

The Effect of Social Media Usage on Visiting Intentions: The Moderating Role of Influencer Following Behavior Among Generation Z in Indonesia

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Abstract

Social media is one of the primary sources for Generation Z in seeking travel information and inspiration. This study aims to understand the relationship between social media usage goals and visit intentions, and to examine the moderating role of following social media influencers. The study used quantitative methods by distributing questionnaires to 212 respondents. Hypothesis testing was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM) and multiple linear regression. The results showed that influencer source credibility positively influences the attitudes of social media users (Generation Z), increasing their intention to visit recommended tourist destinations. In addition, influencer following behavior strengthens the relationship between social media usage goals and visit intention. The findings provide insights for the tourism industry in crafting more effective digital marketing strategies, utilizing influencers as a more personalized and experiential promotional tool.

Keywords: social media influencers; social media; influencer marketing; generation z; attitude; visiting intention

INTRODUCTION

Background

Social media has become the main platform for Generation Z to seek information, entertainment, and inspiration. As a generation that grew up in the digital era, they rely more on social media in making decisions, including in determining travel destinations (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This decision is influenced by

various factors, such as easy access to information, digital trends, and recommendations from fellow users. In the context of tourism, social media not only functions as a communication tool but also as a virtual exploration tool that allows tourists to get an overview of a destination before visiting (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Supporting this view, Adi et al. (2024) emphasized that social media marketing significantly influences destination image and tourists' visiting intentions. This

reinforces the idea that social media serves not only as a source of inspiration but also as a decisive influence in destination selection, especially among younger audiences like Generation Z.

One factor that strongly influences Generation Z's travel decisions is the role of social media influencers. As individuals with wide reach and high credibility, influencers can shape their followers' perceptions and preferences through the content they share (Lou & Yuan, 2019). With engaging visuals and authentic testimonials, they are often the main reference in travel planning, especially for Generation Z, who are more responsive to digital trends and experiential recommendations (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Influencers not only promote destinations but also create trust and emotional attachment with audiences, ultimately driving visit intentions.

In line with this, Astina & Sukaatmadja (2024) found that influencer marketing significantly affects consumer purchase interest, a concept that can be extended to tourism decisions. The persuasive power of influencers lies in their ability to establish credibility and emotional connections, which are crucial in shaping travel intentions among digital-native audiences.

However, the impact of influencers on visit intention is not always the same for every individual. The behavioral factor of following influencers may act as a moderating variable that strengthens or weakens the relationship between media usage goals and visit intentions. A person who actively follows and engages with an influencer's content is more likely to be encouraged to visit the promoted destination compared to those who simply follow without significant interaction (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). Forms of user engagement with influencers can include *liking*, commenting, sharing content, or even adopting the travel recommendations provided.

In addition, the characteristics of Generation Z as digital natives who are

accustomed to the rapid flow of information also influence their content consumption patterns. This generation is more interested in authentic content, engaging visuals, and trustworthy narratives of personal experience (Erwin et al., 2023). They tend to avoid traditional advertising and prefer information sources that are considered relevant and relatable, such as other users' reviews or recommendations from influencers with aesthetic and lifestyle values that match their preferences (Nugroho & Suryadi, 2023).

Social media has become a highly influential tool in the tourism industry, especially in shaping Generation Z's travel decisions. Various studies have highlighted the role of social media in attracting tourists and influencing their travel behavior. For example, Zeng & Gerritsen's (2014) study revealed that social media allows travelers to share experiences and obtain real-time information about destinations, which ultimately increases visit intentions. Another study by Leung, Bai, & Stahura (2015) found that social media plays an important role in destination marketing strategies, especially through user-generated content that is considered more credible than traditional advertising.

In addition, the role of influencers in shaping travel decisions has also been discussed in several studies. Lou & Yuan (2019) showed that social media influencers have a significant influence on their followers' purchasing decisions, including in the context of tourism. They found that influencer credibility, audience engagement, and content appropriateness strongly influence influencer marketing effectiveness. Xu & Pratt (2018) also highlighted that influencers not only promote destinations but also create an emotional attachment with their audience, which drives trust and visit intentions.

