HOW DO SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AFFECT TRAVEL INTENTIONS TO ZANZIBAR?

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ABSTRACT

Tourism industry has become an easy target for destination marketing through Social Media Influencers (SMIs) with the emergence of social media platforms. SMIs generate information and content on these platforms that are considered credible and effective for potential travellers, compared to websites and other tourism operators. The objective of this research is to examine the effect of information shared by SMIs on consumers' travel decision-making. A study model was suggested to illustrate the relationships between Trust in SMIs, Source Credibility and Travel Intention which was then examined using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. The survey included 360 social media users from Generations Y and Z in Zanzibar. The study found significant relationships between source credibility and trust in SMIs and travel intention. It also identified moderating effects between marital status, trust in SMIs, source credibility, and travel intention, except for age and gender. The study's results provide valuable insights for tourism marketers and SMIs, assisting in the development of effective advertising and communication strategies to attract more tourists to Zanzibar. The study suggests collaboration between tourism marketers and SMIs, with an emphasis on incorporating content that adds value to their followers.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, approximately 5 billion people use social media (Statista.com, 2024). This has radically changed customer behaviour. These shifts in behavior have resulted in the transformation of communication and interaction modes for community-residing persons (Ngai et al., 2015). Consequently, social media has emerged as a crucial element in people's daily lives (Krishen et al., 2016). The widespread use of the Internet has created influencers who are their own celebrities or opinion leaders (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Influencers are commonly known as Social Media Influencers or SMIs in short. SMIs are considered as an important factor and reference point on consumers' behaviour (Freberg et al., 2011). SMIs are ordinary internet users who amass a substantial following on social media by sharing aspects of their daily routine and

engaging with their audience. This popularity allows them to include their co-operation with companies in their content (Ye et al., 2021).

As stated by Connolly (2017), Social Media Influencer (SMI) is an industry specialist with over 10,000 followers, consistently sharing product information and engaging with firms to aid in their marketing efforts. Beyond product endorsements, the content they share contributes to building followers' loyalty. It is often stated that Generation Y and Z are considered to be the most prominent generations favoring social media sites. Generation Y, also known as millennial, and Generation Z are regarded as the generations most exposed to Social Media Influencers (SMIs). SMIs utilize platforms like Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn to connect with people, engage with their fans, and share content about their travel experiences (e.g., videos and photos of visited destinations) or share their lives in real-time. They actively share information that is perceived as accurate and reliable. Consequently, in the realm of social media, the content shared by SMIs is regarded as more reliable compared to traditional mass media (Pop et al., 2021). In this regard, individuals normally enjoy watching, endorsing, following, and engaging with SMIs on platforms. They have the desire to buy the products they promote or to visit the destinations they are travelling to there. Followers who are actively engaged in quickly consuming and responding to the stories and posts that SMIs share on social media platforms may be more leaning to visit tourism destinations featured in posts (Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021).

The reliability of SMIs, viewed as knowledge providers, plays a key role in determining the effect of the communicated message on audiences (Dedeoğlu, 2019). To put it differently, source trustworthiness encompasses attractiveness, reliability, and information and directly influences future intentions of customers (Yuan et al., 2016; Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021). Social media users who perceive the source as trustworthy may exhibit travel intentions towards destinations recommended by SMIs (Cheng et al., 2020). Based on that, the basis of the research was the effect of SMIs on the travel intention of Generation Y and Z. On the other hand, the current study aims to investigate how the perceived source credibility of SMIs directly affects the travel intentions of generation Y and Z social media users (Yılmazdoğan et al, 2021). Further, the study proceeds by reviewing the existing body of literature, developing hypotheses and model, elucidating the research methodology, discussing the findings, and concluding with recommendations for further research along with acknowledging its limitations. The subsequent section offers the theoretical background for this research, presenting a review of earlier studies examining the connection between Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and generations' attitudes

(Yılmaz et al., 2022). In the scope of literatures, the research will add to the existing knowledge through expanding study on influencer marketing to encompass the travel and tourism industry. However, the results of the study will provide insightful guidance to the destination marketing firms on utilizing marketing tools and influencer sponsorship through Social Media Influencers (SMIs) tailored to cater to Generation Y and Z.

