RESEARCH ARTICLE

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' CREDIBILITY (ATTRACTIVENESS, TRUSTWORTHINESS AND EXPERTISE) AND SIMILARITY ON CONSUMERS' BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS TOWARDS VACATION PLANNING

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The tourism industry is one of the major economic facets in any country and during the COVID-19 significant declines in business occurred (Folinas and Metaxas, 2020). Rebelo (2017) explained that social media influencers are vital tool for marketing and promotion to bring business sensations. Thus, this research aims to understand what makes social media influencers' impactful on consumers' behavioral intentions towards vacation planning. After review of the literature, the researcher hypothesized that (H1) Attractiveness, (H2) trustworthiness, (H3) expertise, and (H4) similarity impacts behavioral intention towards vacation planning. This study was a descriptive research, seeking to describe and understand the phenomenon and its characteristics. Distribution of online questionnaires was used to collect the needed data. The sampling method used was non-probability sampling, specifically convenience. Data was gathered only once (cross sectional); over a time frame of two months as a means to answer research questions (March and April 2020). Youth and young adults filled out the questionnaire. Once the needed data was collected, the researcher used the SPSS program to conduct the analyses. The analysis showed that there is a relationship between social media influencers' attractiveness, trustworthiness, and similarity on consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning; There is no relationship between social media influencers' expertise and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning. This study contributes academically and practically by illustrating empirical evidence that adds on to the gaps found in the literature. It also shows practitioner the characteristics of a person that makes a significant social media influencer that can help the tourism industry boom again post the Covid-19 period.

INTRODUCTION

During first months of year 2020, the global pandemic hindered the tourism industry, almost eliminating businesses (Folinas and Metaxas, 2020). However, after almost 6 months of the pandemic, nowadays restrictions are gradually easing, some domestic and international flights started to resume as countries are gradually opening their airports. It became fundamental for tourism businesses to promote destinations and encourage traveling while undertaking all the needed precautionary measures (Ranasinghe et al., 2020). Chantal India research (2018) indicated that the travel and tourism market is one of the leading industries that people follow on social media.

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Social media has played a major role in the promotion of tourism due to its great contribution in the information search process undertaken by people prior to making travel decisions. Due to the popularity of social media as a trendy marketing channel, many techniques have emerged to promote products and services virtually, one significant technique is social media influencers (SMIs)(Khorsheed et al., 2020). SMIs influencers are normal people with a large number of followers who have the ability to influence others and impact their decisions (Alic et al, 2017). In 2017, 86% of surveyed marketers were relying on influencer marketing to promote their brands (Linqia, 2018). Also, based on statistics, influencer marketing is a promising marketing channel worth marketers' investments as it helps to establish a strong relationship with customers, consequently encouraging an increase in sales (Smartinsights, 2018). Over the past few years, SMIs became a powerful marketing tool that could be used in order to promote destinations.

Through online social media channels, influencers publish posts, videos, and photos related to vacations, generating buzz

among audience about the shared destinations (Alic et al., 2017). Today, SMIs are permanently online and connected, sharing their travel experiences in real time with their networks and followers. Their audiences, potential travelers, have a wide range of options to choose from when it comes to travel products, and want to make the best choice they can. Therefore, they seek the opinion of others practiced travelers or SMIs (Thai & Yuksel, 2017). Influencer marketing is still an unexplored research field when compared to other popular marketing tools (Phung and Qin, 2018). A growing number of studies are aiming to understand this phenomenon. However, previous research has been focusing on the benefits of influencer marketing in the social media era (Khamis et al., 2016). But, more studies are needed in order to describe the persona of the effective and persuasive SMIs (Zhanget al., 2017). The power and effectiveness of SMIs as a modern advertising source has not been comprehensively investigated academically (Baker, 2018).Prior studies have investigated the role of SMIs on different contexts and on different marketing products and services (Zhanget al., 2017). Nevertheless, these studies have made it clear that there is limited research conducted regarding the potential of SMIs on the tourism industry (Alic et al, 2017). Accordingly, this study is considered academically important.

