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O papel dos influenciadores digitais na intenção de compra do consumidor: setor do turismo

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Digital influencers in hospitality: their role on the consumers' intention of purchase.

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I dedicate this research to my supportive family and friends, who always motivated me to never give up.

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Resumo

As redes sociais tornaram-se uma fonte primária de informação para os consumidores, quer seja por opiniões ou feedback. Analisando a indústria do turismo, a partilha de experiências por influenciadores digitais pode ser uma ferramenta eficaz para promover produtos ou serviços turísticos. Assim, a investigação sobre a utilização dos influenciadores digitais neste setor beneficia do presente estudo pois o mesmo aborda o papel dos influenciadores digitais na intenção de compra do consumidor no setor do turismo.

Variáveis chave foram identificadas na revisão da literatura que ligam os influenciadores digitais e a intenção de compra do consumidor.

No que toca à metodologia, um método quantitativo em formato de questionário online foi escolhido. O questionário obteve 113 respostas e foi direccionado a consumidores que seguem/procuram por influenciadores digitais. Os dados quantitativos foram analisados através do software IBM SPSS e Smart PLS.

Os resultados demonstraram que, das variáveis identificadas, todas influenciam a intenção de compra do consumidor. No entanto, a partilha de experiências é a variável que influencia com mais intensidade a intenção de compra. Nos resultados também foi apurado que existem variáveis que moderam a relação com outras variáveis.

O presente estudo conseguiu identificar e salientar a importância de características dos influenciadores digitais que potencialmente influenciam a intenção de compra do consumidor.

Para finalizar, este estudo providencia novas informações à literatura existente e recomendações para futuras investigações. Da mesma forma que ajuda os gestores e diretores de *marketing* a escolherem estratégias eficazes para promover os seus produtos nas redes sociais, especialmente no turismo.

Palavras-chave: Marketing de Influência, Redes Sociais, Influenciadores digitais, Intenção de Compra, Turismo.

JEL Classification System:

M31: Marketing

Z33: Tourism Marketing and Finance

Abstract

Social media has become a primary source of information for consumers, whether it is through opinions or feedback. In a more in-depth analysis of the tourism industry, experience sharing from digital influencers can be an effective tool to promote tourism products or services.

Key variables were identified in the literature review that connect digital influencers and consumers' purchase intention.

Regarding the methodology, a quantitative method in the form of an online survey was selected. The questionnaire had 113 responses and was directed to consumers who follow/search for digital influencers. The quantitative data were analyzed through the IBM SPSS and Smart PLS software.

The results demonstrated that, from the variables identified, all influence the consumers purchase intention. However, sharing experiences is the variable that influences purchase intention with more intensity. From the results it was also possible to identify that there are variables that have a mediator effect on other variables relationship.

The present study identified and underlined the importance of digital influencers characteristics that potentially influence consumers purchase intention.

To conclude, this study provides new information to the existing literature and further recommendations for future research. Likewise, it helps managers and marketing directors to choose effective strategies to promote their products or services on social media, especially in tourism.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, Social Media, Digital influencers, Purchase intention, Tourism.

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Glossary of Acronyms

TV: Television

SMI: Social Media Influencers

PSI: Para-social Interaction

WOM: Word of Mouth

eWOM: electronic Word of Mouth

1. Chapter One – Introduction

Mass communication channels such as TV stations, radios and newspapers once were the main sources of information in media. However, as technology evolved, internet evolved and with it, social media became a source of information for consumers where they can exchange information and build relationship with others (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Social media became a channel where people can share their daily lives (Parkinson & Thaichon, 2022) and connect with consumers through content that includes feedback, opinions, personal experiences and more. The evolution of social media provided a form of connectivity allowing consumers to connect with others and amplify their own voices (Labrecque, Vor Dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak & Hofacker, 2013) which affects the consumer behavior due to their need of information from fellow consumers (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

This platform gives the opportunity to businesses to reach a vast audience and have social media influencers (SMI) promoting and reviewing their products or services (Stubbs, Nyström & Colliander, 2019). Social media influencers are identified as “prominent social media users who accumulated a dedicated following by crafting an authentic online persona” (Tafesse, & Wood, 2021, p.1) and can foster a new sense of brand awareness and elicit a user image that is desired by brands and businesses (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Consequently, brands can select influencers or content creators that are suitable for their brand and/or product to promote and bring awareness next to their audience, which congregates with their target audience (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The use of social media influencers as a marketing strategy is referred as influencer marketing and has gained interest in the last years due to its effectiveness and higher return on investment (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Martínez-López, Anaya-Sánchez, Fernández Giordano & Lopez-Lopez, 2020).

In the tourism industry, these influencers are increasingly becoming an important part of influencer marketing due to their potential to reach a target market. As consumers are immersed in a society field with all type of information in every field, they become more demanded and informed (Labrecque et al., 2013). Social Media is becoming one of the primary channels for travelers to acquire travel-related information and social media influencers are increasingly being more included in the digital marketing strategy of travel-related businesses (Kapoor, Balaji, Jiang, & Jebarajakirthy, 2022).

The experiences shared by social media influencers can provide consumers with information and eventually affect their experiences (Dedeoglu, Bilgihan, Ye, Buonincontri & Okumus, 2018) and further travels. “Sharing travel information, stories, and experiences, and uploading text contents, images, audios, and videos is becoming a favoured information channel in the industry” (Oliveira, Araujo & Tam, 2020, p.2).

Understanding the power of social media and Social Media Influencers (SMI) will enhance the chance of brands and businesses to be more mindful of new technologies and how it can help them to build stronger connections with consumers and partners. As influencer marketing is an increasing phenomenon in the marketing area, and specifically in tourism, a deeper understanding is needed. Hence, this dissertation aims to address the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in tourism. Tourism is the chosen industry for the present study due to its increasing importance for the economy of every country and is increase in using influencer marketing as a marketing strategy which can translate in positive outcomes for businesses due to its impact on consumer behaviour.

1.1 Research Problem and Objectives

This study is focused on the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in tourism due to the importance that these social media influencers can have on the marketing strategies of businesses in tourism. Influencers can utilize their online platforms to promote businesses who are more and more interested in investing in this marketing strategy named influencer marketing (Gretzel, 2017; Stubb et al., 2019).

Influencer marketing has been studied in the various fields as a marketing phenomenon that is increasingly gaining interest among managers, directors, marketers and scholars (Gretzel, 2017). However, studies referring to the tourism industry and the potential of this strategy among the targeted audiences is scarce (Gretzel, 2017). Therefore, it is useful to understand the power and influence of social media influencers on consumers’ purchase intention as well as key concepts and characteristics. Also, it is relevant to research about the importance of the perceived information value of the content shared by SMI as well as the concept of experience sharing, especially in the tourism industry that is an experience industry.

Therefore, this research aims to reduce the gap in literature related to the role of digital influencers on consumers’ purchase intention in tourism. This research wants to contribute to the existing literature by adding knowledge about influencer marketing in

tourism. Consequently, this research will help clarifying concepts such as para social interaction, information value and sharing experiences, in this specific context (tourism) and help brands and businesses to improve their marketing practices and be aware of the benefits it can bring instead of the traditional marketing tools.

Consequently, this research posits the following questions: (1) How can digital influencers impact consumers' purchase intention in tourism? (2) Is travel experience sharing impacting the consumers' purchase intention in tourism? (3) Does credibility information value impact consumers' purchase intention? (4) Does para social interaction act like a mediator for credibility and experience sharing? (5) Does experience sharing act like a mediator for para social interaction and purchase intention? Likewise, this research aims to evaluate the role of digital influencers on consumers' purchase intention in the tourism industry, with the following objectives:

- Verify if the credibility associated with digital influencers has a positive impact on purchase intention of a recommended touristic product;
- Verify if the interaction between digital influencers and consumers has a positive impact on purchase intention of a recommended touristic product;
- Verify how experience sharing from digital influencers can have a positive impact on purchase intention of a recommended touristic product;
- Identify which variables most influence consumers' purchase intention of a touristic product recommended by digital influencers;
- Realise if digital influencers motivate followers to buy.

In order to achieve the objectives, the methodology chosen was an online questionnaire directed to consumers to address the objectives. To reach the aim of this dissertation, a quantitative method was selected.

The present study brings a new perspective as to what influences purchase intention regarding social media influencers. Variables such as para social interaction and sharing experiences can act as mediators of other variables, such as credibility and purchase intention. This way, a new conceptual model is presented in this dissertation that can bring new knowledge about the role of digital influencers in consumers' purchase intention.

