

THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON DOMESTIC TOURISM DECISIONS AMONG HO CHI MINH CITY RESIDENTS IN VIETNAM: TESTING THE MODERATING ROLE OF INCOME

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Abstract

Influencer marketing has become an important source of information that influences domestic tourism decisions in emerging markets. However, there is limited research on the role of individuals' economic conditions in explaining the translation of influencer attributes from travel intention to actual travel decisions. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of influencer attributes on domestic tourism decisions of residents in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam with Travel Intention as mediator and Income as moderator. A mixed methods design of exploratory sequential type was used. Qualitative interviews were first conducted to refine the conceptual framework and measurement scales, and then a survey of 311 valid responses was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM). The results show that Emotional Connection and Trust are the strongest predictors of Travel Intention. Travel Intention has a significant effect on Travel Decision. Income further reinforces the link between Travel Intention and Travel Decision, indicating that the financial ability facilitates the translation of travel motivation into behavioral decisions. This study contributes to Source Credibility Theory by combining cognitive, socioemotional and economic mechanisms in a unified behavioral framework. The findings have practical implications for destination marketers, tourism businesses and travel influencers who want to develop more effective influencer marketing strategies in emerging tourism markets.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing; Domestic Tourism; Travel Intention; Travel Decision; Income; Vietnam.

JEL Codes: M31, L83, D12, Z32.

1. INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have shown that influencer credibility and content appeal influence travel intention, but three issues are still unclear. First, the evidence is still focused on intention rather than the subsequent stage of decision making. Second, cognitive credibility and socioemotional influence are often studied separately. Third, financial resources are

commonly viewed as the direct antecedent, not a possible boundary condition in the intention-to-decision relationship. The present study addresses these gaps by contextually integrating cognitive, socioemotional, motivational, and economic mechanisms in an exploratory sequential design. Its theoretical contribution lies in examining the operation of different influencer attributes via travel intention; its methodological contribution lies in combining interview-based scale contextualization and PLS-SEM; and its managerial contribution lies in differentiating the content features that draw attention from those that enable actionable travel planning.

In the post-COVID-19 pandemic, domestic tourism has affirmed its role as an important factor in the recovery and sustainable development of Vietnam's tourism industry, especially in the context of a slow recovery of the international market and many uncertainties of the global economy (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). The explosion of the digital age and social media has changed the way consumers search for information and therefore form perceptions and make travel decisions based on non-traditional sources. Contemporary tourists increasingly rely on content shared by influential persons (influencers) rather than traditional promotional channels, which offer personalized experiences, high interaction, and an increased feeling of proximity and trust in the decision process (Pop et al., 2022; Leung et al., 2022). In this context, influencers are not merely information transmitters but also social actors who, through authentic experiential stories, can evoke emotions, foster trust, and powerfully drive behavior, helping to bridge the gap between information reception and action taking (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). However, most previous studies in Vietnam have mainly concentrated on the aspect of travel intention, whereas the psychosocial mechanisms that lead to the transformation from intention to the actual travel decision have not been thoroughly elucidated (Vu et al., 2022). This study addresses this gap by using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design to develop and test an extended model of the influencer marketing influence. The qualitative part was devoted to an in-depth study of the psychological and social factors that influence consumers' perceptions of content, and the findings suggested that, in addition to attributes such as expertise or attractiveness, trust and similarity are central to the persuasiveness of an influencer in the specific cultural context of Vietnam (Belanche et al., 2021). From this, quantitative research was performed to test the model by Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM using SmartPLS) with data collected from the residents of Ho Chi Minh city. The study considered tourism intention as a key mediating variable, integrating it with income as a moderating variable to reflect the likelihood of realizing intention into actual behavior, providing valuable empirical evidence for academic and destination management strategies (Casaló et al., 2020).

The study was performed through a mixed-method approach in an explorative sequence and was developed in two main steps:

- In the first step: Qualitative research was used to explore and refine the attributes of influencers to suit the context of domestic tourism in Vietnam, serving as the foundation for constructing the research model and measurement scale.

- In the second step: Quantitative research was conducted by using PLS-SEM using SmartPLS method to evaluate the measurement model and structural model, therefore testing research hypotheses on the relationship between influencer attributes, travel intentions, travel decisions, the moderating role of income, and the impact of demographic variables.

This study specifically points to two new variables found from the qualitative data. The first one is Emotional Connection, which is the sense of closeness, empathy, and psychological connection that the influencer has with the followers. This variable can be explained from the perspective of Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) which suggests that followers tend to have a one-way but intimate relationship with media personalities. Furthermore, the Inspirational Ability shows the influencer's ability to inspire a person to want to experience something, a desire to explore and act. This is a new feature in the Vietnamese context that was not systematized in the previous studies. In the context of this study, Income was significantly moderating the process from Travel Intention to Domestic Travel Decision of Ho Chi Minh City's residents.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition

The influencers influence the attitudes and consumer behavior of their followers through their reputation, expertise and relationships with the community (Vrontis et al., 2021) and influencer marketing is a social media marketing strategy. This approach is based on the development of an online presence relying on personalized and highly interactive content rather than purely commercial promotional messages, thus enabling travelers to access more authentic and reliable experiential information than traditional media (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Leung et al., 2022).

Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy based on social media platforms where the influencers use their prestige, expertise, and relations with the community to influence the attitudes and consumer behavior of their followers (Vrontis et al., 2021). Domestic tourism (tourism within a country's borders, including citizens' travel and consumption of tourism services) has become a pillar in the economic recovery and revenue maintenance for Vietnam's tourism industry in the post-COVID-19 period (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Recent empirical evidence has demonstrated that cost optimization, short-stay experience trend and informational influence from social media platforms have significant influence on domestic tourists' behaviour (Do et al., 2022; Buhalis et al., 2023).

Tourism decision making is the stage of behavior realization, after a process of need identification, search and evaluation of alternatives based on established intentions (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2021). This is a key transition from awareness to actual behavior, depending on individual demographic characteristics such as income, travel experience, and external factors from online social networks (Karl et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021).

Expertise, in the influencer attribute system, refers to in-depth knowledge and practical experience, which improves the persuasiveness of the message; attractiveness, in the

influencer attribute system, refers to lifestyle and personal image, which helps maintain attention and establish goodwill with followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Belanche et al., 2021). Trust, in particular, is a key construct that reduces perceived risk and is a prerequisite for converting initial interest into actual travel behavior (Pop et al., 2022). Moreover, the similarity in values and lifestyles between influencers and users engenders empathy, increasing the chances of message reception and reinforcing consumer intentions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020).