Furthermore, research by Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez (2020) examined how user engagement with influencers can influence travel decisions. They found that active engagement, such as

commenting or sharing influencer content, can increase travelers' intention to visit a destination. Tafesse & Wood (2021) also identified that the type of interaction users have with influencers can moderate the impact of promotions made by influencers.

While many studies have addressed the role of social media and influencers in travel decisions, there is still a research gap in understanding how influencer following behavior can moderate the relationship between social media usage goals and visit intentions. Most previous studies have focused on the direct impact of social media and influencers on travel decisions (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Xu & Pratt, 2018), but not many have specifically explored how an individual's engagement with influencers—both in the form of active interaction and passive exposure—can strengthen or weaken that influence (Hudders, De Jans, & De Veirman, 2021).

This study addresses that gap by proposing influencer following behavior as a moderating variable, and explores how it affects the relationship between source credibility, user attitude, and visit intention among Generation Z. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of behavioral engagement with influencers as a key factor in predicting tourism decision-making, offering deeper insights into how influencer marketing can be optimized for digital-native audiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influencer Marketing

According to Lengkawati & Saputra (2021), influencer marketing is an approach that involves influential individuals in marketing campaigns to increase reach, sales, and customer relationships. Influencer is defined by Nick Hayes as a person or third party who is capable of and may have responsibility for significantly shaping customer purchasing decisions (Hayes & Brown, 2008). Another definition put forward by Brown & Fiorella, an influencer is someone who is usually not or has

not become a customer and is incentivized to recommend and create content about a brand or specific product through their platform (Brown & Fiorella, 2013, p. 195).

Influencer-based marketing is considered one of the most effective promotional strategies, considering that consumers today are more reluctant to conventional advertising. For those who are active on social media, the content created by the influencers they follow is more interesting (Hutabarat, 2020). Chopra et al. (2021) state that influencer marketing has more appeal than traditional pop-up or banner ads that tend to be annoying. An influencer can influence consumers' decisions to buy products and fulfill their needs. That is why influencer marketing has become an important part of today's marketing strategy.

In doing influencer marketing activities, of course, an influencer is needed, which is someone who is able to influence others to take an action or action making. Usually, an influencer is among artists, celebrities, public figures, or ordinary people who have a large number of followers. Not only do they have a large number of followers, but influencers also gain the trust of their followers. Therefore, the products or services marketed by an influencer can influence their followers to do research about the product or service to take a purchase action.

Source Credibility

Source credibility theory is a theory proposed by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley in their book *Communication and Persuasion* (1953). This theory explains that people will be more easily persuaded if the communicator or person delivering the communication message is credible; in other words, a communication source with high credibility will be more effective in changing a person's opinion than a source with a low level of credibility (Fernandes, 2020). Research conducted by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley identified three aspects that affect source credibility: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. In Source

Credibility Theory, the credibility of the communicator is formed from the skills of a communicator who learns all the information about the object in question and has confidence in the standard of authenticity of the information sent. In this sense, credibility has two elements, namely the trustworthiness and expertise possessed by the communicator (Winoto, 2015: 5).

In a tourism context, source credibility is particularly important because travel decisions often involve emotional, financial, and experiential considerations. Tourists, especially from Generation Z, tend to rely on social media and influencer content to reduce uncertainty and seek inspiration. Influencers perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and relatable are more effective in shaping positive attitudes toward destinations and motivating travel intentions. Thus, leveraging credible sources in tourism marketing can enhance message persuasiveness, foster consumer trust, and ultimately increase the likelihood of destination visits.

User Attitude

Attitude, according to Solomon (in Kotler & Keller, 2009), is an individual's tendency to evaluate a product or object positively or negatively. In the context of influencer marketing on social media, user attitude refers to the positive or negative judgments made by users towards influencer marketing which may influence their behavior towards the promoted product or service. Research by Evans et al. (2017) shows that a positive attitude towards influencer marketing can encourage consumers' intention to buy the promoted product.