1.2 Research Structure

The present study is divided in six chapters. The first chapter addresses the theme of this dissertation and the context leading to the problem of the research, namely social media marketing, influencer marketing and the tourism industry. Additionally, we have the research problem and correspondent objectives.

Secondly, we have the second chapter that includes the literature review which incorporates several concepts and its theoretical context such as consumer behavior, social media, influencer marketing and the tourism industry. Moreover, the theoretical context and background includes past studies and previous established relationships between variables which supports this research and the hypothesis formulated.

Then, the third chapter includes the conceptual model proposed for this study, explaining the relationships between the variables and the proposed hypothesis.

Following, we have the fourth chapter that explains the methodology chosen and used in order to test and confirm the hypothesis and model formulated. Additionally, it contains how the data was collected and the respective sampling process.

The fifth chapter includes the analyses of the gathered data, the hypothesis test and a discussion of the results.

Finally, the sixth chapter includes the final conclusions of this study, as well as its limitations, its contributions and future recommendations for further studies regarding this area.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1. Consumer Behavior and the Buying Decision Process

Consumer behaviour is defined by Kotler and Keller (2011) as the study of the ways of buying and acquiring goods, services, ideas and experiences by the individuals, groups with the objective of satisfying their needs and desires.

Despite existing different definitions to consumer behaviour, they all are similar since they focus on a process that involves the needs and desires of consumers and the products, services and experiences that satisfy those same needs. This needs and desires can have a functional nature, or a nature related with emotions and experiences (Solomon, 2015).

Kotler and Keller (2011) highlight the importance of understanding this behaviour and in what way can it be influenced and used to benefit vendors/producers with a competitive advantage. Consequently, in marketing, it is crucial to understand the behaviour of consumers. This way we can provide the right products to the right consumers in the best and effective way (Kotler & Keller, 2011).

Kotler and Keller (2011) define the buying decision process in five stages, a model developed by previous marketing scholars, where the consumer usually goes through five stages: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post purchase behaviour. Consumers do not have to experience all stages but can repeat or skip any meaning they can experience processes less calculated with less stages.

Firstly, a consumer identifies a problem normally associated with a desire or a need, through internal or external sources, they start searching for information to answer that need and the sources can be internal such as memory, or external like information about products on the internet. Once that information is retrieved, the consumer starts comparing and evaluating his alternatives based on the information found and this stage is crucial for marketers because they want to secure that their products is, at least, in that set of alternatives and is possibly chosen to be acquired by the consumer.

The purchase decision is the stage where the consumer choses the preferred product that meets his needs based on beliefs and, accordingly to Kotler and Keller (2011), can be influenced through attitudes of others and unexpected situational factors.

Purchase intention can be defined as “an individual’s conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand” (Spears & Singh, 2004, p.56). As stated by Lou and Yuan (2019), purchase intention has the likelihood that consumers will be willing to purchase a certain product, and this purchase intentions proceed actual purchasing behaviour.

2.2 Consumer Behavior in Tourism

In this study, we are focusing in the tourism sector, which is composed mainly by services that, may or not, include products. As Kotler and Armstrong (2010) defined services as “any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything (...) Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, p.248), we can conclude that in tourism, we also have this intangible feature associated with the touristic services. Consequently, this feature will affect the decision-making process.

Hence, Tourism and touristic experiences involve tangible and intangible elements which compute complexity to the consumer behaviour itself, embracing several types of influence and factors involved. Unlike other industries, tourism relies in feedback and word of mouth (WOM), which is based on actual experiences with a product or service. Moreover, as this industry can only be evaluated after the actual service, consumers have a higher sensibility regarding others reviews in order to ensure the prime decision (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007).

The past model of the five stages of the buying decision process, in the context of the tourism industry, will clearly change, involving other influences that affect the process from the beginning to the end and, afterwards, the post-purchase behaviour (Cohen, Prayag & Moital, 2014). The first models applied to tourism still had a very rational point-of-view in terms of the consumer maximise the utility when purchasing tourism products (Caldito et al., 2015). However, the same authors defended that firstly the consumers feel the desire to travel, following the information search and its evaluation and ultimately a decision.

Nevertheless, the authors tried to mimic the general process of decision-making into the tourism industry, which is not possible due to the industries nature as stated before. Tourism decisions are more complex and often not as rational as thought by previous studies. In fact, tourism decisions have a higher level of involvement, according to Solomon (2010), it can be affected by objective, situational, and/or personal factors.

Consequently, a higher level of involvement is connected to affective and cognitive decisions (common in the tourism industry), while lower levels of involvement are normally connected to routine consumption decisions (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). Differently from the regular consumer behaviour perspective, Hyde and Lawson (2003) determined that tourism decisions involve planned, unplanned and impulsive purchases due to the unique context of travel decision-making.

Evidently, with different characteristics, we have different types of consumer behaviour that will form different segments and consequently different segmentation strategies to reach the targeted audience. The characteristics can differ from sociocultural, demographics, geographic and psychographics (Schiffman, O'Cass, Paladino & Carlson, 2013).

2.3 Social Media and Social Media Influencers (SMI)

The concept of Web 2.0 was created to describe the phenomenon of businesses that use the Web as a platform to promote and take advantage of their strong features. However, it can be described as a series of applications in development that, due to technology, fuels the need of information by consumers. Consequently, those same users have become creators and consumers of information. (Berthon, Pitt, Plangge & Shapiro, 2012).

Web 2.0. had two major consequences: the growth of social media and exponential growth of creative consumers (Berthon et al., 2012).

As a result, social media is defined by Kaplan and Haelein (2010) as a group of applications based on the internet, that were built in the foundations of Web 2.0. that, in its own way, contributed to the creation and exchange of content by consumers.

Web 2.0 became a platform with applications in constant change where consumers produce content to others. Therefore, social media is based on the content that consumers create and become more and more relevant because it becomes a source of information about several products and services reviewed by others.

Meikle (2016) defends social media as a set of network communication platforms that operate due to internet, including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Youtube, Blogs, among others. In these platforms, individuals can communicate, collaborate, and share content with an audience that has an instant reaction. Being as convenient as it is, social media enables more engagement between users and empower them through the access to information and the ability to reach out to content users (Silva et al., 2020).

Also, aligned with the definition of social media, we have different platforms according to Dwivedi et al. (2021): E-commerce sites; third-party review sites; microblog; user-controlled online community; firm-controlled online community; social network sites; organizational systems; content community; wikis; and social tagging.

This possibility of creating a relationship with the consumers through social media stands as an opportunity to brands and businesses to engage with them and promote their products and instigate the purchase of services or products while also creating a relationship by empowering the consumer (Silva et al., 2020). Consequently, these platforms stand out to businesses, and they must, more than expose themselves and create content, find an element that connects them to their preferred niche and public. This element consists of digital influencers or social media influencers.

Social Media Influencers “are people who have established credibility with large social media audiences because of their knowledge and expertise on topics, and thereby exert a significant influence on their followers’ and peer consumers’ decisions.” (Ki & Kim, 2019, p.905). Other studies name these influencers opinion leaders who are, ultimately, active users who “interprets the meaning of media message content for others – opinion seekers (...) Opinion leaders are interested in a particular product field, make an effort to expose themselves to mass media sources and are trusted by opinion seekers to provide knowledgeable advice “ (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008, p.459). Both concepts have the resemblance of providing trusting and knowledgeable information to a large audience (consumers or opinion seekers). However, social media influencers are present in social media platforms. In the present study, SMI are the most relevant and appropriated concept to be used in this research.

SMI expose their daily experiences in life through photos, videos and texts that express their choices, reasons, and feedback about everything they do, including products or services. With this exposure, they become more accessible and closer to their audience being seen as “friends” or people that they identify with. This relationship, knowledge and expertise in certain topics is what makes them stand out and grow a sustainable audience that rely on them for reviews, experiences, among others therefore becoming independent third-party endorsers. (Ki & Kim, 2019; Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011; Meyers, 2017 & Silva et al., 2020).

Being potential endorsers of brands, establishing a potential relationship between their business and their audience, SMIs partnerships have been becoming increasingly important in the marketing strategy of businesses. “First, compared with traditional

celebrity endorsements, the average consumer finds that endorsements made in the context of SMIs' personal lives make brands more relevant'' (Ki & Kim, 2019, p.905). Consumers view SMI as more accessible and credible than mainstream celebrities and consumers view SMIs messages as more genuine and trustworthy than a celebrity's message (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). Second, SMI audiences are more specific, which enables businesses to target the consumers they are directing their product to, therefore being more efficient by amplifying their marketing messages and connecting the consumer with the product that satisfy their needs. (Ki & Kim, 2019)

In Ki and Kim (2019) research, SMI is proven to influence behavioural outcomes due to the desire consumers have in mimic these creators (sharing their posts or purchasing the products and services of the brand they endorse). By understanding the power of SMI, brands have the tools and methods to enhance their marketing strategy and product exposure.