Currently, Ho Chi Minh City is the largest economic center and source market for domestic tourism in Vietnam with high-income population, high travel frequency and leading technology access rates (Le & Nguyen, 2022). The tourism behaviour of the city residents is a good representation of the cultural diversity and different experiential needs of the Vietnamese market, thus improving the generalizability of empirical research results as city residents come from different regions (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Vietnam has a fast pace of digitalization and one of the highest rates of social media use in the region. This creates conditions where consumer behavior is strongly influenced by social media (Statista, 2024). Vietnamese culture that emphasizes social relationships and personal beliefs, tourists are easily affected by influencers creating a feeling of closeness and shared values (Nguyen et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2023). The study of influencer marketing in this context provides empirical evidence for emerging markets, and also clarifies the interaction of social, emotional and individual economic barriers in influencing actual tourism behavior (Hassan et al., 2021).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This research develops a multi-dimensional theoretical framework to explain the mechanism of influencer marketing on tourism behavior. Firstly, the persuasiveness of influencers is based on a combination of the Source Credibility Model and Parasocial Relationship Theory. The credibility of the influencer, through elements such as expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and content consistency, is a major factor that influences trust and choice of destination among tourists (Belanche et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021; Pop et al., 2022). Simultaneously, the bespoke interaction on social media engenders a one-way, intimate psychological bond, leading users to perceive the travel recommendations as counsel from close relationships (Leung et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2023). From the psychological process perspective, this study uses the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework to explain the mediating role of internal states. Users actively seek content to satisfy their informational, entertainment, and inspirational needs, which generates cognitive and emotional stimuli and leads to behavioral responses such as the formation of intentions and travel decisions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Hassan et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021; Buhalis et al., 2023). The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is the most important basis for explaining the pathway from awareness to action, where influencers are playing a powerful social agent role, influencing attitudes and subjective norms to shape intentions before they turn into actual behavior (Meng & Choi, 2021; Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2021). Finally, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use

of Technology (UTAUT) explain technology acceptance mechanisms (Venkatesh et al., 2016) and studies on perceived human-like interaction and usefulness of digital interfaces further support the behavioural feasibility in online travel contexts (Pelau et al., 2021).

2.3 Related Studies

During the last decade the digital ecosystem has become an important factor in the information search and itinerary planning process of the modern traveler. There is empirical evidence that consumers are increasingly willing to depend on personalized online sources of content rather than traditional media channels, in order to reduce perceived risk and build trust (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2022; Pop et al., 2022; Buhalis et al., 2023). In this context, core influencer attributes such as expertise, credibility and appeal are identified as critical antecedents that directly influence trust and attitudes, which in turn influence the behavioral intentions of followers (Belanche et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021). This is especially true in the case of highly experiential tourism, where the similarity between the influencers and the public contributes to the optimization of the reception of messages (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). From 2020 to the present, research has begun to shift to more profound psychological factors. Studies have shown that emotional connection, compassion and parasocial relationships are the primary mediating variables between influencer communication activities and real buying behavior (Zhang et al., 2021; Ki et al., 2022). Influencers do not only develop intentions through storytelling strategies and authentic experiential imagery but also directly trigger actual travel decisions (Mariani et al., 2021; Iswanto et al., 2024). The results of meta-analyses show that the influence on behavior is a complex interaction of cognitive factors and the inherent emotions of tourists (Singh et al., 2020).

The trends of influencer marketing in the Vietnamese market are slowly catching up with the international trends. Research has indicated that social media, particularly video content and personal travel vlogs, have become the primary source of information that influences the destination choices of young urban consumers (Nguyen et al., 2021; Do et al., 2022; Le & Nguyen, 2022; Pham et al., 2023). Beyond commercial interests, the integration of local cultural values and messages concerning sustainable and green tourism within the content of influencers is of utmost importance for cultivating ethical standards and responsible practices in the tourist community (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Hassan et al., 2021; Linh & Do, 2023). In summary, there is evidence to support the view that the power of influencers in the domestic tourism context in Vietnam is the synergy of professional expertise and the ability to inspire, which impacts both intentions and actual experiences (Singh et al., 2020; Iswanto et al., 2024).

3. HYPOTHESIS

The updated framework is primarily based on Source Credibility Theory to clarify expertise and attractiveness, parasocial and identification mechanisms to clarify emotional connection, Uses and Gratifications Theory to clarify inspirational content consumption, and the Theory of Planned Behavior to locate travel intention as the

proximal antecedent of travel decision. The Stimulus-Organism-Response framework is maintained as a process lens to bring things together. Therefore TAM and UTAUT are not used as core explanatory theories. The model supplied does not measure perceived usefulness, ease of use, performance expectancy or effort expectancy.

The conceptual framework was refined to the research model “The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Domestic Travel Decision of Ho Chi Minh City Residents in Vietnam” in the first phase of the research. The model included six attributes of influencers: Expertise, Attractiveness, Emotional Connection, Inspirational Ability, Trustworthiness, and Similarity. It is assumed that these six attributes will have a positive effect on domestic tourism intentions. The aim of domestic tourism is assumed to have a positive impact on the decision of domestic tourism. Factors of influencer marketing effect on domestic travel decisions through the mediating variable of travel intention. Income is also included in the model as a moderating variable in the Intention-Decision link, where higher income implies a stronger effect from Intention to Decision. Moreover, demographic variables were included to check their influence on travel Decisions, where Age and Education were directly checked using bootstrapping, while Gender was checked using Multigroup Analysis (MGA) as instructed by SmartPLS.

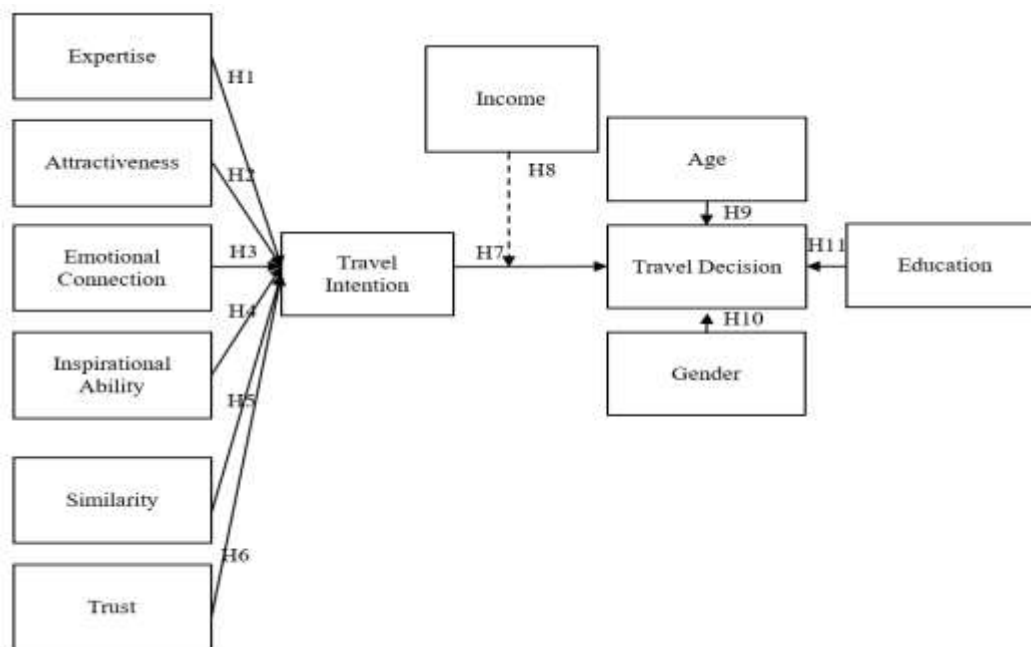


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

In this model, the research hypotheses are stated as follows:

3.1 Expertise and Travel Intention

The Source Credibility Model shows that the expertise of the media source is one of the factors that can improve the persuasiveness of the message because consumers believe in the knowledge and ability to provide accurate information for consumer Decision

(Vrontis et al., 2021). Itineraries, cost estimates, and risk management experience are highly specialized content in the tourism sector. This helps to minimize uncertainty and perceived risk and reinforces positive attitudes and promotes the Travel Intention according to the TPB theoretical framework (Buhalis et al., 2023). Therefore, Ho Chi Minh City residents tend to have stronger Travel Intention when they identify the high level of Expertise from an influencer (Leung et al., 2022).

Hypothesis 1: Expertise has a positive impact on Travel Intention.