The current study, explores the existing problem that based on effect of Social Media Influencers' (SMIs) credibility towards generation Y and Z social media users' travel intention in Zanzibar. The study aims to examine how that information shared by SMIs in the platforms affects the decision making of the consumers in term of intention to travel. What sets this research apart is its unique focus on the combination of two generations in terms of Zanzibar destinations. Unlike previous studies that predominantly focused on one generation or, when mixed, did not investigate Zanzibar specifically, this study stands out. The research's novelty underscores its crucial role in analyzing and uncovering the effects influencing travel intentions for the two generations consistently using social media platforms in Zanzibar. It significantly contributes depth and important understanding to the current literature in this field, addressing aspects that have not been fully explored and tested by researchers before.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

People use social media for approximately 3 hours daily. Therefore, SMIs and social media have evolved into an essential element of people's everyday activities worldwide (Fayez et al., 2022). The introduction of social media into life and the growth of communication with travellers have created important marketing opportunities for tourism businesses (Seçilmiş et al., 2021). As mentioned before, SMIs are people who gain audiences through presenting their lives, talents, opinions, and thoughts on various social media sites (Yuan & Lou, 2020). Thanks to the followers they have obtained, they make special agreements with companies and create income for themselves (Ye et al., 2021). Thus, SMIs have increasingly integrated into the tourism industry, playing a key part in communicating to prospective consumers. (Mokhare et al., 2021).

Celebrities of today's society are recognised as SMIs. In fact, through studies, SMIs are tried to categorise them into some groups by using various criteria such as the number of viewers, the content created, the sites used, the type of activity and the level of professional expertise (Ge & Gretzel, 2018; Gaenssle & Budzinski, 2020; Wielki, 2020). Due to these characteristics, the attention of companies in the tourism sector, as in every sector, has focused on SMIs. Large

chain hotels, travel agencies and local administrations accept SMIs as a marketing tool (Mokhare et al., 2021). SMIs possess the capability to enhance the reputation of tourist destinations, subsequently fostering visitor satisfaction and elevating the probability of repeat visits, thereby amplifying word-of-mouth marketing.

2.1. Trust in SMIs and travel intention

Trust is established between two parties when a substantial degree of interaction or contact occurs. SMIs who offer genuine assessments encourage authentic relationships with their followers, thereby enhancing engagement, both of which possess the potential to cultivate trust (Pop et al., 2021). SMIs are referred to as a bridge and a third party between consumers and businesses. (Freberg et al., 2011). The idea of trust is fundamental in assessing consumers' intentions to purchase tourist products and engage with SMI-generated content. It was expressed that, positive prior experiences with SMIs contribute to an increased level of trust, with trust being a crucial predictor of information (Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). From a customer's viewpoint, SMIs tend to be seen as more reliable compared to celebrities, as followers can relate to them more closely and ultimately influence consumers' purchase intentions (Schouten et al., 2020; Pop et al., 2021). The effect of SMIs on travel intentions has received considerable focus in the past few years (Zhang & Huang, 2022). According to recent research findings, followers' level of trust in SMIs and their content sharing positively influences their behavioral intentions (Magno & Cassia, 2018). This influence extends to their willingness to travel, evaluate and collect information about tourism destinations (Pop et al., 2021).

The behavioral objectives of a tourist serve as valuable indicators for predicting their future purchasing behavior and provide an effective metric for assessing such behavior (Juvan et al., 2017). The primary goal of marketing through SMIs is to positively impact consumers' purchasing decisions (Lim et al., 2017). However, it is crucial to note that the ultimate relationship between the intention to buy and the final purchasing behavior lies within the decisions of the consumer (Anuar et al., 2021). It was contend that customers' purchasing intentions are notably influenced by the level of trust they have in SMIs (Che et al., 2017). Considering the informative nature of travel intention, it is stated that individuals' information acquisition, usefulness and practicality significantly increase travel intention (Asan, 2021; Kim et al, 2021).

In this research, the travel intention toward certain destination is considered as the outcome behavior. It is imperative that SMIs and the destinations they promote align comprehensively (Anuar et al., 2021). In the researches conducted, it is stated that the recommendations of Instagram influencers increase the intention to visit a certain destination (Magno & Cassia, 2018). To increase the likelihood of influencing these travel intentions, SMIs need to ensure congruence between themselves and the places they endorse (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Another study investigated the relationship between trust in SMIs and various behavioural outcomes within the customer journey, encompassing desire, information seeking, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, satisfaction and experience sharing (Pop et al., 2021). The findings of the research showed that trust towards SMIs is a crucial determinant shaping attitude towards SMIs. Consequently, the ensuing hypothesis is put forward:

H1. Trust in SMIs (TSMI) positively affects Travel Intention (TI).

2.2. Source credibility, trust in SMIs and travel intention

Source credibility, often referred to as "believability," holds significant importance in persuasion (Jaso, 2011). Social media users rely on information provided by influencers through various platforms, making credibility crucial in gaining audience trust. Consumers tend to believe content generated by SMIs and are inclined to visit destinations recommended by them, perceiving these sources as reliable and trustworthy. This is explained by the theory of source credibility. According to this theory; when the source provides credible information, it can persuade other people more easily (Hovland et al., 1953). In marketing studies, source credibility has been extensively examined in relation to online customer. Within the context of social media, source reliability refers to the extent to which content providers are perceived as trustworthy, reliable, updated, and credible (Zha et al., 2018). Some researchers have found that audiences are more inclined to trust, respect, and readily believe the statements of presenters possessing a strong degree of source credibility. Consumer trust is described as the desire to trust a business partner in whom one feels assured (Moorman et al., 1993; Pop et al., 2021).