2.4 Influencer Marketing

Influencer Marketing refers to a form of social media marketing where marketers and brands invest in selected influential people online to create and/or promote their branded content to both the influencers' own followers and to the brands' target consumers, sharing the brands message in the form of sponsored content. The content produced by these creators is often viewed by followers as genuine, authentic, and organic rather than brand-generated ads (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Influencer marketing uses opinion leaders or individuals who have a considerable base of followers to raise brand awareness, form favourable brand attitudes, and increase purchase behaviour. "The rise of social media has created new opportunities for influencer marketing" (Kapoor et al., 2022, p.2), meaning, that these platforms aligned with marketing strategies constitute new opportunities for businesses to promote and sell themselves. Therefore, influencer marketing is a powerful tool for a marketer because it presents an opportunity for brands to leverage the power of word-of-mouth through personalities that consumers already follow and admire (Lou & Yuan, 2019)

The development of social media added a social responsibility for brands to engage with their audiences through social media. Audiences are expecting brands to inform and entertain them. With this marketing strategy, brands can place organic content creating a better experience for consumers and consequently building a relationship of

trust and loyalty (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This content can consist in any declaration made by consumers about their experience acquiring or consuming products that are at the disposal of consumers via internet and its technologies (Rahman & Mannan, 2018).

Information gathered by Mediakix (2018), predicts that global spending on influencer marketing was expected to increase from 500 million dollars in 2015 to between 5 billion and 10 billion dollars in 2020. Currently, in 2022, the influencer marketing market size worldwide is evaluated in 16.4 billion dollars.

2.4.1 Credibility

According to existing literature related to influencer marketing, source credibility is one of the elements that can explain SMIs influence on consumer behaviour. McGuire's communication-persuasion matrix argues that various input components in persuasive communication – such as source, message, channel, receiver, and destination – determine its effectiveness. (Lou & Yuan, 2019) One of these inputs is the credibility of the source.

Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) proposed two determinants of source credibility: expertise and trustworthiness. Moreover, McGuire (1985) proposed a third component: attractiveness. Therefore, source credibility in the present study, like Ohanian's (1990) suggestion, is composed by three relevant dimensions: Trustworthiness; Expertise; and Attractiveness.

Credibility could be defined as the degree of the trustworthiness and reliability of the source. An individual, by being persuaded through an SMI's message and induced in behaving in a certain way, assimilates this influence if it matches with the individual's own beliefs (Kelman, 1958).

Trustworthiness is related to the receivers' perception of a source as honest, sincere, or truthful (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Source expertise concerns the source's competence or qualification, including knowledge or skills, to make certain claims relating to a certain subject or topic. (Ohanian, 1990). As a result, digital influencers when recognized for their content, are associated with specific areas (fashion, tourism, finance, etc). Therefore, brands want to be associated with a specific SMI who is already acknowledged by their public as an expert in that domain. Consequently, followers are more likely to purchase, try or search the product recommended by the content creator because they rely on their opinion due to

their knowledge in the area. This way, brands can reach the targeted public or a more specific one by partnering with content creators. (Saima & Khan, 2020).

Source attractiveness can incorporate three concepts: social attractiveness, physical attractiveness and homophily attitude (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

With these three dimensions (Expertise, Trustworthiness and Attractiveness) that build credibility, it can influence the audience (Ohanian, 1990) and purchase intention (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015). As demonstrated in previous studies (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002; Lee & Koo, 2015), these characteristics ‘‘exert positive effects on consumers’ purchase intentions’’ (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p.62).

4.2. Para-social Interaction

Para-social interaction (PSI) is defined by Horton and Wohl (1956, p.215) as ‘‘one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible to mutual development’’ describing the relationship between the spectator and a performer, or in this case, between a consumer and a digital content creator. This relationship is based on an illusion of intimacy that the consumer/spectator believes.

Nowadays digital platforms provided the opportunity for digital influencers, through social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter and etc.) and the internet, to express their opinions and experiences which creates a relationship between them and their followers, potentially creating a community where a considerable number of followers have the same interest in following a certain creator and potentially being influenced by him/her.

The theory of para-social interaction (PSI) is considered in this study due to its attempted to explain this relationship between mass audiences and a personality or social media users and online influencers. Furthermore, Rubin et al. (1985) describes PSI as interpersonal involvement of a media user with what is consumed involving ‘‘seeking guidance from a media persona, seeing media personalities as friends, imagining being part of a favourite program’s social world, and desiring to meet media performers’’ which can explain the influence these creators have on the consumer behaviour whether it is a product they recommended or an experience they had and they want to mimic them. Moreover, regarding marketing environment, Labrecque (2014, p.135) states that PSI as ‘‘an illusionary experience, such that consumers interact with personas (i.e., mediated representations of presenters, celebrities, or characters) as if they are present and engaged in a reciprocal relationship (...) people believe they are engaged in a direct two-way conversation, feeling as though a mediated other is talking directly to him or her’’.

These personas or personalities, described in the definitions, have evolved from the traditional para-social interactions where we had few choices to interact with celebrities (watching television or listening to radio) to be able to comment and have real interactions with creators through social media (Labrecque, 2014). Nevertheless, these relationships between creators and their followers are more illusory than real (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) but because of the creator's exposure and sharing, followers feel like they can comment on their lives and mimic those experiences.

Studies confirmed the benefits that the para-social interaction between followers and digital influencers can bring to brands such as positive perceptions, purchase intentions and overall positive outcomes for businesses (Farivar, Wang & Yuan, 2021; Lee & Watkins, 2016)

2.4.2 Information Value

The perceived value of information can be defined by the perceived utility, usefulness, novelty or qualities of a certain content (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). Information value can, among other attributes, persuade individuals to purchase due to the perceived utility that information can bring. This information achieved by others such as SMI, resulting from their experience, knowledge and resources are shared to their followers and community and "could be a factor to capture their attention", consequently "having a higher impact on consumer decision-making compared with traditional advertising techniques" (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021, p.1124).

Ultimately, Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021) defined information value as the followers' sense of expectation to obtain experience, knowledge information or resources shared by social media influencers.

2.4.3 Experience Sharing

From this study's perspective, the term experience is crucial since the tourism industry relies on and sells experiences to the consumers instead of physical elements. In a more traditional approach, aligned with Pine and Gilmore's (2019) statements, experience economy displays experience as an object of consumption involving commercial exchange and contributing to profitability (Seeler, Lück & Schänzel, 2019).

Seeler et al. (2019, p.80) referred experiences from a humanistic perspective as “knowledge or skills accumulated over time through participation in events and reflections of these lived experiences”. Moreover, studies identified past experiences as critical to explain and forecast consumer behaviour, and motivation due to its influence in “shaping personal identity and contributing to personal growth” (Seeler et al., 2019, p.86; Boswijk, Peelen, Olthof, & Beddow, 2012; Crouch, Huybers & Oppewal, 2016).

Lee, Goh, Chua and Ang (2010) stated that sharing information with others through social media is a great source of entertainment and a primary motive to be a frequent user of social media.

Particularly in tourism, consumers want to reach quality and useful online reviews about the products and services of companies while they are trying to focus on travel planning (Hur, Kim, Karatepe & Lee, 2017). This search for information in social media is related to the content created by social media influencers in their platforms where they share their experiences, feedback and opinions which can influence and shape other consumers decisions and behaviours.

2.5 Media Dependency Theory

Jimenez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019) described the influence that SMI have in followers as an underlying pattern of perception a follower experiences with the influencer that consequently can generate or reinforce a connection between both. The authors described this connection as a dependency relationship, therefore, the Media Dependency Theory can corroborate this study that aims to explain the role and power of influencers in the consumer decision-making process.

Originally, the media dependency theory, proposed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur (1976) elaborated a mass communication theory that seeks to explain the effects of media on the audiences and society.

More specifically, this theory states that “audience dependency on media information resources as a key interactive condition for alteration of audience beliefs, behaviour, or feelings as a result of mass communicated information” (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p.3). As the quality of media technology improves and the consumers as a society grow, the media has more “unique information functions” (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p.6) which translates in being crucial in transmitting information.

Moreover, media messages can influence people's needs or psychological and social characteristics (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Following the authors theory, one of the effects on consumers' behaviours can be activation. Activation "refers to instances in which audience members do something that they would not otherwise have done as a consequence of receiving media messages" (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p.16).