3.2 Attractiveness and Travel Intention

In the Source Credibility Model, Attractiveness is very important in creating goodwill, drawing attention and increasing the public acceptance of the message (Casaló et al., 2020). For Influencer Marketing, Attractiveness does not only refer to appearance, but also lifestyle, visual aesthetics and the way of delivering content that engages followers (Belanche et al., 2021). These factors directly add value to the emotional experience and activate the motivation for the exploration of followers. The Attractiveness of an influencer is expected to be a positive driver of tourists' Travel Intention (Pop et al., 2022).

Hypothesis 2: Attractiveness has a positive impact on Travel Intention.

3.3 Emotional Connection and Travel Intention

Parasocial Relationship Theory explains the mechanism of emotional connection, as followers develop a psychological bond with influencers through constant exposure to personalized content (Chen et al., 2023). Travel content is a stimulus, emotional attachment is an organ, and travel intention is a response under the lens of the SOR model. This is to say that Emotional Connection transforms media stimuli into actual behavioral Intention (Zhang et al., 2021). Recent empirical studies validate that parasocial relationships in the digital environment are able to create more powerful behavioral responses than in traditional channels (Ki, 2022).

Hypothesis 3: Emotional Connection has a positive impact on Travel Intention.

3.4 Inspirational Ability and Travel Intention

The Uses and Gratifications Theory states that users consume content actively to satisfy needs for information, entertainment, and more specifically for the need for Inspiration or escape from reality (Buhalis et al., 2023). Within the SOR framework, "Inspiration" is highlighted as a particularly important intrinsic state, as it brings about positive emotions and generates motivation to steer behavioral intentions (Hassan et al., 2021). Experiential stories are more successful in motivating influencers and more powerfully arouse a desire to travel and strengthen Travel Intention than descriptive content (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Hypothesis 4: Inspirational Ability has a positive impact on Travel Intention.

3.5 Trust and Travel Intention

Trust is a fundamental ingredient of Source Credibility and a pre-condition for message acceptance, particularly for decisions with perceived high risk, such as travel services

(Pop et al., 2022). Current research on influencer marketing indicates that Trust increases consumer confidence in branded content as consumers perceive the information to be less biased and objective (Vrontis et al., 2021). Therefore, it is hypothesized that Trust in influencers will positively and directly affect followers' Travel Intention (Leung et al., 2022).

Hypothesis 5: Trust has a positive impact on Travel Intention.

3.6 Similarity and Travel Intention

Similarity functions through the processes of identification and homophily when followers discover that the influencer shares their lifestyle, values, or circumstances with them (Belanche et al., 2021). This causes them to Trust more in the feasibility of shared experiences, thus increasing the level of message acceptance and reinforcing behavioral Intention (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). Empirical evidence shows that when Similarity is married with Trust, the persuasive effect of the influencer on experiential Decision such as travel is optimized (Schouten et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 6: Similarity has a positive impact on travel intention.

3.7 Travel Intention and Travel Decision

In Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Intention is the closest and most direct predictor of actual behavior, the stronger the Intention, the higher the probability to perform the behavior, as long as the individual has sufficient resources to do so (Venkatesh et al., 2016). In modern tourism studies, the connection between Intention and choice behavior has been well-established, demonstrating the significance of intention in the realization of travel plans (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2021). Hence, Travel Intention is considered to be one of the positive factors that influence actual Travel Decision.

Hypothesis 7: Travel Intention positively impacts Travel Decision.

3.8 The Moderating Role of Income between Travel Intention and Travel Decision

In the context of TPB, perceived behavior control and execution conditions are important to convert Intentions into actual behavior. Income is directly proxied by financial resources, which facilitate behavior and reduce cost barriers for domestic tourism (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). This is in line with the concept of "facilitating conditions" in the UTAUT model where stronger resources will push Intention to be more aggressive toward behavior (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Therefore, Income is expected to be a moderator that reinforces the effect of Travel Intention on actual Travel Decision.

Hypothesis 8: Income positively moderates the relationship between Travel Intention and Travel Decision.

3.9 Age and Travel Decision

Age is typically linked with differences in experiential needs, risk tolerance levels and patterns of consumption of digital information leading to differences in decision-making processes even at the same level of Intention (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In empirical

research of digital behavior, age is utilized as a control or dissociation variable to investigate differences in how users respond to sources of influence (Pelau et al., 2021). Therefore, testing the direct effect of age on Travel Decision using bootstrapping techniques in SmartPLS is an appropriate methodological approach.

Hypothesis 9: Age has a significant impact on Travel Decision.

3.10 Education and Travel Decision

Educational attainment affects the way travelers process information, assess the credibility of sources and assess benefits against costs. This has resulted in differences in their actual travel decisions, especially in circumstances where they are inundated with information from influencers (Hassan et al., 2021). This argument is in line with theories of decision-making behavior under the introduction of basic variables such as education in the model to explain the differences in actual actions (Zhang et al., 2021). Therefore, testing the direct effect of education on Travel Decision using the bootstrapping method is totally scientifically valid.

Hypothesis 10: Education has a significant impact on Travel Decision.

3.11 Gender and Travel Decision

Gender is considered a personal factor that can influence the way individuals receive and process media content, their motivation and tendency to engage in travel activities (Meng & Choi, 2021). Therefore, the inclusion of Gender in the model as a control variable and testing of its direct influence is required to assess the independent influence of Gender on Travel Decision, thus illuminating the role of demographic characteristics in the context of influencer marketing (Vrontis et al., 2021).

Hypothesis 11: Gender has a significant impact on Travel Decision.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Operationalization

The study follows a sequential exploratory mixed method design where qualitative research is first conducted to explore and refine the attributes of influencers in the context of domestic tourism in Vietnam, followed by quantitative research to validate the proposed conceptual model and hypotheses. This approach enables theoretical development and empirical validation, such that scales and structural relationships are grounded in local consumer perceptions prior to statistical testing. The overall aim of the mixed design is to identify the relevant psychological and social mechanisms through which influencer marketing influences domestic travel intention and decision making behavior, and to investigate how individual and demographic conditions shape the realization of travel intention into actual Decision.

4.2 Qualitative Research

4.2.1 Participant recruitment and profile

Participants had to be at least 18 years old, had to have taken a domestic trip in the previous 12 months and had to follow travel influencers to qualify. The final qualitative data set consisted of 13 participants, six men and seven women, aged between 25 and 63 years. These included office workers, marketing and communication professionals, lecturers, trainers, a project manager, a retired teacher, a homemaker and tourism or hospitality practitioners. This deliberate variation allowed for a comparison of practical, emotional and professional readings of influencer content.

Table 1: Profile of Qualitative Participants

ID	Gender	Age	Occupation or role	Analytical note
PV1	Female	35	Office employee	Authentic storytelling
PV2	Female	60	Retired teacher	Cost and safety
PV3	Female	29	Employee, mother	Practical family planning
PV4	Female	63	Homemaker or retired	Simplicity
PV5	Female	25	Marketing employee	Visual influence
PV6	Male	38	Project manager	Expertise and cost
PV7	Male	40	Tour guide	Authenticity
PV8	Female	33	Communication employee	Inspiration
PV9	Female	47	Lecturer	Expertise and verification
PV10	Male	28	Trainer and sales	Inspiration and realism
PV11	Male	30	Lecturer and marketer	Storytelling and visuals
PV12	Male	35	Lecturer and hospitality manager	Practical expertise
PV13	Male	47	Lecturer and tour guide	Authenticity and experience

4.2.2 Interview procedure and thematic analysis

The interview guide included 15 questions related to the topics of platform use, expertise, attractiveness, emotional attachment, inspirational ability, travel intention, travel decision, income, age, and gender. The materials provided indicate that permission to record was sought and that interviews were transcribed and coded thematically.