Customers are inclined to place greater trust in online information when it comes from an opinion leader. Wilson and Sherrell (1993) affirm that source credibility positively influences persuasion and information evaluation. The concepts of trust and source credibility have garnered significant attention in the field of SMIs' literature (Ye et al., 2021). Trust encompasses both cognitive and emotional aspects (Seçilmiş et al., 2021), and mutual trust is fundamental for the sustained relationship between SMIs and their followers. SMIs' expertise

positions them as opinion leaders (Ki & Kim, 2019), and the trustworthiness and experience of YouTube influencers contribute to information credibility (Xiao et al., 2018). Based on the available information, there appears to be a direct and proportional relationship between the experiences and quality of content shared by SMIs and the trust bestowed upon them by their followers (Seçilmiş et al., 2021). Additionally, followers of SMIs perceive the compatibility of products and influencers as positively influencing influencer credibility and their attitude towards them. However, when an influencer engages in compensated advertising, it may compromise their credibility. The assumed reliability of reviews may be influenced by various factors, including the trustworthiness of the source and content, as well as the valence and patterns of reviews (Pop et al., 2021). Studies in the realm of source credibility indicate that the design of websites positively impacts online trust in purchasing decisions (Zhu et al., 2019). Consequently, it is anticipated that the experience and attractiveness of SMIs' content would enhance the trust of their followers. As a result, the following hypotheses have been developed**:**

H2. Source Credibility (SC) positively affects trust in SMIs (TMSI).

Travel intention is the results of an emotional response that lead in an action and converts motivation into behavior, serving as a crucial intermediary between motivation and future travel actions. This intention is defined as individuals expressing a willingness to travel to a certain location at a particular time (Yilmazdoğan et al., 2021). The willingness to travel is considered the first step in the decision-making process (Raafat et al., 2023). In a similar context, it was discovered that source credibility significantly affects travel intention (Yilmazdoğan et al, 2021). Han and Chen (2022) revealed a notable positive relationship between the credibility of SMIs and social media users' travel intentions to recommended destinations. As a result, the subsequent hypothesis is put forward:

H3. Source Credibility (SC) positively affects Travel Intention (TI).

2.3. Moderating variables: age, gender and marital status

According to generations, members of the two generations, Millennials and Zoomers, exhibit distinctive characteristics, beliefs, values, expectations, and interests (Zhou et al., 2023) compared to others. These individuals are categorized as Generation Y and Generation Z, born in 1981 and later. When determining the differences between generations, some authors classify Generation Z as those born in 2000 and later (Yılmazdoğan et al. 2021; Sarıoğlu and Özgen, 2018). According to Dimock (1996), Generation Y is classified as those born between 1981 and

1996; Generation Z is classified as those born in 1997 and later. The attachment of Generations Y and Z to social media is notably high. Mobile phone usage, particularly on social media platforms, may stimulate users' cognitive thoughts about the content they encounter (Kim et al., 2016). Regarding SMIs, actions publicized on their social media accounts impulsively encourage followers to consume and impact their follower relationships. However, followers' emotional engagement with SMIs enhances their behavioral intention. The travel activities of Generations Y and Z significantly influence the tourism consumer industry. Tourists from both generations extensively use social media to research destinations and plan their travels (Hysa et al., 2021).

Moreover, limited research has investigated the context of Generations Y and Z. Caraka et al. (2022) suggest that tourists from Generations Y and Z thrive in the internet of things and the digital age, characterized by the accessibility of information through various technologies on multiple platforms (Seçilmiş et al, 2021). Ghaly (2023) discovered that both user-generated content and the credibility characteristics of influencers significantly impact the visit intention of Generation Z. Conversely, in the realm of gender distinctive in tourism and travel, females are considered more effective compare to male, particularly on social media usage platforms. Gender may also have a significant influence on the relationship between content generated by SMIs and Travel Intention among consumers. The trust that customers place in SMIs may positively affect their behavioral intention. However, there is limited attention in existing research on the impact and moderation of gender and marital status on the social media influences affecting consumers' travel intentions. As a result, this research seeks to address this gap and contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the identified issue. Building on the aforementioned studies, the subsequent hypotheses have been developed:

H4. Gender moderates the effects of TSMI on TI.

H5. Gender moderates the effects of SC on TI.

H6. Age moderates the effects of TSMI on TI.

H7. Age moderates the effects of SC on TI.

H8. Marital Status moderates the effects of TSMI on TI.

H9. Marital Status moderates the effects of SC on TI.