Intention to Visit

Visiting intention refers to a person's desire to visit a particular destination because they are interested in the information received (Arora & Lata, 2020). In the research of Zheng et al. (2022), visiting intention is also defined as the extent to which a person has a positive or negative evaluation of a particular action. In

Haryono & Albetris (2022), the intention to visit can easily arise in a person because of various content uploads on various social media platforms that attract attention or in other words, the intention to visit arises through promotional assistance using social media. Visiting intentions are important to research in order to help in destination management, tourism development, and improving the tourist experience so that it creates a good impression of a destination.

Hypothesis Development

The Effect of Source Credibility on User Attitudes

The attitude of social media users is influenced by the credibility of the source, this is as stated by Joyce and Han Chen (2021) who revealed that individuals will be more easily influenced if they believe that the influencer has credibility. In addition, the congruence between the influencer and the promoted product also greatly influences the perceived credibility of the influencer, which in turn impacts followers' beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behaviors (Lim et al., 2017). In the context of tourism, Ayeh et al. (2013) showed that the perceived credibility of influencers can influence tourists' attitudes in making a decision to visit a tourist destination. Given Generation Z's close relationship with social media, their attitude towards influencer marketing may influence their intention to visit a tourist destination. Therefore, the first hypothesis in this study is:

H1: Influencer source credibility positively influences the attitude of social media users (Generation Z).

Influence of User Attitude on Visiting Intention

Ajzen (in Nina, 2018) suggests that intention refers to a person's tendency to choose to take or not take an action. In this context, intention to visit refers to an individual's tendency to visit a tourist destination. Just as with a favored product, the

intention to buy will increase, the same is true when a tourist destination is promoted by an influencer on social media.

Previous research shows that travelers' attitudes towards content produced by travel influencers influence their intention to plan a trip (Ayeh et al., 2013). Especially for generation Z who actively use social media, their attitude towards influencer marketing may influence their intention to visit the promoted tourist destination. Therefore, the second hypothesis in this study is:

H2: The attitude of social media users (Generation Z) has a positive effect on the intention to visit tourist destinations.

Social Media Influencer Following Behavior

Several previous studies have discussed the impact of influencers' posts on social media on followers and non-followers on their behavior. Thomson (2006) explains that individuals' attachment to influencers can vary. Strong attachment relates to a sense of connection, affection, passion and need. In the context of this study, individuals who follow a particular influencer will feel more connected compared to those who do not follow that influencer.

Thomson (2006) also states that higher levels of attachment will result in greater trust and commitment. Therefore, users who follow influencers have greater trust and commitment to the content produced by these influencers. Thus, the behavior of following an influencer can strengthen the perceived credibility of the influencer, increase positive attitudes towards influencer marketing, and increase the intention to visit the promoted tourist destination. Based on these findings, the research hypotheses are:

H3: Influencer following behavior strengthens the relationship between influencer source credibility and social media users' (Generation Z) attitudes.

H4: Influencer following behavior strengthens the relationship between social media users' (Generation Z) attitudes and visit intention.

METHOD

This research was conducted using a quantitative approach. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2017) quantitative research is research that contains numbers collected through structured questions.

The sample used in this study is Indonesian Generation Z, which is individuals aged 18 to 24 who actively use social media and often interact with content created by influencers. To ensure that the respondents fit into the Generation Z category, a screening process was carried out at the beginning of the questionnaire.

First, respondents were asked to state their age, and only those aged between 18 and 24 years old were allowed to continue filling out the rest of the questionnaire. Second, respondents were asked if they actively use social media (with a minimum frequency of once per day) and whether they follow or interact with influencer content (such as liking, commenting, or sharing posts). Only respondents who met these two criteria were considered valid and included in the final dataset.

In collecting data, this research uses questionnaire techniques. Researchers will process data by assessing instruments or questionnaires given to respondents using a Likert scale. The use of the Likert scale aims to make it easier for researchers to assess the level of agreement or disagreement of respondents with a statement.