Table 2: Coding Framework and Implications for Scale Refinement

Theme	Frequency
Attractiveness	10
Expertise	9
Inspirational capability	9
Emotional connection	8
Travel intention	7
Travel decision	6
Income	5
Gender	5
Age	4

Note: Authors' own work

The qualitative phase of the study was performed using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 13 participants who regularly follow travel-related influencers on social media and have experience with domestic travel. Participants were chosen to mirror a broad spectrum of consumer views, considering factors like age, occupation, and frequency of travel.

The interviews focused on three main areas: perceptions of the credibility and usefulness of influencer content, emotional and psychological responses to influencer storytelling, and practical considerations that influence domestic Travel Decision. All interviews were audiorecorded, transcribed and thematically analysed.

Table 3: Frequency of Themes in the 13-Interview Dataset

Theme	Initial codes	Illustrative evidence	Theoretical interpretation	Questionnaire implication
Expertise	detail sharing; cost; logistics	"Influencer chia sẻ cụ thể về phương tiện, khách sạn, món ăn."	Practical knowledge reduces planning uncertainty.	Retain expertise items focused on actionable information.
Attractiveness	authenticity; visual appeal; storytelling	"Cách kể chuyện chân chất, không phô trương."	Aesthetic and personal appeal attract attention and engagement.	Retain visual and communication-style items.
Emotional connection	nostalgia; shared passion; social similarity	"Video miền Tây gợi nhớ tuổi thơ ở quê."	Personal resonance may intensify identification, although its quantitative direction requires careful interpretation.	Retain emotional resonance items and avoid assuming a positive effect.
Inspirational capability	motivation; discovery; new experience	"Xem video về Tây Bắc thấy thôi thúc đi ngay."	Inspirational content activates exploration motivation.	Retain items capturing desire and activation.
Travel intention	saving content; planning; information search	"Tôi lưu video và tra thêm thông tin để đi."	Represents the proximal planning state.	Measure planning and likelihood of travel.
Travel decision	trip execution; following suggestions	"Tôi đi Đà Lạt, chọn homestay như influencer."	Represents self-reported decision enactment.	Clarify whether items capture booking, completed travel, or decision readiness.
Income	budget constraint; affordability	"Muốn đi Tây Bắc mà không đủ chi phí."	Financial resources condition feasibility.	Retain income as a tested moderator, without presuming significance.

Note: Authors' own work

The qualitative results confirm the importance of the most studied influencer attributes: Expertise, Attractiveness, Emotional Connection and Inspirational Ability. Moreover, the participants put strong emphasis on the two emerging factors, Trust and Similarity. Trust is the degree to which the followers believe that the influencer's content is true, objective and realistic, especially in terms of cost, service quality and real experience. Similarity is the degree to which the followers perceive that the influencer has similar lifestyles, financial circumstances, travel priorities and limitations, thus making the recommended experiences seem feasible and relevant to them personally. Building upon these qualitative insights, two additional independent variables, namely, Trust and Similarity, were incorporated into the formal research model as factors influencing Travel Intention.

4.3. Quantitative Research

4.3.1 Sampling Method

The quantitative phase involved an online questionnaire distributed via convenience and chain-referral sampling. The analytical data set contained 311 complete cases and 47 variables. All respondents scored positive on the three screened items (YN1, YN2 and YN3).

The dataset provided had no missing values. The final sample consisted of 311 respondents who met the study's eligibility criteria and had complete responses on the measurement and demographic variables. This sample size was sufficient to meet the minimum requisites for PLS-Smart SEM given the complexity of the research model and the number of latent constructs.

Table 4: Quantitative Sample Profile Based on the Coded Dataset (N = 311)

Variable	Category as coded	n	%
Gender	Nam / Male	150	48.2
Gender	Nữ / Female	161	51.8
Age	18 - 30	189	60.8
Age	31 - 40	81	26
Age	41 - 50	29	9.3
Age	Trên / Over 50	12	3.9
Edu	THPT / Highschool	10	3.2
Edu	Cao đẳng / College	15	4.8
Edu	Đại học / University	258	83
Edu	Sau đại học / Post-graduate	28	9
Inc	Dưới 5 triệu / Below 5 million VND	40	12.9
Inc	5-10 triệu / million VND	60	19.3
Inc	10-20 triệu / million VND	131	42.1
Inc	Trên 20 triệu / million VND	80	25.7

Note: Authors' own work

The measurement items were adapted and refined to be aligned with the language and expression of Vietnamese consumers in the context of domestic tourism. After the calibration of the scale, the official questionnaire for quantitative survey was a 5-points Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

A multi-item reflective scale was used to measure all latent variables with five indicators for each construct. A 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used. All eight substantive constructs were defined as reflective and measured using five indicators on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The structural variables were Expertise (EXP1-EXP5), Attractiveness (ATT1-ATT5), Emotional Connection (ECONN1-ECONN5), Inspiration (INSP1-INSP5), Trust (TRUST1-TRUST5), Similarity (SIMI1-SIMI5), Travel Intention (INT1-INT5) and Travel Decision (DEC1-DEC5).

Age, Education, Income and Gender were considered as observed demographic variables and not as reflective latent constructs. Income was also used to generate the interaction term Income $\times$ Travel Intention for the moderation test. The PLS-SEM analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.11.2.

4.3.2 Research Process

The data was analyzed using SmartPLS software based on the standard PLS-Smart SEM procedures. The analysis process was summarized in two steps. Outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, average variance extracted and heterotrait-monotrait ratio were used to evaluate the measurement model.

Subsequently, the structural model was examined by inner VIF values, path coefficient, bootstrapped standard error, t statistics, p values, R^2 , adjusted R^2 and f^2 . To explore the mediating effect of Travel Intention, specific indirect paths from each influencer attribute to Travel Decision were examined. We investigated the interaction of Income and Travel Intention in order to test the moderating role of Income.

The demographic effects were estimated by using the direct paths to Travel Decision in the SmartPLS model provided. Firstly, the measurement model was tested with regard to index reliability, internal consistency reliability and convergent validity by using outloading coefficients, Cronbach Alpha coefficient, composite reliability and extracted mean variance (AVE). To evaluate discriminant validity, the Ratio of Differentiated Characteristics – Single Characteristics (HTMT) criterion was used.

Second, the structural model was evaluated by examining multicollinearity among the predicted structures by means of Variance Amplification Factor (VIF), estimating their path coefficients and statistical significance through bootstrapping, and evaluating the model's explanatory power by R^2 value.

The effect size (f^2) was calculated to assess the relative contribution of each predicted variable to the endogenous structures. The moderating role of Tourism Intention was tested by indirect path relationships and the moderating role of Income was tested by the interaction of Income and Tourism Intention. Demographic variables (Age, Education Level and Gender) were used as control variables with direct paths to Tourism Decision.