The behaviours resulted from this influence can be varied, instigating action (from the activation effect) from people. For the current study, the behaviour relevant is the purchase of products, services or experiences influenced by social media influencers that are the personification of the channel of information for these consumers (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

2.6 Tourism Industry and Influencer Marketing

As above mentioned, the internet enabled the creation of social media and became one extensive platform where users can generate content and share information. Regarding the tourism industry, this includes several types of services that together create a touristic experience (e.g. hotels, travel agencies, rent-a-car, etc). This platform created an opportunity to businesses to promote themselves and having customers sharing their experience to others, therefore influencing the information available to future consumers. More than consumers, they can reach their targeted audiences providing them personalised content that is useful for them, consequently generating purchases.

Nevertheless, nowadays travellers have the possibility to explore and search for all type of information regarding one destination, service, or experience. Essentially, social media platforms are "recognized as an important information source that may help tourists' travel planning or even eventually influence potential travellers' travel decision-making" (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014, p.29).

Tourism products have always relied on experiences, potential tourists can rely on others' experiences for their decision-making, due to the experiential nature of tourism products (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008).

Moreover, these new marketing technologies can help marketers and managers to define their audiences and meet their expectations, needs and desires by personalizing their content. SMI's can promote products to aimed audiences with their content, for example, promoting an hotel through a travel influencer that has an audience interested

in travelling can consequently generate interest in that hotel (Sârbu, Alecu & Dina, 2018). Past research show that viewing travel experiences shared on social networking sites can be the main stimulus to take a trip impulsively (Yao, Jia & Hou, 2021). Moreover, Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier (2015) also determined in his research about the information technology and consumer behaviour in travel and tourism that “Social media (...) is a growing force in shaping the travel planning behaviour on the internet” (p.247).

Furthermore, people are affected by others’ shared experiences, and are willing to share experiences that may affect others (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020) and this action is the centre of travel influencers content: their experiences. This is becoming increasingly popular among social platforms because nowadays tourists “have a strong motivation to search for suggestions and insights from others’ shared experiences to reduce risk and uncertainty” (Su, Tang & Nawijn, 2021, p.1). Despite the different types of tourism segments, travel experience sharing has played a very important role for tourist travel and had a profound impact on the tourism industry (Su, Tang & Nawijn, 2021; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Chen, Liu & Mattila, 2020; Wong, Lai & Tao, 2020).

Although Social Media Influencer and Travel Influencers are receiving more and more attention from the academic research and this topic and its significance have been growing exponentially due to their potential in the marketing industry and, specifically to this study, the tourism industry, this research aims to the connection between travel experience sharing from these creators and the consumer behaviour, more specifically, the purchase intention.

Chapter Three – Conceptual Model and Research Hypotheses

The present chapter aims to illustrate and explain the conceptual model designed in order to understand the relationship between the variables identified. With the literature review in mind, four hypotheses were formulated.

3.1. Conceptual Model

Based on the literature review, four variables were identified that potentially influence directly or indirectly, the purchase intention regarding the tourism industry: Credibility; Information Value; Para-social Interaction; and Experience Sharing.

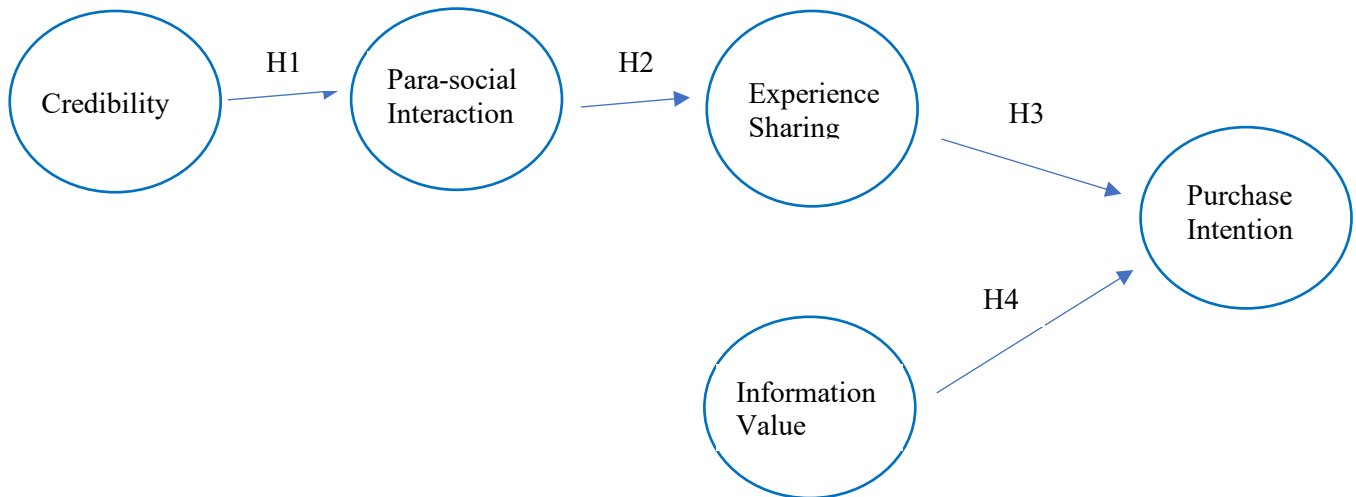
Purchase Intention, which is a concept already well researched in the marketing and management area. Purchase intention is essentially, ‘one type of behavioral intention which indicates consumers’ intent to buy a product or service, which is affected by their subjective judgment, such as individual perceptions, attitudes, and satisfaction’ (Yang & Ha, 2021, p.298), consequently representing a crucial variable for this study.

Secondly, associated with digital influencers, this study focused on certain characteristics believed to influence purchase intention. These characteristics are credibility (Lou & Yuan, 2019), information value regarding the content shared by digital influencers (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021), the para-social interaction between digital influencers and consumers/followers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) and experience sharing (Seeler et al., 2019). However, as seen in the literature review, celebrities and digital influencers both have influence in their targeted audience and their consumer behaviour even though they utilize different media platforms. Consequently, the characteristics are similar and can be applied in the context of digital influencers.

As the study focuses on the tourism industry, digital influencers and their experience sharing are very relevant for the nowadays marketing strategies as the creators share their feedback and recommendations on their online platforms and these channels are becoming a crucial source of information for tourism consumers (Bae, Lee, Suh & Suh, 2017). This fact occurs due to the nature of the industry, as its based on intangible experiences, consumers want to minimize their risks by being as much informed as possible (Kang & Schuett, 2013). Hence, experience sharing may have an influence on purchase intention.

Considering the objectives of this dissertation, the following conceptual model was created in order to illustrate the variables identified and their relationships.

Figure 3.1 - Conceptual Model created.



3.2. Hypotheses

Credibility could be defined as the degree of the trustworthiness and reliability of the source (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Credibility is related to the perception of the quality of the communication by the audience member. Credibility influences the audience through the internalization process: members share similar values and attitudes with the speaker (Kelman, 1958). Expertise - knowledge and experience the person has in the given domain - is one of the main factors of credibility, along with trustworthiness, and goodwill (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Trustworthiness relates to the perceived honesty of the speaker and the goodwill reflects his/her perceived caring about his/her audience. Generally, if the source is considered being trustworthy, attractive and perceived as an expert, it can influence the attitude and behavior of the audience (Ohanian, 1990; Fabrigar, Priester, Petty & Wegener, 1998) including purchase intention (Gunawan, & Huarng, 2015). Whereas the followers can buy a product because they find the SMI reliable and trustworthy consequently generating an intention of purchase.

However, research, such as Zhang (2020), about the effect of para-social interaction in endorsement advertising demonstrated that attributes such as expertise or

attractiveness (elements of credibility) affect PSI consumer-celebrity and that same PSI acts as a mediator between their attractiveness/expertise and consumer brand related responses. In fact, the author argues ‘‘Source credibility is the baseline for inducing consumers to pay attention to an advertisement and a brand (...) Consumer PSI with a celebrity endorser, with psychological intimacy and emotional interaction, is the underlying reason why consumers pay special and enduring attention to a brand endorsed by the celebrity.’’ (Zhang, 2020, p.66) In this context, instead of a celebrity-consumer relationship, it is analysed a SMI-consumer relationship which is relevant in the social media platforms where SMI are viewed as celebrities however consumers sense them as more genuine and authentic. Past research in the fields of para-social interaction and types of celebrities, suggested to focus further research on social media-based celebrities, which is the objective of this study (Escalas & Bettman, 2017).

Therefore, it is reasonable to formulate the first hypothesis:

H1: The Social Media Influencer’s credibility is positively related to the para-social interaction between a social media influencer and consumers.

