site that tourism stakeholders should consider using to improve their business performance. Although travellers and online users tend to expose to an abundance of fake information, social media influencers could play an essential role in delivering accurate information in interactive ways, primarily via Instagram. They could also assist tourism stakeholders or businesses in promoting tourism destinations to their followers. As COVID-19 is unavoidable, it is not impossible to reset the current tourism marketing strategies in order to remain competitive and reach broader target markets via digitalisation. Above all, it is the responsibility of academics to guarantee abundant exemplary studies of social media influencer credibility impact on the tourism and hospitality realm to prepare the industry for the post-pandemic era.

This study has certain limitations. The researchers planned to conduct the survey over a more extended period and via face-to-face settings. Unfortunately, due to the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia, the researchers have to utilise the online survey platform to the fullest. It is difficult to acquire many responses since it is tough to persuade responses online. The correctness and trustworthiness of the collected data were entirely dependent on the online survey attributes. Future research is suggested to collect a larger sample and test the study framework using structural equation modelling, including the model fit and effect size. Future research could make several extensions of the current study. Firstly, this study only considered five dimensions of Instagram influencer source credibility. Other dimensions such as social attractiveness, popularity and informative value are recommended to be assessed further. Besides, future studies could analyse Instagram source credibility influences other behavioural intentions components. Perhaps, the revisit intention, spreading Word of Mouth (WOM) or electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) and willingness to pay a premium are better indicators to determine the effectiveness of Instagram influencers' source credibility.

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