5. RESEARCH RESULT

5.1. The Measurement Model

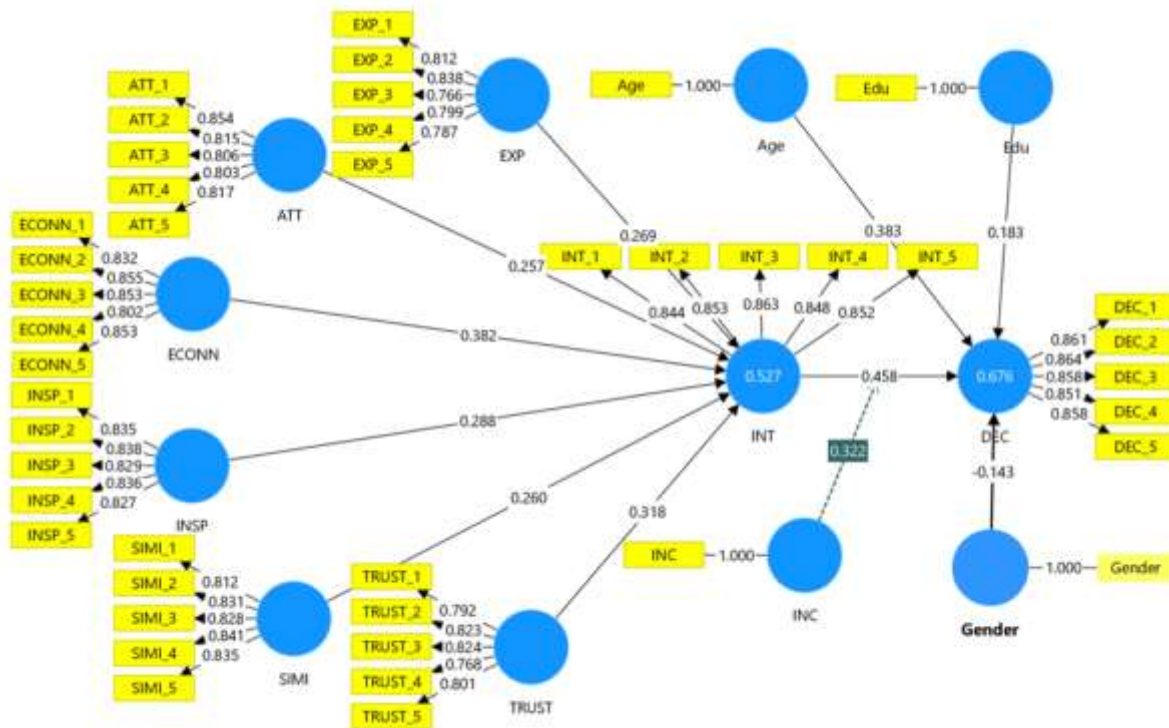


Figure 2: The Result of PLS Algorithm

Note: Authors' own work, using SmartPLS software.

The PLS model shows that the scales reach a good level of representation for the underlying concepts, with the outloading coefficients of most of the observed variables being above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable convergence and reliability of the scales.

Demographic variables like Age, Edu, and Gender are modeled with a single indicator with the outloading coefficient of 1.00, as the single indicator variable handling in PLS-Smart SEM. The R^2 value of Travel Intention is about 0.53 in terms of explanatory power, which indicates that influencer attributes explain more than half of the variance of travel intention.

The R^2 of Travel Decision is about 0.68, reflecting the good predictive power of the model for travel decision behavior. All the path coefficients present positive signs for the influencer attributes and the relationship from Travel Intention to Travel Decision, the moderating effect of Income shows a tendency to strengthen the conversion process from intention to decision and demographic variables show varying degrees of influence on

travel decisions. The data analyses using the result tables will be explained in detail in the respective sections below.

5.1.1 Outer Loading

Table 5: Outer Loadings

	EXP	ATT	ECONN	INSP	TRUST	SIMI	INT	DEC
EXP1	0.812							
EXP2	0.838							
EXP3	0.766							
EXP4	0.799							
EXP5	0.787							
ATT1		0.854						
ATT2		0.815						
ATT3		0.806						
ATT4		0.803						
ATT5		0.817						
ECONN1			0.832					
ECONN2			0.855					
ECONN3			0.853					
ECONN4			0.802					
ECONN5			0.853					
INSP1				0.835				
INSP2				0.838				
INSP3				0.829				
INSP4				0.836				
INSP5				0.827				
TRUST1					0.792			
TRUST2					0.823			
TRUST3					0.824			
TRUST4					0.768			
TRUST5					0.801			
SIMI1						0.812		
SIMI2						0.831		
SIMI3						0.828		
SIMI4						0.841		
SIMI5						0.835		
INT1							0.844	
INT2							0.853	
INT3							0.863	
INT4							0.848	
INT5							0.852	
DEC1								0.861
DEC2								0.864
DEC3								0.858
DEC4								0.851
DEC5								0.858

Note: Authors' own work, using SmartPLS software.

Table 5 presents the outer loadings of eight possible constructs: Expertise (EXP), Attractiveness (ATT), Emotional Connection (ECONN), Inspirational Ability (INSP), Trust (TRUST), Similarity (SIMI), Travel Intention (INT) and Travel Decision (DEC). The experimental results show that all observed variables have loadings above the cut-off point of 0.70 suggested by Hair et al., thus indicating that the reliability of indicators is at optimum level. The independent variables of the influencer attribute were found to have stable outer loadings; specifically, the outer loading for EXP ranged between 0.766-0.838, with EXP2 being the highest, ATT ranged between 0.803-0.854, ECONN ranged between 0.802-0.855 and INSP reflected consistency between 0.827-0.838. Coefficients for TRUST ranged from 0.768 to 0.824, with the highest score for TRUST4 (0.824). SIMI showed a strong measurement of the psychosocial and cognitive aspects with coefficients ranging from 0.812 to 0.841. Specifically, the mediating variable INT (0.844-0.863) and the dependent variable DEC (0.851-0.864) showed very high loading coefficients, demonstrating the scale's good convergence on actual Travel Intention and decision-making behavior. No indicators were deleted and the measurement model met all strict criteria for intrinsic reliability and convergent validity in subsequent steps of analysis.

5.1.2 Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted

Table 6: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho-c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ATT	0.878	0.911	0.671
DEC	0.911	0.933	0.737
ECONN	0.895	0.923	0.704
EXP	0.86	0.899	0.641
INSP	0.89	0.919	0.694
INT	0.905	0.93	0.725
SIMI	0.887	0.917	0.688
TRUST	0.862	0.9	0.643

Note: Authors' own work, using SmartPLS software.

Table 6 summarizes the Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) indices for the eight latent structures confirming the convergent validity and intrinsic reliability of the measurement model. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.860-0.911, which is far above the threshold value of 0.70. The highest intrinsic consistency was recorded by DEC (0.911) and INT (0.905), followed by attribute variables such as INSP (0.890) and SIMI (0.887). The Composite Reliability index ranges from 0.899 to 0.933 that indicates the overall high reliability especially for central structures such as DEC (0.933) and INT (0.930). In terms of convergence, the AVE of all variables was 0.641-0.737 which was higher than the minimum threshold of 0.50, indicating that latent variables can well explain the variance of observed indicators. DEC and INT are still the first with AVE values of 0.737 and 0.725, respectively. The influencer attributes such as EXP (0.641) and TRUST (0.643) also perfectly meet the convergence criteria. In general, the results indicate that the measurement model fulfills the requirements of internal consistency, reliability and convergent validity, which constitutes a solid

foundation for the evaluation of discriminant validity and for the analysis of the structural model.

5.1.3 Discriminant validity, Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio

Table 7: Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio, HTMT

	ATT	AGE	DEC	ECONN	EXP	EDU	GENDER	INC	INSP	INT	SIMI	TRUST	INC X INT
ATT													
AGE	0.125												
DEC	0.266	0.573											
ECONN	0.099	0.133	0.184										
EXP	0.084	0.051	0.158	0.055									
EDU	0.139	0.512	0.463	0.024	0.035								
GENDER	0.053	0.035	0.056	0.19	0.081	0.083							
INC	0.063	0.683	0.16	0.031	0.104	0.457	0.087						
INSP	0.041	0.127	0.267	0.086	0.126	0.094	0.037	0.031					
INT	0.303	0.267	0.661	0.385	0.324	0.186	0.051	0.069	0.386				
SIMI	0.094	0.041	0.199	0.058	0.122	0.131	0.045	0.081	0.074	0.246			
TRUST	0.048	0.028	0.134	0.127	0.07	0.079	0.01	0.11	0.056	0.301	0.055		
INC X INT	0.118	0.21	0.453	0.046	0.04	0.196	0.055	0	0.049	0.037	0.078	0.127	

Note: Authors' own work, using SmartPLS software.