The para-social theory identifies the relationship between a spectator and a performer (Horton & Wohl, 1956) with an illusion of intimacy as for the real interpersonal relationships (Dibble, Hartmann & Rosaen, 2016). With the new media channels where the SMI share their experiences and personal lives, consumers and/or followers can follow their content and strengthen that relationship of PSI which consequently can generate influence in the purchase intention of a product/service.

PSI plays a significant role in online environments, especially in social media (Choi, Kim, Cha, Suh & Kim, 2019) and this interaction was introduced in this study to explain the indirect influence it has on purchase intention. More specifically, the direct effect it produces on sharing experiences. As past research argues, PSI can generate WOM (Hwang & Zhang, 2018) and purchase intentions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Hwang & Zhang, 2018). WOM has increased due to the increase of content created by consumers and shared online (Christodoulides, Michaelidou & Argyriou, 2012). Experience sharing is a way of review products and services which contains feedback, visual content and opinions therefore being a way of WOM (Nguyen & Tong 2022).

Therefore para-social interaction can foster sharing experiences intention. Therefore, the next hypothesis was elaborated:

H2: Para-social interaction between the influencer and his/her followers is positively related to sharing experiences.

Considering the exponential growth of the content created by consumers online, the tourism industry can be experienced through someone else's eyes meaning they can evaluate and gain knowledge through their experiences and opinions. This type of content can give consumers a feeling of being better prepared and more secure as they have more specific information about a certain place/product/experience.

This content is appealing for tourists that search for information online as the secondary experiences are viewed as authentic and reliable. In this digital era, where consumers have access to information and are constantly accumulating experiences through others, SMI sharing their feedback on a certain touristic product can influence their followers or others searching for information about that service/product and consequently generate intention to purchase (Sotiriadis, 2017).

In tourism, experience sharing translates as crucial in the decisions and purchases as it gathers review information (Bae et al., 2017). Hence, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H3: Experience sharing by Social Media Influencer's is positively related to the user intention of purchase.

Information value can be named throughout the past studies as "information satisfaction" (Hsu et al., 2015), "informational value" (Lou & Yuan, 2019) and others, similar merely to explain how users and followers describe their perception of acquiring knowledge, experience, and service from others, in this case, in digital platforms (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). Moreover, this concept contains characteristics such as usefulness, quality and credibility that work as factors that make users have that perception of information value as something valuable (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). The content that SMI share and produce in these digital platforms is viewed as valuable, current, and even advanced information to others since its origin relies on the creator's experiences and opinions therefore being perceived as authentic and accurate (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014; Hsu & Tsou, 2011).

This perceived utility of the information is what influences consumers and users in their decision-making, producing a higher impact rather than the traditional advertising tools (De Veirman et al., 2017). As social media influencers act as the provider of this information and its utility, consequently influencing the consumer behaviour and his decision-making, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Information value from social media influencers to their followers is positively related to the user intention of purchase.

Chapter Four – Methodology

This chapter concerns the methodology applied in this study and its in-depth characteristics. To achieve the objectives of this study, a quantitative methodology was selected.

4.1. Research Strategy

Regarding the research strategy, descriptive research is more aligned with the studies objectives since it intends to describe a ‘marketing phenomena and demonstrate an association among variables’ (Kinneer & Taylor, 1991, p.138). It is structured, and we have the hypothesis previously defined. As this study’s objective is to assess the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in tourism, this strategy is the most adequate as it includes a quantitative method which is relevant for descriptive research.

4.2. Quantitative Research

The quantitative research was composed by an online questionnaire with the aim to collect information. This method was chosen due to the ability to obtain a larger number of responses, which is crucial to the evaluation of the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in the tourism industry. Furthermore, the hypotheses of this study are tested regarding their validity, through this method.

The online questionnaire was conducted through the Qualtrics platform (due to its practicality and user-friendly design), in English from the twenty fourth of July to the twenty fourth of October of 2022. The survey was shared through social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and LinkedIn. The first message when entering the questionnaire informed the respondents of the objective of the survey and their helpful contribution with their anonymous answers.

Before the final questionnaire, a previous test was made with 27 respondents with the aim to verify the reliability of the variables and the constructs. Approximately 8 items from the questionnaire were changed to reach a favourable value of reliability.

4.2.1 Population and Sample

Population is the combination of all the elements that share the same features and that include the universe which addresses the marketing research problem (Kinneer & Taylor, 1991). The information about the population behaviours can be extracted using a sample, which represents a subgroup of the population chosen from the participation in the study.

To start the sampling process, a target population needs to be selected. Based on the theme of this dissertation, the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in the tourism industry, the target population refers to Portuguese consumers who follow/search for one or more digital influencers, more specifically in the tourism industry. Also, it is relevant for this research for the sample to have an active use of social media due to the study's context. However, as the total of the population is not possible to analyse, the convenience sampling was chosen as the sample was based on the researcher's accessibility and the consequent snowball sampling where participants also shared the questionnaire with people who could also belong to the target population of the present research.

Furthermore, the population considered for the present sample are adults (older than 18 years old) from the Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2010) and Y (born between 1980 and 1995).

4.2.2 Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire is composed by 11 sections. Firstly, we start with an introduction mentioning the objective of the study, which is to understand the role of social media/digital influencers in the purchase intention of consumers regarding the tourism sector. This introduction also mentions the important contribution of the answers to this academic investigation as well as the anonymous characteristics of the answers, used only for academic purposes.

Secondly, we have a section composed of multiple choices regarding the use of social media platforms in order to understand the frequency of respondents' usage of social media platforms and/or to exclude the answers that are not relevant to the study. The next section is to measure the number of influencers the respondents follow and their areas of work. Moreover, in a more specific context (regarding touristic experiences), questions are made regarding their consumption habits in the tourism industry.

The remaining sections are related to the previous hypotheses formulated in chapter III, in order to answer the questions of the present study. The statements are measured by a five-point Likert scale range from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, this method of measurement is frequently used in the studies present in the literature. Moreover, this scale measurement provides us with the opportunity to compare the results with other studies, including the ones adapted to this study (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Ki & Kim, 2019; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021; Lee & Walkins, 2016; Seeler et al., 2019; Kitsios et al., 2022).

Each statement refers to a different construct of the study. The first hypothesis is measured in three sections one per dimensions of the concept of credibility (Expertise, Trustworthiness and Attractiveness). The rest of the sections are related to the other variables (Information Value, PSI and Secondary Experiences; also, there is a section dedicated to questions regarding the purchase intention (in general and specifically in the tourism industry). Lastly, we have demographic questions such as age, profession and gender.

The statements included on the sections were adapted from previous studies, however, some changes were made in order to align with the context of the present study (tourism). The following table (table 4.1) displays the constructs, the adapted items and their sources.

Table 4.1 - Constructs adapted items from the questionnaire and references.

Constructs	Items	Sources
Expertise	• I find this influencer expert in their domain. • I find this influencer efficient in their job. • I find this digital influencer qualified.	Sokolova & Kefi (2020) Ki & Kim (2019)
Thrustworthiness	• I find this influencer trustworthy • I think this digital influencer cares about his/her followers. • I find this influencer honest.	Sokolova & Kefi (2020)

	• I find this digital influencer reliable. • I find this digital influencer sincere.	
Attractiveness	• I think this influencer shares my values. • I think this influencer could be a friend of mine. • This digital influencer has a lot in common with me. • This digital influencer behaves like me. • This digital influencer has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine. • This digital influencer treats people like I do.	Sokolova & Kefi (2020)
Information Value	• I acquire novel information through the influencers that I follow. • The information provided by the influencers that I follow is useful to me. • The information provided by the influencers in social media is accurate. • The information and suggestions published by this digital influencer in social media are reliable. • The content provided by this digital influencer in social media is updated. • This digital influencer provides high quality information in social media.	Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo (2021)
PSI	• I look forward to watching this digital influencers content in social media.	Lee & Watkins (2016)

	• When I'm watching this digital influencer/reading their posts, I feel as if I am part of their group. • I think this digital influencer is like an old friend. • I would like to meet this digital influencer in person. • This digital influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends. • When this digital influencer shows me how they feel about a product or service, it helps me make up my own mind about the products or services	
Experience Sharing	• I accumulate knowledge from social media influencers who share travel-related information. • I acquire a variety of travel-related information from social media influencers who share their experiences. • I obtain useful travel-related information from social media influencers who share their experiences. • Social media influencers travel-related experiences allow me to gain information (prices, characteristics, and feedback). • The experience of these social-media influencers and their feedback on travel-related products	Seeler et al. (2019) Kitsios et al., (2022)

	influences my perception of travel-related products. • I'm likely to consider social media influencers travel-related experiences when making my travel decisions.	
Purchase Intention	• I would purchase the touristic products promoted by this digital influencer in the future. • I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by this digital influencer. • I would follow brand recommendations from this digital influencer. • I would encourage people close to me to buy touristic products promoted by this digital influencer. • When having touristic experiences, I look forward to purchasing the services this influencer shared. • I will probably purchase the touristic services that this influencer shared. • I would purchase the touristic services that this influencer shared if I have the opportunity. • I expect to purchase the touristic services that this influencer shared in the future. • I want to have the same/similar touristic experiences that this influencer shared.	Ki & Kim (2019)

4.2.3. Data Analysis Methods

The data extracted from the quantitative method is further analysed using descriptive measures and confirmatory. modelling. First, all variables are analysed by frequency distribution or average value.