3. METHODOLOGY

All constructs used for this research were derived from the literature. In this context, Trust in SMIs (Kim et al., 2011), Source Credibility (Moon & Kim, 2001) and Travel Intention (Jalilvand et al., 2012) were adapted from the existing literature. The remaining variables, such as gender and age, which was measuring the moderation effects between variables were adapted and applied from the demographic section formulated by the researcher based on the context of the present study.
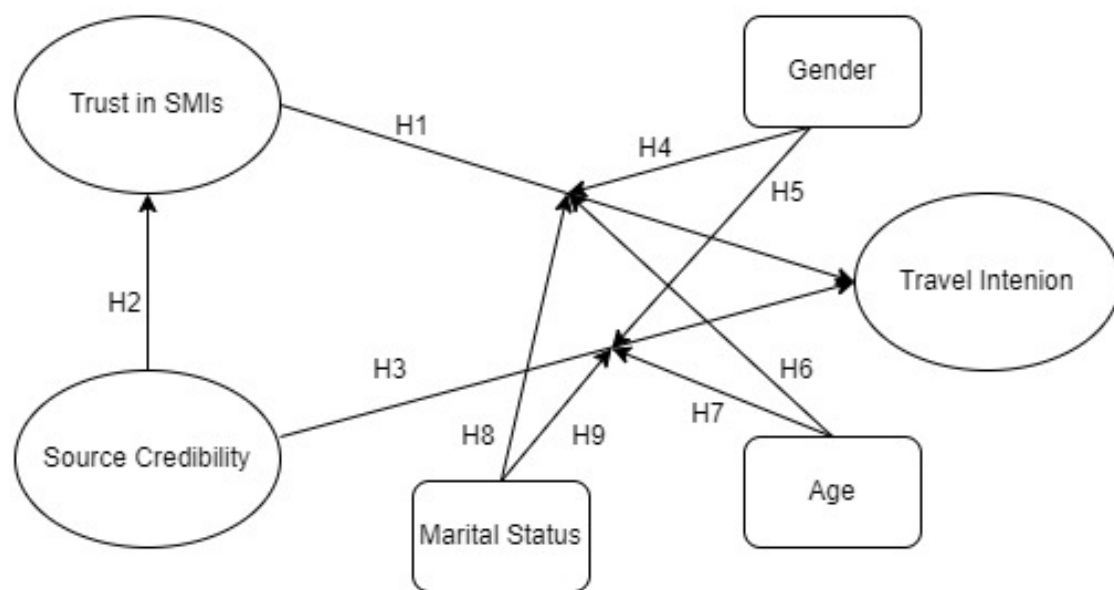

Figure 1. Research Model

3.1. Questionnaire design and data collection

This quantitative research design is web-based study and employs a closed-ended questionnaire. Data collection of this study comprises two parts including pilot survey. The researcher invited 5 people who were experienced and knowledgeable in using social media to participate in the survey. The researcher thus interacted with these respondents and receive some feedbacks that used to adjust the questionnaire including wording problems and terminology that are no longer used (i.e Twitter now is X formerly twitter). The adjustments were made in survey to maintain credibility and clarity to respondents. The process was conducted through online survey to statistically test the hypotheses from December 1 to 31, 2023. Considering the nature of the research, the survey was created using Google form and distributed to Generation Y and Z participants who frequently use social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook.

The snowball sampling technique was applied to reach the targeted sample. Therefore, it was used close contacts through own personal accounts to request individuals to participate and consulted for further distribution of the survey. Since the survey was designed five-point Likert scale that found to be famous and suitable for the online survey form, respondents were able to decide on the respond dimension based on their perspective. The second section consists of data regarding the participants' demographic traits.

3.2. Population and sample

The current study tends to explore the existing problem that based on impact of SMIs' credibility towards generation Y and Z social media users' travel intention in Zanzibar. Thus, the study primarily population derived from Zanzibar which consists the main target population of generation Y and Z individuals. There are approximately 85% of social media platforms users in this generation in Tanzania that exposed by Social Media celebrities or influencers. The reason of working with these generation Y and Z) individuals is believed that, these two generations employ a huge number of individuals who are regarded to be the most on using technology specifically social media sites constantly in tourism business. The reason of choosing Zanzibar is the most popular travel destination among African countries with a comparative high number of young populations who constantly concentrating their every move in social media. Thus, the total of 360 individuals belonged to the generation Y and Z in Zanzibar were reached.