To pick up the rate of traveling again after the 2020 pandemic crisis, nations need to promote it significantly (Ranasinghe et al., 2020). SMIs have become the new marketing trend and means to communicate to potential travelers, influencing their attitudes and behaviors (Primetag, 2017).Furthermore, social influencers have become a dominant figure in spreading travel content that is used by potential travelers in aiding their decision making towards vacation planning (Rinka & Pratt, 2018). Therefore, it is important for practitioners and academic to further research to understand what makes SMIs a significant marketing tool; how to choose the right person to promote a certain vacation product or service (Schaefer, 2019). Accordingly, this research seeks to investigate how social influencers can influence consumers' tourism behavior intentions. This study aims to understand the impact of SMIs' credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise) and similarity traits on consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning. The specific research objectives of this research can be stated as follows: (RO1) to critically review prior studies in order to identify the concept of SMIs and their influential characteristics; (RO2)to recognize the appropriate research approach to investigate the relationship between the vital characteristics of SMIs and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning; (RO3) to identify the significant variables related to the characteristics of SMIs that influences consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning in the Egyptian market; (RO4) to recognize the required tactics in using SMIs in impacting consumer behavioral intention towards vacation planning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media relevance compared to traditional communication methods is obvious due to the fact that social media has eliminated the geographical and time constraints (Zahoor and Quereshi, 2017). It also provided easy to use platforms and interfaces that allow individuals to share multimedia content

with a large number of people and connect with one another (Fotis, 2015). Researchers explain how social media and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) have transformed the communication methods and the relationship not only between individuals, but also between companies and their consumers. Through the various social media platforms, consumers all over the globe are exposed to eWOM, which can play a role in changing their behaviors and purchasing decisions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). According to this phenomenon, marketers have used SMIs as a tool for promoting various products and services (Schaefer, 2019).

Social Media Influencers (SMIs): SMIs are people who are considered opinion leaders that exist on online social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram. Those influencers recommend specific products/services that they have tried personally to their followers. They also tend to post about their personal life to some extent in order to establish stronger, personal relationships with their audience (Freberg et al., 2011). According to Varsamis (2018), SMIs are with a significant online presence and a huge number of followers on popular social media platforms. They are known to have an influence over their audience (Woods, 2016). SMIs can also be defined as social media users who have managed to establish an image as credible information sources in certain industries (Brown and Hayes, 2008). According to Senft (2008), SMIs refer to "*common Internet users who gather a huge following on SM through the engagement with followers in digital and physical spaces by coordinating advertorials into their SM posts.*" Based on Keller and Berry (2003), SMIs have the benefit of having a huge number of followers who actively seek to be up to date with their social media activity, as they perceive those influencers as reliable and trustworthy.

Contemporary marketers create social media advertising using the same elements as in traditional advertising (Kotler and Armstrong, 2019). When developing advertisements, marketers seek to implement the AIDA model. According to Li et al. (2012), SMIs actually using the product/service can be beneficial in gaining and maintaining the attention of the audience. Ryu et al. (2009) explained that this is where the idea of using opinion leaders emerged as their appearance in ads was proven to influence consumers´ attention positively. Based on a study conducted by Tayebi (2010), it is vital to use physically attractive influencers in order to ensure obtaining consumers´ attention.SMIs tend to possess the following characteristics: being influential, knowledgeable in addition to their commitment to share information to their community (Ennaji et al., 2018). SMIs are defined as third party endorsers who have the ability to influence their audience through social media platforms (Freberg et al., 2011). As a form of opinion leaders, SMIs have the ability to influence how consumers perceive brands and stimulate behavioral intentions by providing accurate and reliable advice and information about products and services (Stern & Gould, 1988). This study focuses on SMIs as a marketing tool.

The Power of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in Marketing: More and Lingam (2017) explained that: "*Influencer marketing is applied when companies target key individuals, named influencers, who align with the brand values and operate in favor of the companies to find potential*

customers (p.6)." SMIs are considered to be trustable people and this is why they are used by brands to stimulate product and brand awareness (De Veirman *et al.,* 2017). It was proven that influencer marketing can generate up to 11 times more return on investment yearly when compared with traditional advertising (Tapinfluence, 2016). According to Berger and the Keller Fay Group (2016), it was proven that consumers perceive influencers as more trustworthy and well informed. Therefore, 82% of the influencer´s audiences are highly likely to follow their advice. One major advantage of using SMIs is that consumers can still access and view the content posted by the influencers even after the campaign is over, which necessarily means that their campaigns has an ongoing effect (Tapinfluence, 2016).