Data analysis uses both multiple linear regression and structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM was used to test the overall model structure, including the relationships between latent variables such as source credibility, attitude, and visit intention, as SEM is effective in handling complex models with multiple dependent and mediating variables. Meanwhile, multiple linear regression was used to analyze

specific moderating effects particularly the role of following behavior and to confirm the influence of certain independent variables on a single dependent variable. Using both methods allows for a more robust analysis by validating the model structure (SEM) and examining specific variable-level relationships (regression). Before analysis, the data were tested for validity and reliability using SPSS 24.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this study obtained 267 respondents through a questionnaire distributed via Google Form. However, 55 respondents did not provide complete

answers, so only 212 respondents were eligible for analysis. Among the respondents, about 65% were female and 35% were male. Based on the respondents' answers, almost 75% belong to generation Z.

The majority of respondents (78.3%) stated that they have plans to travel in the next 12 months. Almost 84% of them also reported accessing Instagram at least once a day. Among the 212 respondents, 46.2% stated that they spend more time looking at the Instagram timeline or browsing the page and suggestions that pop up.

To assess the suitability of the model, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using machine learning (ML) estimation as follows.

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

	Factor Loadings	Composite Reliability
Source Credibility (Moon and Kim, 2001)		
I think the content of the posts made by these social media influencers is accurate.	0.90	0.892
I think the content of the posts made by these social media influencers is in line with the facts.	0.90	
I think the content of the posts made by these social media influencers is	0.80	
Attitude towards Instagram posts (Xu and Chen, 200)		
I think the content created by these social media influencers is good.	0.90	0.96
I think the content created by these social media is clear.	0.90	
I think the content created by these social media influencers is interesting.	0.91	
I think this social media influencer content has an impact.	0.95	
I think this social media influencer content is useful for me.	0.70	
Visit intention (Chen dkk, 2014)		
If I have the opportunity to travel, I intend to visit the destinations mentioned in the social media influencer's content.	0.70	0.85
When I travel, the likelihood of me visiting a destination mentioned in a social media influencer's post is high.	0.80	
If I have the opportunity to visit a travel destination visited by an influencer, I would like to buy the products recommended by the influencer in their content.	0.70	
Description: X ² (30) = 40.9, CFI: 0.96, GFI: 0.93, RMSEA: 0.06, SRMR: 0.05		

From the table above, the analysis results show that the applied model has an excellent fit with the collected data. The

comparative fit index (CFI) reached 0.99, the fit index (GFI) 0.93, the root mean square approximation error (RMSEA)

0.06, and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) 0.05, indicating that the proposed model fits the data obtained through the questionnaire very well. The Cronbach alpha and CR values of the constructs that ranged from 0.88 to 0.95 indicated excellent internal consistency. To ensure statistically significant convergence, factor loadings and t-values for each construct were used in testing its validity. The following are the results of the reliability testing.

Table 2. Reliability Results
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
.888	12

The results shown in table 2 above indicate that all indicators have values greater than 0.70 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), which means the study is valid. In addition, good convergent validity is reflected in the average value of the variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs, which is above 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), so it can be concluded that convergent validity has been met. Nonetheless, there is a potential for bias because data from all constructs are collected from one source at the same time (Guchait et al., 2016). The results showed that the three-factor model was better than the one-factor model, with the results of CFI: 0.96, GFI: 0.93, RMSEA: 0.06, and SRMR: 0.05.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	P	Results
H1	Source credibility-> User attitude	0.78		Supported
H2	User attitude-> Visit intention	0.58		Supported

Description: $X^2(30) = 40.9$, CFI: 0.96, GFI: 0.93, RMSEA: 0.06, SRMR: 0.05

Based on Table 3, the paths connecting source credibility, user attitude, and visit intention are revealed. The results show that the overall structural model exhibits a good fit, with CFI: 0.96, GFI: 0.93, RMSEA: 0.06, and SRMR: 0.05. The findings indicate a positive correlation between source credibility and users' attitudes towards influencer marketing (0.62, $p <$

0.01), indicating that the more credible an influencer post is, the more positive users' attitudes towards influencer marketing are. In addition, the more positive users' attitude towards the influencer's post, the more likely they are to visit the destination. Therefore, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 can be accepted.