3.3. Data analysis and results

The current study used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling method were applied. The purpose of choosing this method is to determine the extent to which each construct affects the composite score of the latent variable. In addition, this method also allows for the detection of moderating effects (Chin et al., 2003). This method can work with the small sample size, and small number of expressions in the model and provide the results perfectly (Hair et al., 2019).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

In 360 responses gathered from this study, the descriptive statistics analysis of the respondents concerning their age, gender, income, education, mostly used social media platform, number of SMIs followed, and time spent on social media daily are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristics	Items	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	153	42.5
	Female	207	57.5
Age	18 – 23	63	17.5
	24 – 29	170	47.2
	30 – 35	91	25.3
	36 – 40	36	10.0
Marital Status	Single	161	44.7
	Married	169	46.9
	Divorced	30	8.3
Monthly Income	Less than 50,000 TZS*	63	17.5
	50,001-200,000 TZS*	73	20.3
	200,001-400,000 TZS*	126	35.0
	Above 400,001 TZS*	98	27.2
Education	Primary School	15	4.2
	High School	78	21.7
	Associate degree	82	22.8
	Undergraduate degree	152	42.2
	Postgraduate degree	33	9.2
Most used Social Media Platform	Instagram	141	39.2
	TikTok	69	19.2
	Facebook	45	12.5
	X. (formerly Twitter)	22	6.1
	YouTube	37	10.3
	Others	46	12.8
Number of SMI Followed	Less than 2	165	45.8
	3 – 6	138	38.3
	7 – 12	25	6.9
	12 and above	32	8.9
Time Spent in Social Media Daily	Less than 30 mins	12	3.3
	31 – 60 mins	32	8.9
	1hr – 2hrs	82	22.8
	3hrs – 4hrs	110	30.6
	4hrs and above	124	34.4

*TZS: Tanzania Shilling.

Table 1 contains information about the characteristics of the research participants. Accordingly, table 1 represents that 57.5% of the respondents were female and 42.5% were male. Most of the respondents who participated in this survey study were within the age range of 24–29, representing 47.2%, followed by 30–35 (25.3%). Out of 360 respondents, 46.9% were married, 44.7% were single, and 8.3% were divorced. In terms of monthly income, the highest percentage was between 200,001 and 400,000 TZS, for 35.0%, followed by 400,000 and above (98%). When the education level of the respondents was investigated, 42.2% of them were undergraduate degree holders, indicating the highest percentage, and some of them were associate degree holders with a rate of 22.8%, and those in high school were 21.7%. Regarding

the most used social media platform, Instagram had the highest range with a rate of 39.2%, while the average number of SMI followers was less than 2 and rated 45.8%. Lastly, the highest percentage of time spent by respondents on social media daily was 4hrs and above, with a rate of 34.4%, followed by 3 – 4hrs rated at 30.6%.

4.2. Measurement Model

In the evaluation of measurement model of this research, the outer model was examined and presented in the figure 2. The study specifically employed Hair et al. (2019) guidelines to evaluate the measurement model. Including discovering the convergent validity, reliability and discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015; Yılmaz et al., 2022).

Table 2.
Reliability Analysis Result

Factors	CA	CR	AVE
TSMI	0.861	0.862	0.878
SC	0.896	0.897	0.828
TI	0.879	0.881	0.805

In this context, the reliability and validity findings represented in Table 3 regarding Cronbach's alpha values were between 0.862 and 0.896. When the CR values were analyzed; the values were between 0.862 and 0.897, indicating that SC, TI, and TSMI were all greater than 0.70, and when the AVE values were evaluated, all values seemed to be between 0.805 and 0.878, indicating that all factors exceeded 0.50. Thus, it can be stated that these values provide the proper criteria for the model, and those three criterions were met perfectly (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). Hence, the findings indicate that the convergent validity of the model was provided.

Table 3.
Discriminant Validity

Factors	SC	TI	TSMI
SC	0.910		
TI	0.847	0.897	
TSMI	0.865	0.820	0.937

The discriminant validity of the measurement model values for all variables was also evaluated and illustrated in Table 3. The discriminant validity of the measurement model was evaluated through the square root of the AVE value of all factors' comparison along with the correlation among the constructs. Hence, Fornell and Larcker (1981) asserted that if the AVE value's square root is high, then discriminant validity is ensured. In this context, the comparisons were checked by the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and the square root of the AVE values of all constructs