Para Social Identification Theory and Reference Group: According to the theory of reference groups, SMIs are considered aspiration reference groups, having people wish and desire to be similar to them (Ki and Kim, 2019). Followers are more likely to aspire to the influencer communications and purchase behaviors (Abidin, 2016). In addition, the Para Social Identification Theory further explained that consumers who are frequently exposed to certain characters on the media that hold desirable and same personalities as them tend to develop the feeling of knowing these characters as if they are their friends. Chung and Cho (2017) explained that SMIs tend to share personal information with their followers and address them directly in some occasions contributes positively to the intensity of para-social interactions, which eventually creates lasting para-social relationships. Nevertheless, in order for consumers to develop a stronger bond with SMIs, SMIs should clearly communicate with consumers on a more personal, respective, and truthful level (Ki and Kim, 2019), which is explained by the theory of source credibility (Hovland et al., 1953).

Source Credibility Theory: When it comes to the influencers' personal traits that are admired by consumers, there are certain characteristics that genuine SMIs must have (De Veirman et al., 2017; Goldsmith and Clark, 2018). Influencers should have the ability to influence their audience with the help of their resources that focus on different consumer values (Ki and Kim, 2019). When compared to traditional celebrities, SMIs are more approachable and compelling which results in their audience imitating them because they are regarded as real and relatable (Jin et al., 2019). Freberg et al. (2011) sought to explain that when it comes to the apparent characteristics of SMIs, they are more commonly out spoken, intelligent, aspiring and productive. It is unlikely that they possess negative traits, such as being indecisive and self-pitying. SMIs should: *"exhibit the characteristics of having their own sense of humor, their own perspective, and having what their followers wish they had"* (Chae, 2018). Essential characteristics of SMIs, include the following: credibility, high activity, large followings and great exposure (Ioanid et al., 2015). According to the source credibility theory, receivers are more likely to be persuaded by a source when it's considered to be credible (Hovland et al., 1953). It was proven by prior research that communicators who show high credibility according to the receivers tend to get more respect; and therefore their words are accepted more readily (McCroskey et al.,1974; Ki and Kim, 2019). Historically, research showed

that credibility involved the following dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness and power (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). However, when it comes to the advertising and consumer behavior literature, power is not a notable contributor to source credibility (Ohanian, 1991).Accordingly, based on these theories, this study investigates SMIs similarity, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise on consumers' intention to plan vacations.

Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and the Tourism Industry: According to prior studies, SMIs play a major role in promoting certain destinations and creating an image in the minds of consumers (Alic et al., 2017). With social media and SMIs, consumers have the opportunities to develop perception and expectations of certain destinations (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). Destination image has an intense and severe impact on the consumer behavior prior as well as post destination decision has been made. Before a purchase choice has been made, destination image assists in the decision making process, evaluating different feasible options, whereas post affects encourages consumers to share their experiences as well as their reviews (Lee et al., 2005). Based on a study conducted by Hunt (1975), the destination image was proven to be an essential tool when it comes to increasing the number of tourists visiting a specific destination. This is due to its power in generating eWOM besides influencing travelers´ satisfaction and loyalty (Alic et al., 2017).

It has been proven that SMIs can be a significant tool for tourism industry. Influencer marketing can be a powerful tool when it comes to generating positive eWOM about travel destinations and encouraging potential tourists to visit specific promoted locations. The power of influencer marketing in tourism stems from the fact that SMIs are appealing and their words sounds logic, reliable, constructive, and truthful among their followers (Xu and Pratt, 2018). SMIs is powerful information to consumers and aid in developing their intentions to plan vacations because they allow the discovery of the destination they are visiting by sharing every detail of their experience (videos, pictures, comments, etc.) on their social media platforms (Alic et al., 2017). Thus, this study seeks *to measure the impact of the influencers' credibility (attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise) and similarity on behavioral intentions towards vacation planning.* Figure 1 clarifies the proposed conceptual framework emerged from the literature review.
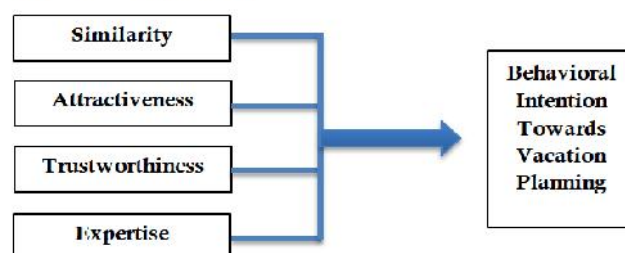