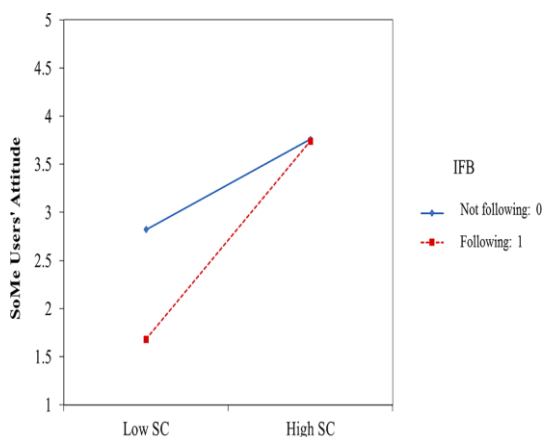
Table 4. Model result structure (N = 212)

Independent variable	Bound Variable and multiple regression	
	Step 1	Step 2
Attitudes of social media users		
Source Credibility	0.78**	0.78**
Influencer Influence	-0.40**	-0.28*
KS x PI		0.20*
F	52.59**	52.59*
R ²	0.30**	0.30*
Intention to visit		
User attitude	0.40**	0.40**
Influence of influencers	-0.25**	-0.05
SP x PI		0.3**
F	10.30**	18.00*
R	0.08**	0.12*

Note: $p < 0.001$ hal < 0.05

The analysis results in Table 4 show that this interaction is significant ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that it contributes significantly to the variance in users' attitudes towards influencer posts. A similar method was used to investigate the moderating effect of IFB on the relationship between users' attitudes and their intention to visit the promoted destination. The results showed a significant interaction between user attitude and IFB ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.05$), which accounted for significant additional variance in visit intention ($\Delta R^2 = 0.03$, $p < 0.05$).

User attitude scores were calculated based on a combination of the mean ± 1 SD (high and low levels) for source credibility and attitude. The interaction plot shown in Figure 1 reveals that the effect of source credibility on user attitude is positive for both influencer followers and non-followers, which means hypothesis 3 is accepted. In addition, the authors found that users' attitude scores increased when respondents followed influencers, as seen in Figure 1. Compared to those who did not follow, followers of influencers showed a positive relationship between attitude and intention to visit. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is also acceptable.



Note(s): SC- source credibility; IFB- influencer following behavior

Figure 1. Interaction Effect of Source Credibility and Influencer Following Behavior on Social Media User Attitude

The influence of *influencer* source credibility on the attitude of social media users (Generation Z)

From the results of the analysis that has been carried out, it is found that there is a significant positive relationship between source credibility and the attitude of generation Z users on influencer posts, which means that the first hypothesis is accepted. The credibility of a post shared by an influencer can affect a person's attitude, if the post is considered credible and trustworthy then a social media user will show an attitude of interest and later this will have an impact on his decision to visit or not to a tourist destination.

This is in line with research conducted by Evans *et al* (2017) which shows that individual attitudes towards *influencer marketing* have a positive effect on the intention or intention to buy marketed products or services. In the context of tourism, findings in previous research conducted by Ayeh *et al* (2013) also show that the impact of *influencer* credibility perceptions on online traveler attitudes has a significant influence. In addition to the previously mentioned research, the current study further strengthens the application of source credibility theory to the attitudes of generation Z users, especially in terms of tourism.

The influence of the attitude of social media users (Generation Z) on the intention to visit a destination

From the results of the analysis that has been done, this study shows that there is a positive relationship between the attitude of social media users (Genn Z) towards the intention to visit a destination, so it can be said that the second hypothesis is accepted. This means that the better the attitude shown by social media users, especially Gen Z, will be able to generate the intention to visit a tourist destination. This will have an impact on increasing visitors to a tour. So, the results of this study are in line with the theory that successful influencer marketing will make the attitude of a

social media user, especially Gen Z, to create an intention to visit a tourist destination.