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) for the discriminant validity based on the strict criteria of Hair et al is presented in Table 7. The experimental results confirm that all HTMT values are less than 0.85, which provides evidence that latent constructs are conceptually distinct. In particular, the correlation between DEC and INT was the highest (0.661), which indicated the correlation between intention and behavior based on the TPB theory while maintaining measurement independence. Other pairs of demographic and psychological variables such as AGE-INC (0.683) or INT-ECONN (0.385) also kept safe values, removing conceptual overlap. The HTMT index confirmed the distinctness between cognitive and emotional aspects, which was mostly below 0.30 for the influencer attributes (EXP, ATT, ECONN, INSP, SIMI, TRUST) (e.g., EXP-ECONN was 0.055; TRUST-SIMI was 0.055). Importantly, the moderating interaction variable (INC × INT) resulted in a low HTMT with the main variables (with INT at 0.037; with DEC at 0.453), which provides assurance for reliability for the subsequent structural analysis. Finally, HTMT results support the discriminant validity of the model confirming the independent measures of the constructs and making the model ready for testing the hypotheses.

5.2 The Structural Model

5.2.1 Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Table 8: Collinearity Statistic, Vif

	VIF
Age → DEC	2.583
ATT → INT	1.017
ECONN → INT	1.025
Edu → DEC	1.46
EXP → INT	1.024

Gender → DEC	1.019
INC → DEC	2.377
INC x INT → DEC	1.135
INSP → INT	1.019
INT → DEC	1.252

Note: Authors' own work, using SmartPLS software.

To control multicollinearity among the independent variables, the VIF is shown in Table 8. Hair et al. have a strict criteria that VIF value should be less than 3.0 to make sure the path estimates are not biased. The results of the experiment showed that the overall VIF was between 1.017 and 2.583, which confirmed that there is no serious multicollinearity problem in the structural model. The VIF values of the predictor factors of the Travel Intention (INT) are ATT (1.017), ECONN (1.025), EXP (1.024), and INSP (1.019), all close to 1, indicating high independence between the influencer attributes. In the meantime, the variables affecting Travel Decision (DEC) such as INT (1.252), Edu (1.460), Gender (1.019), and the interaction variable INC × INT (1.135) also maintained safe VIF levels. The Age (2.583) and Income (2.377) had higher indices, as expected, given the natural association between demographic and economic resources, but they were within acceptable limits. Importantly, the VIF of the interaction variable INC × INT was low (1.135), which allowed for reliable interpretation of the moderating effect of income. The VIF results verified the assumption of no multicollinearity violation in the model in general and the estimated path coefficients were reliable for the next hypothesis testing step.

5.2.2 Original sample, P value

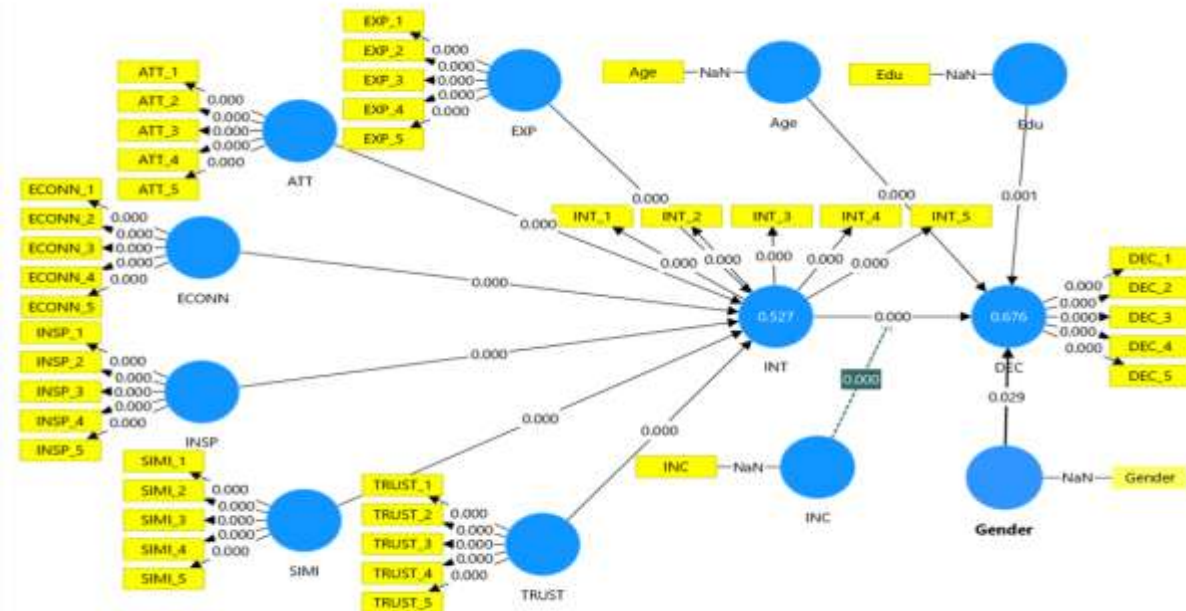


Figure 3: The Result of Bootstrapping

Note: Authors' own work, using SmartPLS software.

The bootstrap results shown in Figure 3 indicate that all model paths are statistically significant. That is, all six influencer attributes had a significant impact on Travel Intention (p-value = 0.000) and the central path from Travel Intention → Travel Decision (p-value = 0.000) also reached a significant level, confirming the strong predictive role of the intention in travel decision-making behavior. Income as a Moderating Variable on the Relationship between INT and DEC The interaction variable of INC × INT → DEC has a p-value of 0.000, which means the moderating effect of income still reaches a p-value of 0.000. Of the demographic variables, Age → DEC and Edu → DEC were statistically highly significant with p-values approximately 0.000. Gender → DEC was significant with p-value 0.029, which is less than the threshold 0.05, showing significant differences in travel decisions by gender.

All hypotheses of the model are supported by empirical data and none were rejected, confirming the structural fit of the research model. Thus, the model demonstrates not only the indirect effect mechanism of influencer marketing via travel intention but also the role of resource conditions and personal characteristics in realizing travel behavior. The R² of the model and the effect size of each independent variable (f²) will be further presented and discussed in the following sections.

Table 9: Original Sample, P-value

Relationship	Original sample (O)	P-value
Age → DEC	0.383	0
ATT → INT	0.257	0
ECONN → INT	0.382	0
Edu → DEC	0.183	0.001
EXP → INT	0.269	0
Gender → DEC	-0.143	0.029
INC → DEC	-0.156	0.004
INC x INT → DEC	0.322	0
INSP → INT	0.288	0
INT → DEC	0.458	0
SIMI → INT	0.26	0
TRUST → INT	0.318	0

Note: Authors' own work, using SmartPLS software.