Figure 1. The proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the mentioned theories, SMIs can play a major role in shaping consumer behavior. In this study, based on several

researches (mention the research that discusses the influence traveling), SMIs are considered reference groups that guide peoples purchase behavior related to traveling. So, in the proposed conceptual framework, there are four main independent variables that inspire various consumer behaviors' traveling intentions: (IV1) Attractiveness (IV2) trustworthiness (IV3) expertise (IV4) similarity. The dependent variable is behavioral intention towards vacation planning. The researcher hypothesized that (H1) Attractiveness, (H2) trustworthiness, (H3) expertise, and (H4) similarity impacts behavioral intention towards vacation planning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quantitative approach was chosen for this research**.** A quantitative research method can be defined as a research strategy that consists of quantifying and analyzing data collected from the selected participants (Bell et al., 2018). The reason why quantitative research is considered beneficial in solving research problems faced by different businesses is because this strategy involves numerical data. This numerical data could be analyzed in order to find out and explain the relationship between various variables, which consequently could aid in solving research problems (Saunders, 2011). This research is a *descriptive research.* The descriptive research is used because the researcher seeks to gather information regarding the characteristics of the studied population (Burns & Bush, 2014). According to Gall et al., (2007), the main aim of descriptive research is to describe and understand a specific phenomenon and its characteristics. This is what the current study plans to do (Saunders, 2011). This research aims to understand the relationship between the traits of SMIs and the purchase intention of consumers by using a deductive approach and positivism, thus utilizing the quantitative method for data collection is considered to be the most convenient.

The Research philosophy selected to carry out this study is *Positivism*. The reason behind choosing this philosophy is the fact that the researcher's part is restricted to the objective collection and analysis of data (Oliver, 2013). Saunders et al., (2009) explained that the positivist approach relates to *"working with an observable social reality and that the end product of such research can be law-like generalizations similar to those produced by the physical and natural scientists" (p.15).* Positivism rises from hypothesis, assuming that social scientist needs to impartially and objectively examine the world around them (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In this study, the researcher applies the *survey strategy*. An online survey is conducted in this study. A structured questionnaire is sent to individuals that fit the studied target population. The individuals are to complete the survey over the Internet generally through a filling out a form. The data is stored in a database so as the researcher can review and conduct further analysis of the data. The survey process is further explained during the data collection approach.

In this research, the questionnaire was developed in both the English and Arabic language. The questionnaire consisted of four main sections**.** Section One of the questionnaire is an introduction to the research aim and purpose. This section also reassures the participants' confidentiality and data privacy. The second section (question 1-5) contained introductory questions

regarding the participant's social media usage frequency. The questions sought to understand whether the respondents' notice SMIs or not, what products/services they purchase based on SMI's recommendations, how frequent they travel inside or outside Egypt, and their source of information when it comes to vacation planning. Section three assesses the variables of this study. Finally, the last section (question 8– 15) is regarding the respondents' socio-demographic background. These questions requested to know the respondents: age, highest completed level of education, gender, marital status, number of children, city of residence, current job status and average monthly household income.

The variables in this study were measured using scales from prior studies. These scales were taken and adjusted to fit in this research context. The scale similarity was taken from Chun et al.(2018); the scale attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise was taken from Rebelo(2017);the scale behavior intention was taken from Chun et al. (2018). These scales were adjusted to suit the current research. Before the actual data collection took place, the researcher conducted *a pilot test of 50 respondents* in order to check the reliability and validity of the developed questionnaire.

This study' *population of focus is Egyptian youth and young adults (age 15-34) in Egypt.* Youth and young adults (age 18-24) are the age group, which tends to travel the most compared to other population segments. These age groups are not tied down to life commitments, such as work and family (Xu and Pratt, 2018).The largest user group in Egypt's social media is people aged 18-34 (Napoleoncat, 2020). This age group were also found to commonly follow SMIs. The segment is attracted to influencers significantly; and their behaviors are likely to be influenced by them (Xu and Pratt, 2018).