In addition, a partial least squares (PLS) path modelling approach is used to test the relationships established in the hypothesis, more specifically in this context, PLS-SEM.

PLS-SEM is a structural equation modelling based on a variable-based structure. (Hair et al., 2017). Firstly, a measurement model is performed. The PLS algorithm extracts four indicators necessaire to evaluate the validity and reliability of the constructs. For reliability, we base our analysis on Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, depending on the results, we evaluate the reliability of the constructs regarding each variable. For validity, we have two types: convergent validity measured by Average Variance Extracted (AVE); or discriminant validity measured by Fornell-Larcker, Cross Loading and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT). These indicators measure how our constructs are evaluating the concept they are supposed to evaluate.

Secondly, a structural model is performed. This model aims to evaluate how variables are related. Moreover, this algorithm estimates the model's path coefficients by performing a bootstrap analysis obtaining values such as standard error and p value.

Chapter Five – Data Analysis and Results

5.1 Quantitative Study

A total of 113 responses were registered. The data gathered from the responses was analyzed through IBM SPSS Statistics 28 and Smart PLS. For the interest of the present study, 91 respondents (80,5% of the total sample) follow or search for digital influencers. These 91 respondents compose the sample that will be analyzed for further characterization with details such as their behaviors towards social media, behaviors concerning social media influencers, opinions about social media influencers and possible behaviors regarding purchase intention. Sociodemographic characteristics will be analyzed regarding the 113 respondents (total of respondents).

5.1.1 Sociodemographic Characterization

Based on the sample, we have 105 valid responses: 32 respondents are male which represents 28,3% and the majority with 64,6% (73) respondents female. Regarding the age groups, most respondents belong to the 18-24 age group with 69,9% (79 responses), followed by the 25-31 age group with 17,7% (20 responses).

Figure 5.1 – Distribution of gender. Values in percentage.

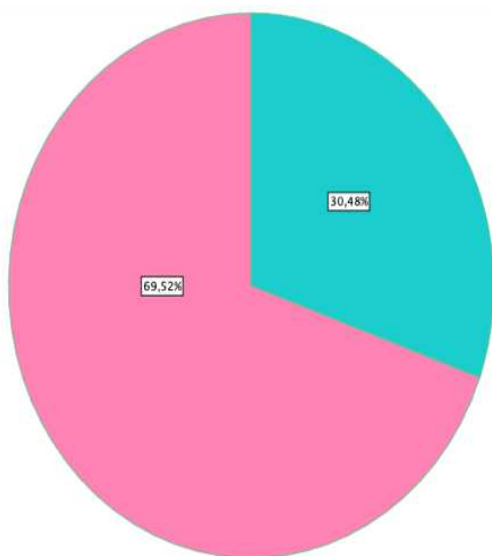


Figure 5.2 – Distribution of age. Absolute values.

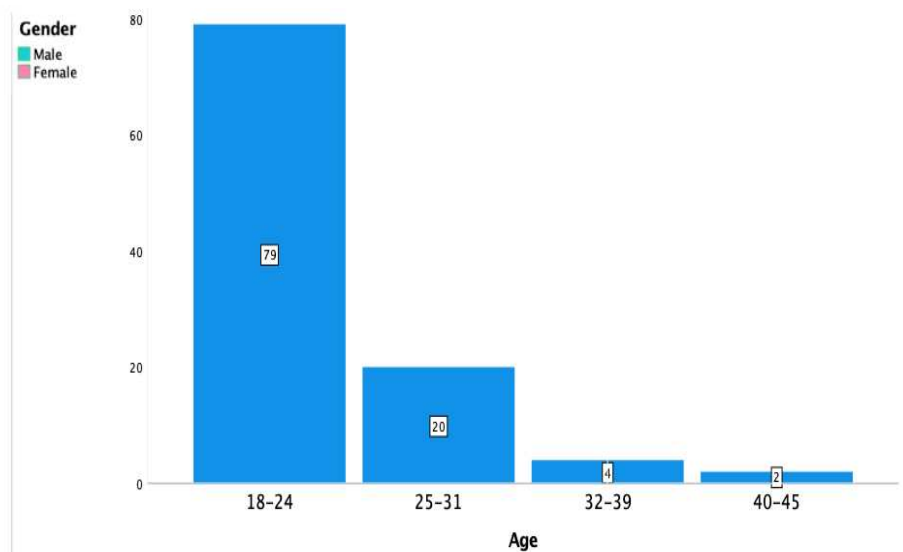


Figure 5.3 – Distribution of education. Values in percentage.

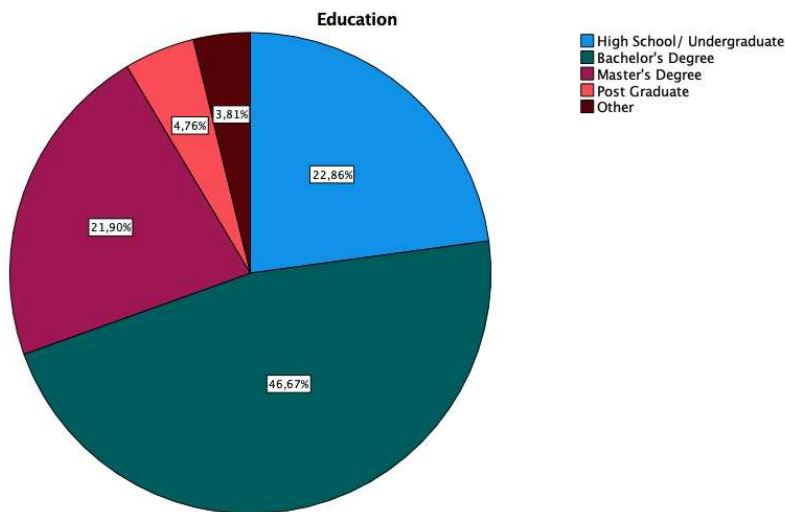
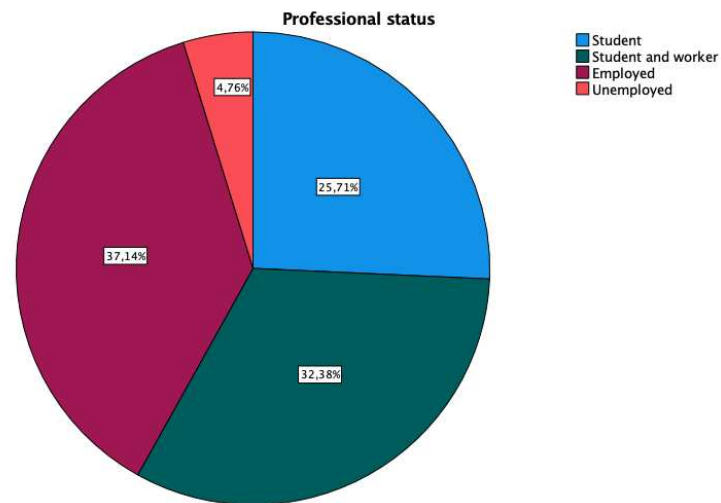


Figure 5.4 - Distribution of professional status. Values in percentage.



Regarding Education, most respondents have a Bachelor's degree (43,4% with 49 responses), 20,4% have a Master's degree (23 responses), 21,2% has High School/Undergraduate, and 5% are Post graduate or 4% other. As for professional status, 34,5% are employed and represent the majority (39 responses), 30,1% are students and workers and 23,9% are only students. 5% are unemployed.

5.1.2 Behaviours towards Social Media

In this point in the questionnaire, we still consider the 113 responses to assess the behaviours regarding social media. Starting with the usage of social media, the majority of the respondents (92,9%) uses 'More than 2 times a day', as demonstrated in figure 5.6. Likewise, the media platforms mostly used by the respondents are: Instagram (108 responses); Youtube (98 responses) and Facebook (58 respondents).