was found to be higher than the correlation coefficients among all factors. Therefore, it can be said that discriminant validity is ensured and provided (Yilmaz & Tunca, 2024).
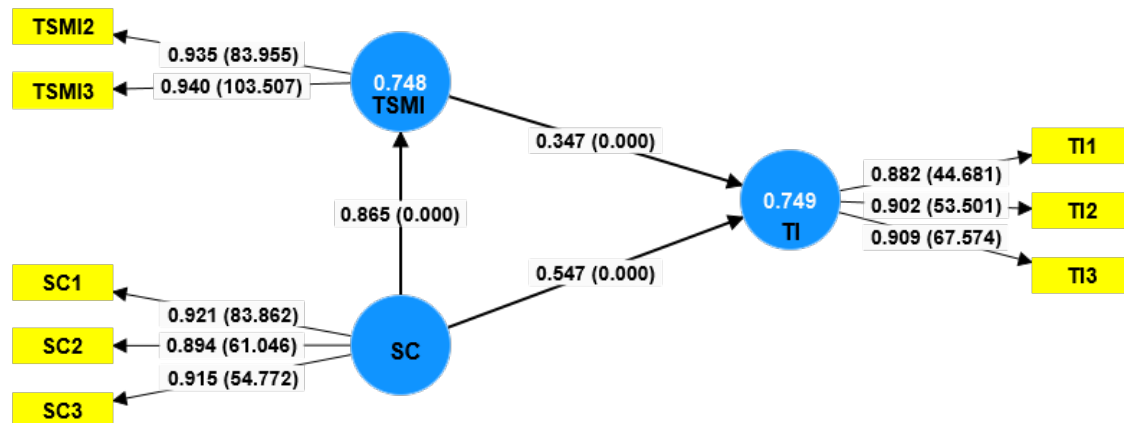

Figure 2. Structural model. Source: Authors' construct

In evaluating structural model, some criterions have been considered, including coefficient of determination R2, t value, goodness-of-fit Index (GoF), path coefficient, and model fit. The research applied Tenenhaus et al. (2005) recommendation to explain the goodness-of-fit (GoF) index and validated the model fit through computing the average R^2 and AVE values. Thus, without missing particular values, Wetzels et al. (2009) proposed that 0.1 indicates great fit, and these thresholds can be employed to examine the GoF. However, since the PLS-SEM has no general fit index, the goodness-of-fit (GoF) index has been suggested as a measure of goodness-of-fit (Tenenhaus et al., 2005; Yılmaz et al., 2022). GoF values are larger than 0.36, the model is considered to be a perfect fit (Wetzels et al., 2009). GoF takes a value between 0 and 1 (Yılmaz et al., 2022). The mean of R^2 values were 0.748 and the mean AVE values were 0.837. In this context, the GoF of this study was calculated at 0.79, indicating that the model fit was examined as very good.

The study further applied Standardized Root Square Residual (SRMR) and Normed Fit Index (NFI) to correct the misspecification of the goodness-of-fit model measure for PLS-SEM (Henseler et al., 2015). It suggested that if the SRMR value is less than 0.10 and the NFI value is greater than 0.80, it indicates an acceptable fit (Yılmaz et al., 2022). With the SRMR=0.047 and NFI=0.867 values for the model, our research, respectively, agreed with the threshold. It is important to assess the accuracy of the value predictions in relation to the level of R2 values. Thus, the R^2 values of the current research were examined as 0.749 and 0.748 for travel intention and trust in SMIs. R^2 values are normally not anticipated to be close to 1 (Yilmaz & Tunca, 2024). The results showed the model to be significant and applicable (Fig. 3). During the structural model evaluation, VIF values were evaluated to determine if there is multicollinearity

among the latent factors. Considering that if VIF values are below 5, it shows no multicollinearity among the latent factors (Hair et al., 2010; Yılmaz et al., 2022). The study calculated a VIF value between 2.254 and 2.989, which is less than 5. With this result, it can be said that there is no multicollinearity issue among the unobserved factors.

4.3. Hypotheses testing

The findings regarding hypothesis tests through the PLS model based on t statistics, mean, standard deviation, p values, and hypothesis decision are given in Table 4.

Table 4.
Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	t statistics	p value	Decision
H_1.TSMI→TI	0.406	0.387	0.133	3.043	0.001***	Supported
H_2.SC→TSMI	0.865	0.865	0.018	47.411	0.001***	Supported
H_3.SC→TI	0.473	0.489	0.131	3.613	0.001***	Supported

***p<0.01; **p<0.05

In accordance with the findings found, significant positive effects were found among SC and TI (t=3.613, p<0.010); and source credibility had a direct and positive impact on trust in SMIs (t=47.411, p<0.010); On the other hand, trust in SMIs had a direct and positive impact on travel intention (t=3.043, p<0.010). Therefore, H1, H2 and H3 were fully supported. This indicates that the effects of trust in SMIs on travel intention were statistically significant. Moreover, the effects of source credibility on travel intention and trust in SMIs were also statistically significant.

4.4. Moderating effects

The moderation effect analysis was performed in PLS-SEM. Figure 3 and Table 6 illustrate the tested moderating roles of age, gender, and marital status on the relationships of travel intention with trust in SMIs and source credibility.