In this research, the sampling technique chosen was *non-probability sampling through convenience sampling* approach. Convenience sampling is a sampling technique where participants are selected if they meet specific criteria, for example; easy accessibility, interest in the research conducted or availability (Hermanda et al., 2019). The criteria of participants were at the age range of 15-34 years old and who are regular social media users. Based on research, these age ranges are consumers whom purchase intentions are affected by SMIs.

Research Analysis

Out of 429 questionnaires distributed, 9 were eliminated because the respondents did not satisfy the eligible criterion, which is familiarity with the SMIs. Moreover, 20 were unusable because respondents failed to answer most of the questions. As a result only 400 questionnaires were usable and analyzed. The response rate in this study is 93%. Frequency analysis is a descriptive statistical method that shows the number of occurrences of each response chosen by the respondents. In this study, the frequency analysis was used to identify the socio-demographic traits (age, gender, income, education, marital status, number of children, current job status and city of residence) of the participants' in the study. The following table presents the structure for the actual sample analyzed in this study. In this study, the frequency analysis was conducted on the introduction questions.

Table 1. The Socio-demographic Traits of the Respondents

Trait	Percentage	Frequency	Trait	Percentage	Frequency
Age:			Education:		
15-19	3.0	12	Elementary	1.0	4
20-24	30.0	120	High school	8.8	35
25-29	49.5	198	College	59.3	237
30-34	17.5	70	Postgraduate	31.0	124
Gender:			Residence:		
Male	60.8	243	Cairo	31.5	126
Female	39.3	157	Alexandria Other	68.3.3	2731
Job:	12.5	50	Monthly Income:		
Student	56.3	225	<2000		
White collar	31.3	125	2000-5000	.5	2
Blue collar			5001-10000	9.8	39
			>10000	41.0	164
				48.8	195

Table 2. The Respondents Opinion regarding SMIs

Question	Percentage	Frequency Number	Question	Percentage	Frequency Number
Do you noticeSocial Media Influencers	Yes 95.3 No 4.8	Yes 381 No 19	Do you seek Influencers Reference when buying products?	Yes 66.3 No 33.8	Yes 265 No 135

Table 3. The Influencers that the Respondents are Familiar With

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Hadia Ghaleb	58	14.5	15.2	15.2
	Sherif Fayed	82	20.5	21.5	36.7
	Mohanad El Hattab	49	12.3	12.9	49.6
	Sara Sabry	44	11.0	11.5	61.2
	Mohamed Mekawy	13	3.3	3.4	64.6
	Yara El Helbawi	3	.8	.8	65.4
	Nourhanne Eissa	8	2.0	2.1	67.5
	Youssef Sabry	3	.8	.8	68.2
	Laila Ezzat	2	.5	.5	68.8
	Ingy El Engebawy	3	.8	.8	69.6
	Lana El Sahely	5	1.3	1.3	70.9
	Tina Khalil Diab	9	2.3	2.4	73.2
	Aly Mazhar	6	1.5	1.6	74.8
	Amira Adeeb	4	1.0	1.0	75.9
	Sally Fouad	2	.5	.5	76.4
	Marwan Younes	2	.5	.5	76.9
	Nour Arida	19	4.8	5.0	81.9
	Karen Wazen	11	2.8	2.9	84.8
	Huda Beauty	7	1.8	1.8	86.6
	Maya Ahmad	3	.8	.8	87.4
	Farah Emara	5	1.3	1.3	88.7
	Soraya Shawky	3	.8	.8	89.5
	Farah Nofal	5	1.3	1.3	90.8
	Zeina El Fakahany	4	1.0	1.0	91.9
	Tamara Farra	2	.5	.5	92.4
	Menna El Fakhany	4	1.0	1.0	93.4
	Sarah´s Day	5	1.3	1.3	94.8
	Farah Dhukai	4	1.0	1.0	95.8
	other influencers	16	4.0	4.2	100.0
	Total	381	95.3	100.0	

Questions were asked to understand the respondents' relation to the research topic. The Researcher also wanted to know whom the respondents believed were the most influential SMIs in the Middle East. The following table illustrates the Popular SMI in the Arab region that was mentioned during the survey. The Reliability *analysis* was the next analysis conducted in the study. It is conducted to see if the scale should consistently reflect the construct it is measuring. In this study, the reliability of scales used was measured using Cronbach's Alpha (a) reliability measure.