The normalized path coefficients and p-values for the relationships in the structural model are shown in Table 9. Emotional Connection (ECONN → INT) had the strongest effect on Travel Intention (INT) (O = 0.382; p < 0.001), followed by Trust (TRUST → INT) (O = 0.318; p < 0.001), Inspiring Ability (INSP → INT) (O = 0.288; p < 0.001), Expertise (EXP → INT) (O = 0.269; p < 0.001), Similarity (SIMI → INT) (O = 0.260; p < 0.001), and Attractiveness (ATT → INT) (O = 0.257; p < 0.001). The results imply that both cognitive and socio-emotional factors contribute to intention formation, with emotional connection and trust being particularly salient. more pronounced. The Intention → Decision (INT → DEC) pathway is statistically significant and strong (O = 0.458; p < 0.001) supporting the important role of intention in predicting tourism behavior. The moderating effect of income

is significant too ($INC \times INT \rightarrow DEC$: $O = 0.322$; $p < 0.001$), highlighting the role of financial resources in the transformation of intention into decision.

In terms of demographic variables, Age had a positive and rather strong influence on travel decisions ($Age \rightarrow DEC$: $O = 0.383$; $p < 0.001$), followed by Education Level ($Edu \rightarrow DEC$: $O = 0.183$; $p = 0.001$), and Gender had a negative but still significant effect ($Gender \rightarrow DEC$: $O = -0.143$; $p = 0.029$). In general, all hypotheses are accepted, in which the intention formation process is governed by the socio-emotional attributes of the influencer and the travel decision is simultaneously influenced by intention, resource conditions and demographic characteristics.

5.2.3 R^2 , f^2

Table 10: R^2

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Travel Decision (DEC)	0.676	0.67
Travel Intention (INT)	0.527	0.518

Note: Authors' own work, using SmartPLS software.

Table 10 shows the R^2 and Adjusted R^2 for two dependent variables, Travel Intention (INT) and Travel Decision (DEC). The results show that R^2 for INT is 0.527, meaning that six influencer attributes predict 52.7% of the variance in travel intention, which indicates the good predictive power of influencer marketing factors in intention formation.

For DEC, the R^2 value is 0.676, which means that Travel Intention, the interaction variable of Intention and Income and demographic variables explain 67.6% of the variance of Travel Decision. This shows the strong predictive power of the model for actual travel behavior. The adjusted R^2 s for INT and DEC are 0.518 and 0.670 respectively, close to the original R^2 s, showing the model is stable and not inflated.

In general, the R^2 results show that the model can explain tourism Intention and Decision to a large extent, supporting the appropriateness of the proposed theoretical framework. The next section identifies the influence of each variable through the effect size (f^2) to determine the relative role of the factors in the model.

Table 11: f^2

Relationship	f-square
EXP $\rightarrow$ INT	0.149
ATT $\rightarrow$ INT	0.137
ECONN $\rightarrow$ INT	0.301
INSP $\rightarrow$ INT	0.172
TRUST $\rightarrow$ INT	0.21
SIMI $\rightarrow$ INT	0.14
INT $\rightarrow$ DEC	0.518
INC $\times$ INT $\rightarrow$ DEC	0.247

Note: Authors' own work, using SmartPLS software.

The f^2 index is presented in Table 11, and is used to determine the contribution of each independent variable to the explanatory power of the dependent variable. Using Cohen's guidelines, $f^2 = 0.02$ is small, $f^2 = 0.15$ is medium and $f^2 = 0.35$ is large. Emotional Connection (ECONN $\rightarrow$ INT) has the strongest influence with $f^2 = 0.301$, followed by Trust (TRUST $\rightarrow$ INT) with $f^2 = 0.210$, which shows the predominant role of emotional and belief factors in forming Intention for Travel Intention (INT).

Inspiring ability (INSP $\rightarrow$ INT) has a moderate influence ($f^2 = 0.172$), followed by Expertise (EXP $\rightarrow$ INT) ($f^2 = 0.149$), Similarity (SIMI $\rightarrow$ INT) ($f^2 = 0.140$) and Attractiveness (ATT $\rightarrow$ INT) ($f^2 = 0.137$), which shows that visual factors have a lesser impact than socio-emotional factors.

Travel Intention has a very strong influence on Travel Decision (DEC) (INT $\rightarrow$ DEC: $f^2 = 0.518$), confirming the central role of Intention in predicting actual behavior. The interaction between Income and Intention also had a moderate to high impact (INC $\times$ INT $\rightarrow$ DEC: $f^2 = 0.247$), suggesting the importance of financial resources to enable the transformation of Intention into Decision.

Overall effect size results indicate that the socio-emotional factors of the influencer play a dominant role in the intention formation process, whereas Travel Decision is mainly dependent on the level of Intention and financial conditions. This supports the indirect impact mechanism of influencer marketing through psychological motivation and the capacity to perform the behavior.

5.2 Moderator Variable

The interaction variable INC $\times$ INT was incorporated into the model to examine the moderating role of Income in the relationship between Intention and Tourism Decision. Bootstrapping results showed that the INC $\times$ INT $\rightarrow$ DEC path was statistically too significant ($O = 0.322$; $p = 0.000$) with a medium to high effect size ($f^2 = 0.247$), confirming the significant moderating role of Income in the transformation from Intention to Decision. This means that Income is a prerequisite to perform the behavior and not to stimulate tourism demand.

5.3 Demographic Effects

Demographic variables were directly tested on Travel Decision in the structural model. The results showed that age had a positive and significant effect on Travel Decision (Age $\rightarrow$ DEC: $O = 0.383$; $p = 0.000$) indicating that there were significant differences in tourism behavior between age groups.

Education level was also positively and statistically significantly influential (Education $\rightarrow$ DEC: $O = 0.183$; $p = 0.001$). This means that groups with higher Education levels tended to make decisions to participate in domestic tourism. Gender had a negative but statistically significant effect (Gender $\rightarrow$ DEC: $O = -0.143$; $p = 0.029$), which indicated there were Gender differences in Travel Decision-Making levels. However, the main effects of influencer marketing and the mediating effect of Intention were stable in the model.

In general, Age and Education level were the basic factors influencing the differences in travel behavior, and Gender made differences in decision making levels but did not change the main impact structure of the model.

6. DISCUSSION

The results of the research support that influencer marketing has a significant impact on domestic tourism behavior through the formation of Travel Intention, which is in line with the behavioral mechanisms proposed in the Theory of Planned Behavior. Influencer attributes mainly affect travelers at the motivation stage. The actual Travel Decision is determined by psychological readiness and practical conditions.

The characteristics of influencers are dominated by socio-emotional factors rather than purely cognitive assessments. The study finds that Emotional Connection and Trust are particularly significant in predicting Travel Intention, suggesting that followers are more susceptible to persuasion by influencers with whom they feel an emotional bond and who they perceive as authentic and trustworthy. This supports the Parasocial Relationship Theory, which suggests that repeated exposure to personalized content reinforces feelings of intimacy and social closeness, thereby increasing the likelihood of accepting behavioral recommendations. The strong effect of similarity further indicates the importance of social identification in travel decision-making. Followers consider proposed travel experiences to be more feasible and meaningful to them when they perceive influencers to have lifestyles and restrictions that are similar to their own. This finding contributes to the previous research on influencer marketing, as it points out the relevance of perceived feasibility in the context of experiential consumption such as domestic travel.

The strong effect of Travel Intention on Travel Decision-Making further reinforces the TPB's core behavioral assumption that intention is the closest predictor of action . However, the adjustment effect of income indicates that only psychological motivation is not sufficient to attain the behavior. Financial resources are a facilitating condition, which strengthens the conversion of intention to actual participation in line with the concept of facilitation in behavioral theory and technology adoption theory.

The demographic effects show that tourism behaviour is affected by both marketing stimuli and individual characteristics. Differences in tourism participation patterns are associated with Age and Education level, which are indicators of differences in lifestyles, information processing abilities and opportunity structures. Gender also has a statistically significant effect on Travel Decision, which could mean that social roles and travel preferences could influence behavioral outcomes, but the core effect mechanisms of the model are robust.