Table 6.
Results of moderating effects

Hypothesis	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	t statistics	p value	Decision
H_4.Gender x TSMI→TI	-0.184	-0.164	0.174	1.054	0.146[NS]	NS
H_5.Gender x SC→TI	0.189	0.177	0.178	1.063	0.144[NS]	NS
H_6.Age x TSMI→TI	-0.044	-0.034	0.077	0.578	0.282[NS]	NS
H_7.Age x SC→TI	-0.010	-0.019	0.079	0.127	0.450[NS]	NS
H_8.Marital x TSMI→TI	0.196	0.170	0.094	2.092	0.018**	Supported
H_9.Marital x SC→TI	-0.149	-0.125	0.089	1.669	0.048**	Supported

***p<0. 01; **p<0. 05; NS: Not Supported

Out of six moderation effects hypotheses, four were found statistically insignificant and hence unsupported: H4 (t=1.054; p>0.050), H5 (t=1.063; p>0.050), H6 (t=0.127; p>0.050) and H7 (t=0.578; p>0.050). Therefore, these results reveal that there are no moderate effects of TSMI and SC on relationships among gender and travel intention, and also that source credibility and trust in SMIs affect the relationship between age and travel intention. However, the two remaining hypotheses for moderation effects were statistically significant and supported: H8 (t=1.669; p<0.050); H9 (t=2.092; p<0.050), indicating there is a moderation effect of source credibility and trust in SMIs on the relationship among marital status and travel intention.
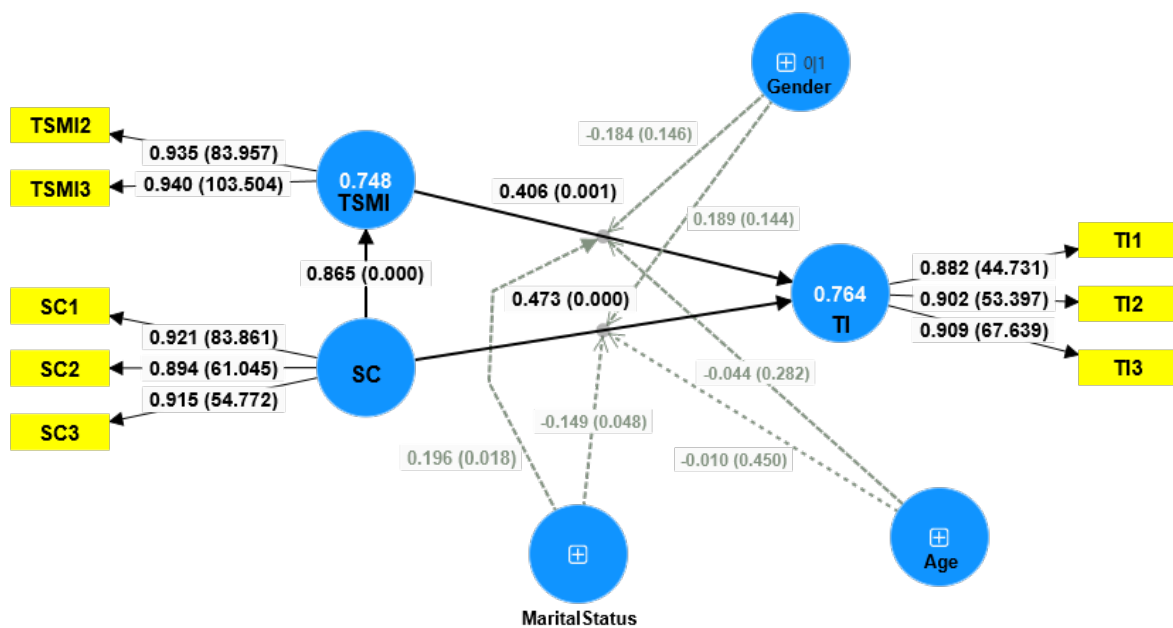

Figure 3. Structural model for moderating effects. Source: Authors' construct

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The usage rate of social media platforms in the tourism industry, especially among Generation Y and Z, is steadily increasing day by day in Zanzibar. Although many studies have explored the broader subject of social media, there has been a lack of comprehensive research on the credibility of SMIs specifically targeting these two generations in the literature, especially for a city known worldwide as a tourist destination. In order to fill this gap, the present research examined the effects of SMIs' source credibility on information and its impact on potential customers' travel intentions. The results contribute significant insights into how potential tourists make their travel decisions based on information from SMIs. The collected data were analyzed using a technique designed specifically to measure variables such as source credibility, trust in SMIs, and travel intention. Furthermore, this methodology positively

contributes to the literature due to its adaptability for researching social media sites with SMIs targeting potential users.