If it's equal or more than 0.6 then the scale is reliable. Based on the analysis, all the scales were reliabile with the following Cronbach's Alpha (a): Behavioral intention (0.959), Attractiveness (0.931), Trustworthiness (0.961), Expertise (0.954), and Similarity (0.942). The *Validity analysis* refers to how accurately a method measures what it is intended to measure. If research has high validity that means it produces results that correspond to real properties, characteristics, and variations in the physical or social world. In this study the research conducted Face validity. Face validity considers how suitable the content of a test seems to be on the surface. It's

similar to content validity, but face validity is a more informal and subjective assessment. The researcher made academics and practitioners look over the questionnaire to give their opinion and make adjustments to confirm the instrument effectiveness. In this study the researcher conducted another approach to validity as well. Accordingly, this validity approach says that the maximum level of validity is equal to the square root of the reliability coefficient. What this means is that the validity of a test is constrained by how reliable it is. And that makes perfect sense that a test must do what it does consistently before being sure it does what it says it does. Based on this analysis, the variables were considered valid with an alpha of: Behavioral intention (0.979), Attractiveness (0.964), Trustworthiness (0.980), Expertise (0.976), and Similarity (0.970)

The next analysis conducted was the *correlation analysis*. This analysis is a statistical method used to evaluate the strength of relationship between two quantitative variables. A high correlation means that two or more variables have a strong relationship with each other, while a weak correlation means that the variables are hardly related. In this study the researcher conducted Pearson correlation analysis for each hypothesis. Based on the analysis, the relationship between SMI's attractiveness and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning is significant, positive and strong, with an alpha of 0.557**; the relationship between SMI's trustworthiness and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning is a significant, strong and positive with an alpha of 0.668**; the relationship between SMI's expertise and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning is significant, positive and strong with an alpha of 0.557**; there is a significant, strong, positive relationship between SMI's similarity and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning with an alpha of 0.680**.

The *Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)* analysis is made up of calculations that provide data about levels of variability within a regression model and form a basis for tests of significance. Accordingly, the ANOVA analysis for this study, the model used in this study is significant as the Sig. value is equal to 0.000.

The *Adjusted R-square* is a statistical measure that represents the fraction of the variance for a dependent variable that's caused by an independent variable or variables in a regression model.R-squared explains to what degree the variance of one variable explains the variance of the second variable. According to the analysis, the adjusted R2 is 59.1%.This result reveals that 59.1% of social media users' behavioral intention towards vacation planning is explained by SMIs. The remaining 40.9% can be caused by other variables.

The final analysis conducted was the *Multiple regression.* It is an extension of simple linear regression. It is used when the researcher want to predict the value of a variable based on the value of two or more other variables. This analysis was used to test the hypotheses of the study. According to the analysis:

⟩ **Hypothesis one: There is a positive relationship between social media influencers' attractiveness and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning.** The results show that the relationship between the variables is significant with the sig value less than 0.05 (= 0.244, p < 0.05).

⟩ **Hypothesis two: There is a positive relationship between social media influencers' trustworthiness and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning.** The results show that the relationship between the variables is significant with the sig value less than 0.05 (= 0.241, p < 0.05).

⟩ **Hypothesis three: There is a positive relationship between social media influencers' expertise and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning.** The results show that this hypothesis cannot be accepted as the sig value is above 0.05 (= 0.081, p > 0.05).

⟩ **Hypothesis four: There is a positive relationship between social media influencers' similarity and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning.** The results show that the relationship between the variables is significant with the sig value less than 0.05 (= 0.372, p < 0.05)

The researcher then moved on to check the ***Beta analysis (B)*** under the multiple regressions. Beta is the rate of change per unit time. Beta is the correlation coefficient range from 0-1, higher the value of beta stronger the association between variables. A standardized beta coefficient compares the strength of the effect of each individual independent variable to the dependent variable. The higher the absolute value of the beta coefficient, the stronger the effect. According to this study, the variables that have the highest impact on consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning are similarity (B=0.372) followed by attractiveness (B=0.244) then trustworthiness (B=0.241).

DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis, some of the hypotheses were supported while others were rejected. These outcomes reflect similar conclusions found in other prior studies. The first hypothesis in this study, *there is a relationship between social media influencers' similarity and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning*, is supported. This finding is consistent with the findings of past researches that proved a significant, positive relationship between those two variables (Al-Darraji et al., 2020; Chun et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2015). According to these studies, the more SMIs are regarded by their audience as individuals that hold similar qualities, tastes, beliefs, and lifestyles, the more likely their behavioral intentions will be impacted by those influencers. The second hypothesis, *there is a relationship between social media influencers' attractiveness and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning*, is supported. This finding is supports the outcomes of past studies that also indicated the significant impact of attractiveness on behavioral intentions (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018; Sinaga & Kusumawati, 2018). Also, this confirms the findings of other previous researches that indicate that attractiveness positively affects behavioral intentions (Lee & Watkins, 2016;Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Weismueller et al., 2020). Wang & Scheinbaum (2018) clarified that based on the halo effect and consistency theory, SMIs who are regarded as physically

attractive are ranked higher on other attributes as well. Thus, when influencers look appealing, they tend to grab the attention of their audience and eventually influence their behaviors.

The third hypothesis, *there is a relationship between social media influencers' trustworthiness and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning*, is supported. Although this finding is consistent with the findings of some studies (Magno & Cassia, 2018; Ernawad et al., 2019; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Weismueller et al., 2020). It was explained by these past researches that consumers follow the recommendations of influencers they trust which indicates that the level of trustworthiness of SMIs has a strong impact on the behavioral intentions of their followers. However, other studies contradicted this and argued that trustworthiness does not influence behavioral intentions as there is no relationship between the two variables (Chun et al., 2018; Raintung et al., 2016).

The fourth hypothesis, *there is a relationship between social media influencers' expertise and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning*, is rejected. This study proves that influencers do not have to be perceived as an expert in order to have people listening to their comments and recommendations. This is consistent with the findings of past researchers who proved that the perceived expertise of an influencer does not affect the behavioral intentions of social media users (Robelo, 2017). Robelo (2017) studied the impact of SMI's expertise on both male and female consumers and in both cases; the findings indicated that it does not have a significant impact on the behavioral intentions of consumers. Nevertheless, other studies contradicted this finding and argued that there is a relationship between these two variables. It is better when influencers are perceived as an expert (Chun et al., 2018 ; Sertoglu & al., 2014; Kim et al., 2018; Uribe et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Previous researches have carefully studied the concept of SMIs and claimed that this is becoming the most popular marketing tool nowadays (Primetag, 2017). It was explained that due to the digital age, SMIs are considered to be a new form of opinion leaders that are capable of promoting messages to their audience through various social media platforms. SMIs are more relatable than other celebrities and they can promote a brand without overshadowing it (Jahnke, 2018). Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted the tourism industry worldwide, many researches have assumed that countries should initiate marketing activities to regrow the industry and promote tourism back (Ranasinghe et al., 2020). Thus, SMIs can be applicable in this mission. Therefore, this study sought to research on this phenomenon. This study, after conducting secondary research, sought to measure the impact of the SMIs' credibility and similarity on behavioral intentions towards vacation planning. In order to investigate SMIs' credibility and similarity on behavioral intentions towards vacation planning, several research objectives were pursued. These objectives were: (RO1) to critically review prior studies in order to identify the concept of SMIs and their influential characteristics; (RO2) to recognize the appropriate research

approach to investigate the relationship between the vital characteristics of SMIs' and consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning; (RO3) to identify the significant variables related to the characteristic of SMIs' that influences consumers' behavioral intention towards vacation planning in the Egyptian market; (RO4) to recognize the required tactics in using SMIs in impacting consumer behavioral intention towards vacation planning. The first research objective was achieved after the completion of the literature review. According to prior studies, regarding the characteristics of SMIs, numerous past studies talked about how the attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise of influencers are essential factors to make them successful (Weismueller et al., 2020; Gashi, 2017). Over the past few years, other researchers focused on another variable, which the similarity. They assumed that when an influencer has similar characteristics as the audience, their recommendations become relatable and usable. Thus, these studies show how it is fundamental that SMIs are comparable and relatable to audience in order for their audience to view them as trustworthy (Chapple and Cownie, 2017). Accordingly, based on these findings in the literature review, the researcher developed a proposed research model to test. The model consists of four main independent variables that inspire various consumer behaviors' traveling intentions: (IV1) Attractiveness (IV2) trustworthiness (IV3) expertise (IV4) similarity. The dependent variable is behavioral intention towards vacation planning.