Figure 5.5 – Distribution of most used platforms.

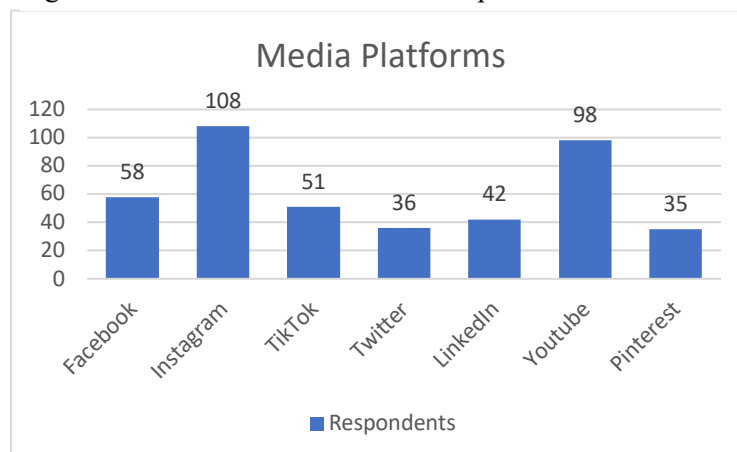
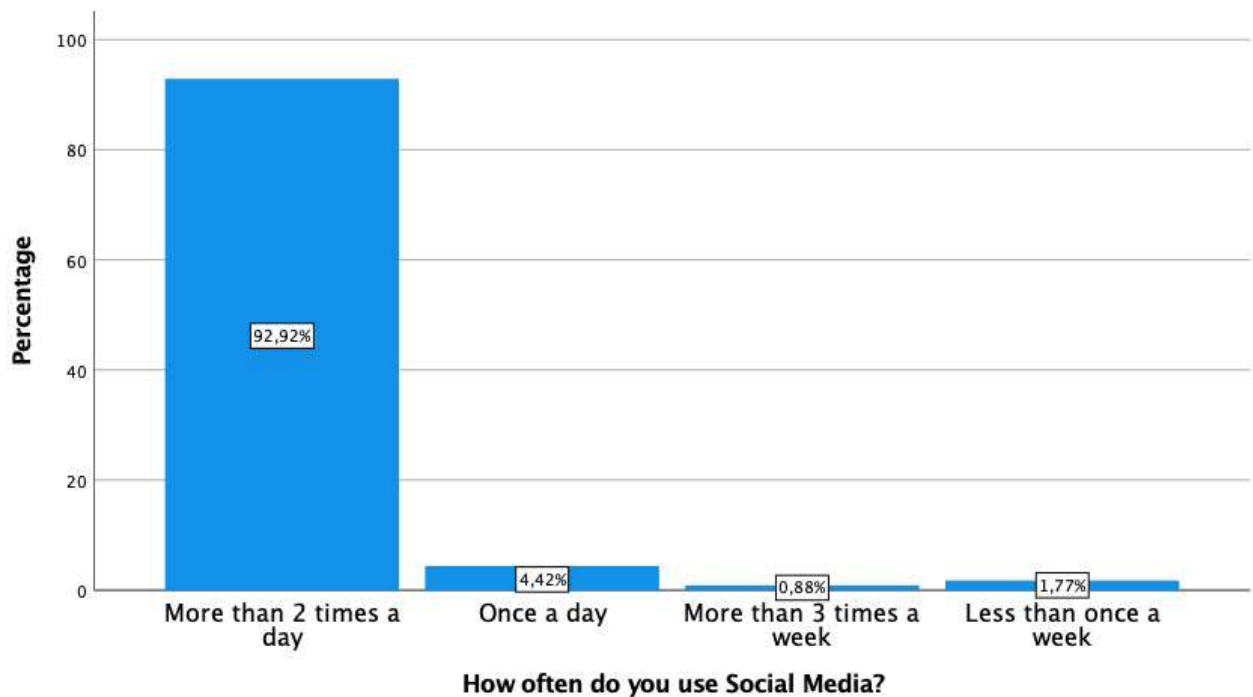
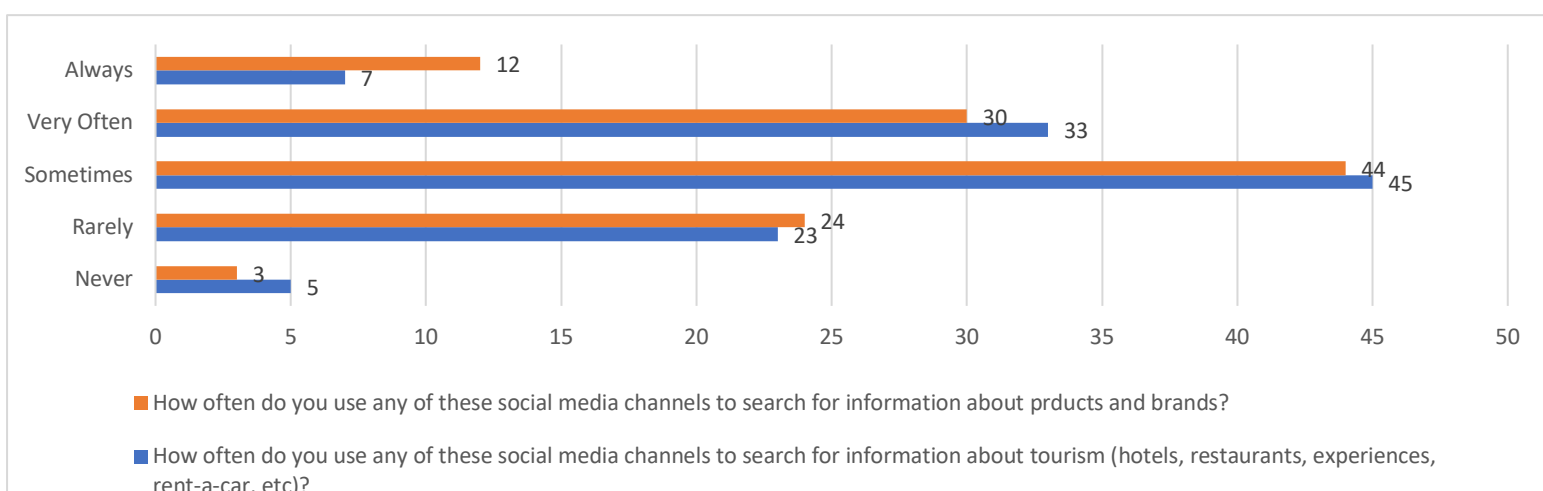


Figure 5.6 – Distribution of usage of social media.



Moreover, based on figure 5.7, the respondents confirmed the search for information about products and brands using social media (97,3% corresponding to 110 positive responses) and regarding tourism (hotels, restaurants, experiences, rent-a-car, etc) corresponding to 108 positive responses (95,6%).

Figure 5.7 – Distribution of social media usage for information purposes.



5.1.3 Behavior towards Digital Influencers/Social Media Influencers

A filter question was used: “Do you follow or search for any digital influencers?”. Only those who follow or search for any digital influencers continued to answer the rest of the questions of the questionnaire. Out of 113 responses, 91 (80,5%) follow or search any digital influencer.

Of the filtered sample, the majority (38,94%) follow between 2 and 5 digital influencers; 19,47% follows more than 15; 16,81% follows between 6 and 10 digital influencers; 7,08% follows between 11 and 15 digital influencers; 12,39% follow only 1; and 5,31% responded 0.

Figure 5.8 - Distribution of followers of digital influencers.