The findings of the current research demonstrated strong, direct, and positive effects of SMIs on the travel intentions of potential customers (Generation Y and Z). The findings showed that trust in SMIs had a statistically significant impact on the travel intentions of social media users, thereby supporting H1. This result corresponds to earlier research (Kim et al., 2017; Seçilmiş et al., 2021) that reported a notable rise in trust among followers of Travel Influencers (TIs) who found their information appealing and insightful after viewing their posts on social media. Similarly, trust in SMIs has been shown to have positive impacts in prior studies (Xiao et al., 2018; Ki & Kim, 2019; Zhu et al., 2019; Seçilmiş et al., 2021). The research indicates that building trust for SMIs among their followers involves setting a positive example for others.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that source credibility has a significant effect on both trust in SMIs and travel intention, supporting H2 and H3. Social media users are inclined to evaluate the content shared by SMIs before trusting and taking action. Followers perceive the source credibility of SMIs as trustworthy, attractive, and expert. This aligns with previous studies; for instance, Yilmazdoğan et al. (2021) found that source credibility significantly influences travel intention and plays a mediating role between expertise, trustworthiness, parasocial interaction, and travel intention. Additionally, Seçilmiş et al. (2021) reported that the attractive content of Travel Influencers (TIs) affects cognitive and trust-based responses. Han and Chen (2021) confirmed the relationship between source credibility and Generation Y social media users' attitudes towards influencers' posts. This is in line with the theory of source credibility, which states that individuals are more persuaded if the producing source is acknowledged as credible, respected, and willing to receive the communicator's words (Hovland et al., 1953).

While the moderating role of marital status is significant in the effect of trust in SMIs and source credibility on travel intention, indicating support for H8 and H9, no moderating effect of generational cohort (Generation Y and Z) or gender has been found on the impact of trust in SMIs on travel intention. These results contradict Zhou et al. (2023), who reported that Generation Z and Millennials' behavioral intention to use TikTok in choosing travel destinations was significantly influenced, indicating significant differences in variables influencing destination choice for the two generations (Y and Z). This discrepancy may arise from the fact that respondents in this research are not precisely influenced by their age or gender in their travel decisions, as they are in the exploration age. However, marital status appeared to

positively affect the travel intentions of potential social media users. Additionally, as demonstrated in the demographic results, the majority of married respondents were calculated to be higher than others, indicating that they are the individuals most affected by SMIs in their travel intentions. It is noteworthy that there is an absence of prior research supporting this assumption in the literature.

This research examines the impact of SMIs on travel intentions. The results revealed that out of the nine hypotheses formulated in this research, five were significantly supported, indicating moderate relationships among latent variables, including trust in SMIs, source credibility, marital status, age, gender, and travel intention. However, the remaining four hypotheses were not supported. This research explored the connections between SMIs' credibility and travel intention within the dynamic context of the trending tourism industry. Notably, it is among the studies delving into the effects of SMIs, specifically in Zanzibar. The research employed PLS-SEM analysis as the preferred technique to elucidate relationships and effects among variables within the realm of SMIs and individual behavior, focusing on Generation Y and Z. Furthermore, the analysis uncovered positive moderation effects among the variables. The incorporation of these factors was grounded in existing literature, both theoretically and practically. The study predicts that the applied model will add to the literature by offering diverse samples and variables assumed to be closely correlated, thereby enriching the understanding of future studies in this field.

5.1. Implications

The research findings hold immense significance for marketers in the tourism industry. Currently, Social Media Influencers (SMIs) stand out as the most widely followed creative individuals on social media platforms globally. The study suggests that tourism operators and marketers, including Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), can collaborate with SMIs for effective marketing communication and promotion of tourism destinations, including Zanzibar. In light of these findings, the research suggests that destination marketers should integrate SMIs into their social media strategies, such as sharing cross-post content from SMIs on their own accounts. Since the majority of influencers' followers belong to generations Y and Z, recognized as the most active social media users and travellers, it is advisable to closely collaborate with them to enhance awareness of both the influencers' accounts and the promoted travel destinations. Providing an exceptional brand experience and fostering engagement through creative SMIs can significantly influence travel intentions. Moreover, the research

emphasizes the importance of building online trust and confidence with customers, as the primary mode of communication is currently through online platforms. Influencers' trust in their followers relies heavily on the credibility of the information or content shared on their accounts. Therefore, destination operators are encouraged to partner with credible and trustworthy social media travel influencers. This collaboration can be utilized to inform potential travellers about the realistic experiences of destination, ensuring satisfactions for visitors. The study further notes that travel influencers, being early adopters, can inspire individuals to visualize and gain confidence in traveling. As influencers share their experiences, they play a pivotal role in encouraging and shaping travel decisions.

5.2. Limitations and future studies

The current study has some limitations that provide opportunities for future research. The outcomes of this study may not be generalizable, as the sample is limited to individuals from Generations Y and Z using social media in Zanzibar. Given that there are other generations with similar demographic characteristics, the results may vary for them, as well as for samples with different geographical characteristics. Additionally, the data used in this research are derived from a quantitative approach; therefore, future studies should explore alternative methods, such as grounded theory or qualitative techniques, to delve deeper into and investigate the factors influencing social media platform users in the tourism industry.

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