Overall, the results suggest that influencer marketing in domestic tourism operates through a multi-layered process, where Emotional Connection and Trust activate motivation, while the availability of resources determines the feasibility of the behavior. The integrated mechanism builds upon existing frameworks of source reliability by incorporating socio-economic and emotional factors within emerging markets.

7. IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

The study indicates implications for improving content and communication strategies to promote domestic tourism via the results of structural model which shows Influencer Attributes have a significant effect on Travel Intention and Emotional Connection and Trust are the most important and Intention is the strongest predictor of tourism decision. The recommendations below are based on the logic of the impact of the model, in terms of the factors that trigger the Intention and then on ways to support the transformation of intention into Decision, especially where income plays a significant moderating role.

7.1 Regarding Expertise

The analysis indicates that expertise has a positive effect on Travel Intention, so professional content is still the basis for followers to make "travelable" Decision rather than just "like to watch." Businesses and influencers need to create content that reduces perceived risk by providing specific information like time-slot itineraries, estimated costs broken down by category, suitable transportation recommendations, accommodation options based on budget, and safety precautions. Information should be presented in checklists, route maps, cost comparison tables or sample 2-day/1-night or 3-day/2-night itineraries. This will enhance usability of the information and enable viewers to apply the information immediately. Content for professionals should also be updated according to the season, the weather, the availability of services at the destination and should address common risks such as charges, traffic jams and overcrowding during peak seasons. Businesses can work with influencers to co-create a set of "local tips" for mass-market destinations, such as best times to avoid crowds, recommended restaurants, good photo spots and tips for budget-friendly bookings. When followers receive information that is detailed and consistent enough, their Travel Intention are strengthened, laying the foundation for a final Travel Decision.

7.2 Regarding Trust

In this model Trust was found to have significant impact on Travel Intention. This shows that Trust is not only statistically significant but also contributes substantially in the explanatory power of the model. Therefore, transparency should be a basic rule for influencers and companies when working together on media, particularly when it is a sponsored content. Content should clearly disclose the nature of the collaboration, clearly disclose the experience's terms and disclose the benefits and limitations of the service, avoiding taking the service to the point of misleading. The key to credibility is a "co-creation" model that embraces real life experiences, where influencers are given the chance to express their own feelings, rather than a one-sided advertising script. Services can be assessed against standard evaluation criteria at touchpoints including transport, check-in, quality of accommodation, cleanliness, service attitude and value for money, ensuring consistency and checkability of content. Secondly, social proof should be built by prompting community feedback through comments, reviews or mini-surveys after the trip, which will create Trust over time. When Trust is well established, followers tend to

believe that information on cost, quality and experience is authentic, thus reducing perceived risk and enhancing behavioral Intention.

7.3 Regarding Similarity

Similarity positively influences Travel Intention, consistent with social identification mechanisms. Consumers are more easily convinced when they believe the influencer is "similar to me," and the shared experience is doable. So, instead of trying to create generic content for everyone, influencers should clearly define their travel style and segment. For example, budget travel, family travel with small kids, weekend group travel, cultural experience travel, or travel for busy people. By showing personal context such as budget, itinerary, habits and priorities for comfort or exploration, followers will be able to compare and experience a greater sense of Similarity. When choosing an influencer, businesses should focus on how relevant they are to the target customer profile, rather than on the influencer's popularity or number of followers. Similarity often carries more weight when it comes to generating intention for possible decisions such as domestic travel. A good strategy is to use several micro-influencers from different groups, each telling a story and offering a suitable itinerary, thus expanding reach while keeping the "right people, right needs" approach. At the same time, content should provide different options for cost and needs, to help different groups of followers see what they can do, thus increasing their intention to travel.

7.4 Regarding Emotional Connection and Inspirational Ability

Emotional Connection is the most important factor affecting Travel Intention and Inspirational Ability also plays a significant role. This means successful travel content is not only about information, but it must also stir emotions and inspire experiences, especially in the social media environment where decisions are often started with an emotional connection. This means that influencers and companies must invest heavily in storytelling, focusing on memorable moments, local experiences, cultural significance, and the spiritual significance of the trip, while also being authentic to avoid creating false expectations that undermine trust. The content structure could be built with an emotional rhythm, starting with the everyday context and motivation for the trip, then an inspiring "wow" moment, and then specific details showing the viewers the feasibility of the trip, thus activating emotions and supporting the intention. Destination businesses and destination management organizations can collaborate to develop themed campaigns like "nearby but worthwhile", "healing weekend", "local festival season" etc. to increase virality through the use of visuals, sound, rhythm and emotionally rich messaging. And finally, inspiring content should also be actionable, suggesting unique experiences, seasonal itineraries or check-in challenges, moving viewers from Inspiration to real plans.

7.5 Regarding Income moderation

Results show that Intention is the most important predictor of Travel Decision and Income significantly moderates this relationship. This confirms that even when influencers are able to generate a strong intention, the conversion to Decision still is highly dependent on budget conditions, in line with the specific nature of travel costs. Therefore, businesses

should design flexible product packages according to the budget, diversifying price levels and service components, so that the middle-income group can still achieve their Intention. We can reduce the barriers by adopting stratification strategies such as economy packages, standard packages and premium packages with add-on options and transparent cost disclosure.

Seasonal offers, weekend combos, early booking policies, installment payments or partnerships with e-wallets and banks to support payments will help increase conversion rates from intention to decision. Instead of just showing premium experiences, influencers need to offer multiple price points, be clear about minimum budgets, give money-saving tips, and suggest alternatives, so that the trip feels “affordable” to their followers. Providing appropriate product design and cost information to address financial barriers will amplify the impact from Intention to Decision, as evidenced by established regulatory mechanisms.

8. CONCLUSION

Firstly, the research results confirm that influencer marketing has a significant effect on domestic tourism behavior through the mechanism of intention formation. Emotional Connection, Trust level and perceived Similarity with the influencer are central drivers of travel motivation. The model shows that influencer attributes explain more than half of the variation in Travel Intention, while the whole model explains the majority of the variation in actual Travel Decision, showing the great predictive capacity of the research framework for consumer behavior in the context of the Vietnamese market. This highlights that the power of influencers lies not only in the transmission of information but also in their ability to establish psychological and social relationships with their followers.

Secondly, influencers have a high impact on the Intention but the step from the Intention to the Decision is in practice very dependent on the financial capacity of the individual. Income significantly improves the relationship between Intention and Decision, showing that economic factors are prerequisite for the fulfillment of travel motivations. Therefore, communication strategies based on influencers should be combined with pricing solutions, flexible service packages and transparent information on costs, in order to reduce financial barriers and support consumers in decision making.

Thirdly, the research contributes to the academic literature by extending the traditional influencer marketing models based on cognitive factors such as expertise and attractiveness, to an integrated model including social, emotional and personal resource mechanisms. The inclusion of Income as a conditional factor in the model along with the emphasis on the role of Emotional Connection and Similarity helps to explain the process more fully from media exposure to travel behavior especially in the context of emerging markets with clearly differentiated economic conditions.

Finally, the study's findings have important practical implications for tourism businesses, destination management organizations and influencers in terms of content design, partner selection and behavioural conversion optimization. In terms of future research directions,

future studies can extend the comparison of different social media platforms, influencer groups, levels of content commercialization, and destination contexts. Other psychosocial mechanisms such as perceived risk, content authenticity, and online community norms can be considered to further clarify the relationship between digital media and domestic tourism behavior.

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