The second objective was achieved after the completion of the research methodology. Accordingly, this study followed a quantitative research approach. Therefore, this study was deductive in nature. The researcher developed the research problem based on existing theory (theory of source credibility and theory of reference group). Fittingly, the researcher develops hypotheses, and seeks to test them; assuming social scientist needs to impartially and objectively examine the world around them. This study was a descriptive research, seeking to describe and understand the phenomenon and its characteristics. Distribution of online questionnaires was used to collect the needed data. The sampling method used was non-probability sampling, specifically convenience. This method of data collection and sample selection was useful as it allowed individuals to complete the survey over the Internet due to the government enforcement of citizens' quarantine. Data was gathered only once (cross sectional); over a time frame of two months as a means to answer research questions (March and April 2020). Youth and young adults filled out the questionnaire. Once the needed data was collected, the researcher used the SPSS program to conduct the analyses. The third objective was achieved after the completion of the research findings. The researcher chose to test the hypotheses using multiple regression analysis. Multiple regression is an extension of simple linear regression. It is used when we want to predict the value of a variable based on the value of two or more other variables. The variable we want to predict is called the dependent variable (or sometimes, the outcome, target or criterion variable). Based on the results and hypotheses testing, it showed that the three variables that have a significant, positive relationship with the behavioral intentions of consumers are the attractiveness, trustworthiness and similarity of SMIs. However, the hypothesis stating that there is a positive relationship between SMI's expertise and consumers'

behavioral intentions towards vacation planning in this study was not supported. This was shown the hypotheses were tested; the sig. value of expertise was above 0.05 which indicates that this hypothesis is rejected. Similarity was proven to have the strongest impact on behavioral intentions as it had the highest beta coefficient value. Attractiveness is the second strongest contributor to behavioral intentions followed by trustworthiness of SMIs. The fourth objective required the researcher to recognize the required tactics in using SMIs in impacting consumer behavioral intention towards vacation planning. Based on this research paper, the empirical evidence shows influencers as a significant, new, powerful marketing tool. The research highlighted the traits that make them successful and believable. According to the research, various businesses and marketers in the tourism industry should use SMIs in promoting their products and services. They should select SMIs that appear to their followers as appealing and trustworthy. Also, it is essential to choose influencers that are comparable to their followers and that hold similar interests and lifestyles as them. The concept of being perceived as "proficient" in the field of product promotion is not a necessity. When listening to SMIs, people listen to their personal experience with the product or service, not because they are specialists.

Limitation and Direction for Future Research

This research was conducted to add value in understanding the relationship between SMIs' traits and behavioral intentions of consumers. However, there were some limitations that the researcher faced during the conduction of this research. For example, when developing the research model, many variables exist in which can be implemented to provide power and effectiveness of SMIs as a modern advertising source. However, in this study, the researcher sought to build upon the source credibility theory and the theory of reference group, neglecting other variables that SMIs can follow to be influential. Therefore, future research can add further SMIs personality characteristic to asses. When it comes to the research sampling technique, a main limitation existed. This research relied on non-probability sampling through convenience approach in order to reach a sample that is easily accessible due to time constraints. Therefore, not everyone in the population had an equal chance of being selected. Another sampling problem that existed was that the research focused on Alexandria and Cairo. Thus, it neglected other point of views of citizens in different cities of Egypt. Therefore, this study did not have a wider and diverse sample. Therefore, future research can use probability sampling; they can test the model on other cities in Egypt; they can also test the model in other countries; future studies can do a comparison study between SMIs in Egypt and the western context. This quantitative study was capable of gathering represent able data and providing beneficial insights regarding the impact of SMIs' credibility and similarity on consumers' behavioral intentions. Gathering quantitative data through online questionnaires provided the needed information regarding the influential characteristics of SMIs. However, relying on other qualitative research methods would have been beneficial in getting further detailed explanations and examples of the topic understudy. Therefore, futute studies can conduct mixed research approaches.

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