This finding is in line with research conducted by Ayah *et al* (2013), which shows that travelers' attitudes towards *influencer-generated* content have a positive effect on their intention to plan a trip. In addition, previous research findings by Amaro and Duarte (2015) also show that consumer attitudes towards *influencer marketing* can increase decisions to visit.

Influencer following behavior strengthens the relationship between influencer source credibility and social media user attitudes (Generation Z).

The analysis shows that influencer following behavior acts as a moderator in the relationship between influencer source credibility and social media users' (Generation Z) attitude towards influencer marketing. In other words, individuals who follow influencers tend to have a more positive perception of the source credibility compared to those who do not follow. This suggests that attachment to influencers can strengthen the perception of trust in the content presented, thereby increasing users' positive attitude towards influencer marketing.

In the context of tourism, an increased positive attitude towards influencer marketing also contributes to a higher intention to visit the promoted destination. Followers of influencers are more likely to be influenced by the content they regularly consume compared to non-followers, who may not have the same emotional attachment or trust in the source of information.

This finding is consistent with Han & Chen's (2022) research, which states that source credibility has a significant positive influence on social media users' attitudes. The attitude, in turn, is closely related to their intention to visit the tourist destination promoted by the influencer. Thus, higher engagement with influencers not only increases the perception of source

credibility but also strengthens the impact of influencer marketing on the travel decisions of social media users, particularly Generation Z.

Influencer following behavior strengthens the relationship between social media users' (Generation Z) attitudes toward destination visit intention.

The analysis shows that influencer following behavior plays a moderating role in the relationship between social media users' (Generation Z) attitude towards influencer marketing and their intention to visit the promoted destination. This means that the impact of positive attitudes towards influencer marketing on intention to visit is not uniform, but rather depends on users' level of engagement with the influencers they follow. Users who actively follow and interact with the influencer's content tend to have a higher intention to visit the promoted destination compared to those who do not actively follow the influencer.

More intense interactions with influencers can increase trust and emotional attachment, making users more likely to accept the recommendations provided. In addition, repeated exposure to influencer content can strengthen users' trust and interest in the promoted destination, increasing their likelihood of actually visiting.

This finding is in line with research conducted by Azkiah (2023), which states that following influencers on social media can influence users' attitudes and intentions, both in making purchases and in planning visits to tourist destinations. Thus, the greater one's engagement with an influencer, the stronger the relationship between their attitude towards influencer marketing and the decision to visit the recommended destination.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis, the credibility of the influencer source is shown to have a significant positive

relationship with user attitudes. When influencers are perceived as credible, users tend to exhibit more positive attitudes, especially in relation to posts related to tourist destinations. This finding supports the first hypothesis of the study. The positive attitude of social media users, especially Generation Z, also has a positive impact on their intention to visit the promoted tourist destination. The more favorable the user's attitude towards the influencer's content, the greater their intention to visit the destination, which is in line with previous research in influencer marketing and tourism.

Practical implications of these findings suggest that tourism marketers should prioritize collaborations with influencers who have high perceived credibility among their followers. Ensuring that influencers maintain authenticity and trustworthiness can enhance user engagement and increase travel intentions, particularly among Gen Z audiences who are highly responsive to digital content. Influencer selection should consider factors like relevance, consistency, and transparency to maximize impact.

However, this study has limitations. The sample was limited to Indonesian Generation Z users aged 18–24, which may not reflect the attitudes and behaviors of older generations or users from different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the study did not account for the diversity in influencer types, content categories, or user-platform trust levels. Future research is expected to deepen the understanding of the influence of influencer marketing on Generation Z's attitudes and visit intentions by exploring specific variables, such as the type of influencer content and lifestyle, duration and frequency of following, and user engagement in interactions.

Research that compares generations, trust in social media platforms, and analysis of longitudinal studies can provide a broader perspective on the influence of influencer marketing. Cultural and regional factors, as well as the balance between

promotional content and authenticity, also need to be considered to provide deeper insights for marketing, tourism, and social media practitioners in designing more effective influencer marketing strategies.

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