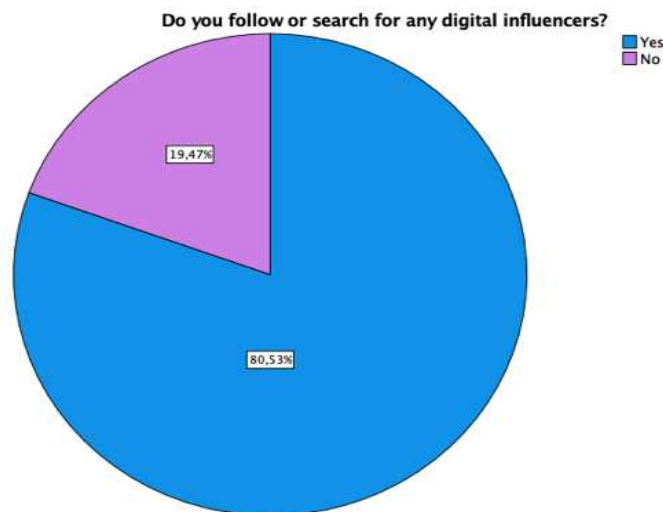
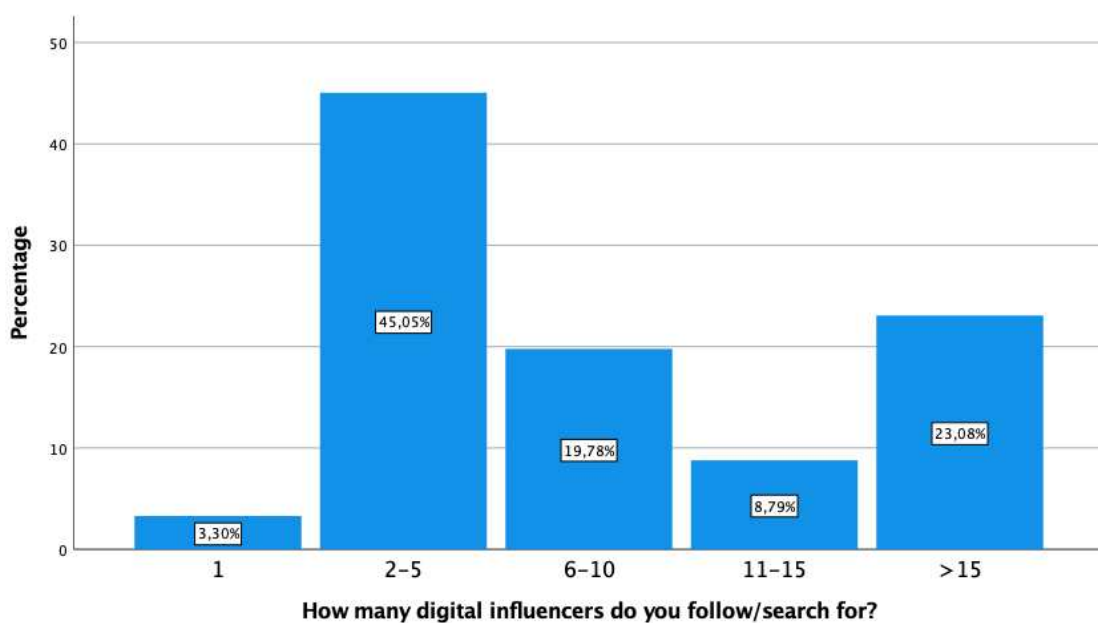


Figure 5.9 - Distribution of the number of digital influencers followed.



Regarding tourism products/brands, illustrated in the figure 5.10, 67,6% of the 113 responses have known this product/brand exclusively through Social Media Influencers/Digital Influencers and only 32,38% (34 responses) responded negatively. Furthermore, about the purchase of a tourism product recommended by Social Media Influencers/Digital Influencers, only 40% (42 responses) responded positively, and 60% responded negatively (63 responses). However, regarding the number of Social Media Influencers related to touristic experiences, the majority of the sample (44,8% - 47 responses) follow/search between 2 and 5; 19% (36) does not follow any; 12,38% follow 1; and 6,67% follow more than 5 Digital Influencers.

Figure 5.10 – Distribution of the knowledge about a touristic product/brand exclusively through Social Media Influencers/Digital Influencers.

Have you ever known about a touristic product/brand exclusively through Social Media Influencers/Digital Influencers (ex: an hotel, an experience, etc)?

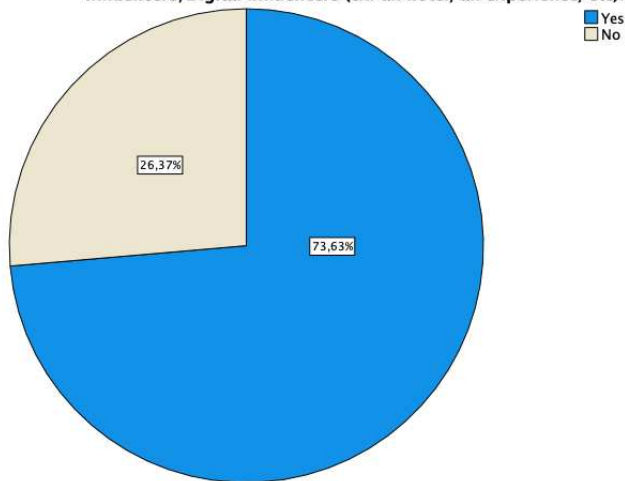


Figure 5.11 - Distribution of purchases regarding a touristic product recommended by Social Media Influencers/Digital Influencers.

Have you ever purchased a touristic product recommended by Social Media Influencers/Digital Influencers?

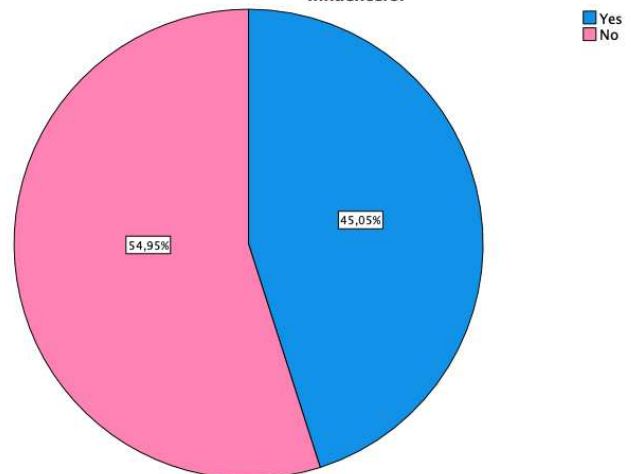
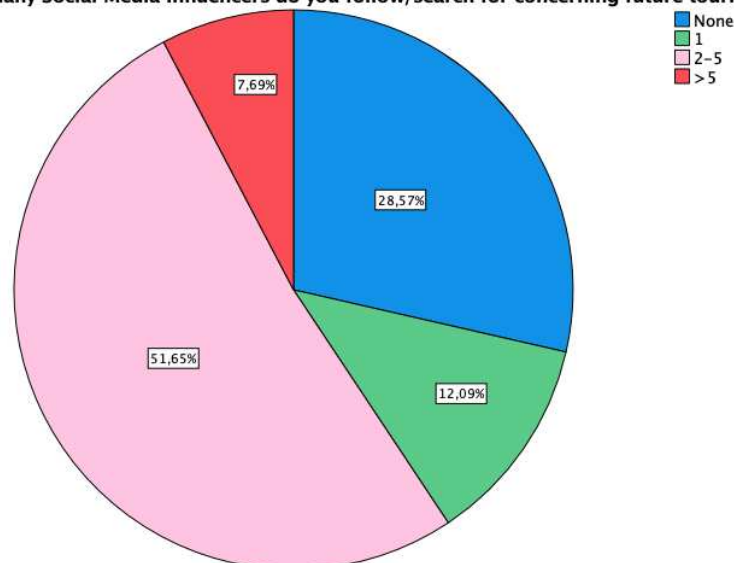


Figure 5.12 - Distribution of the quantity of social media influencers followed/searched for concerning future touristic experiences.

How many Social Media Influencers do you follow/search for concerning future touristic experiences?



Lastly, the favorite areas in which digital influencers are present, illustrated in figure 5.13, are Tourism and Cooking both with 57 responses, followed by Beauty (50 responses), Fashion (48 responses), Fitness (41 responses) and other, where participants choose mostly Lifestyle (8 responses) and Gaming (7 responses). To conclude the gathered information about respondents' behaviors towards digital influencers, when asked which recommendation sources help them to choose a tourism product, they choose friends as their main source (86 responses), followed by Social Media Influencers and Family (with 69 responses) and Television (20 responses).

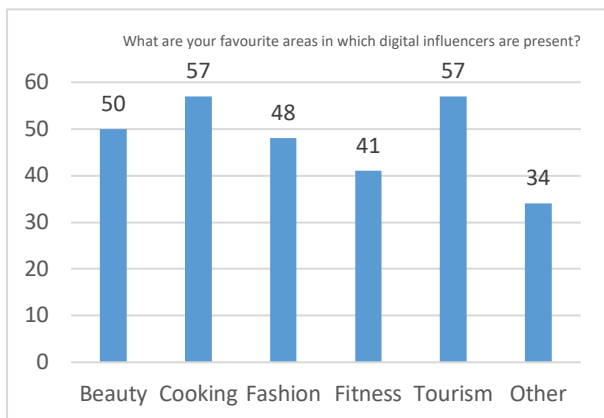


Figure 5.13 – Distribution of favorite areas where digital influencers are present.

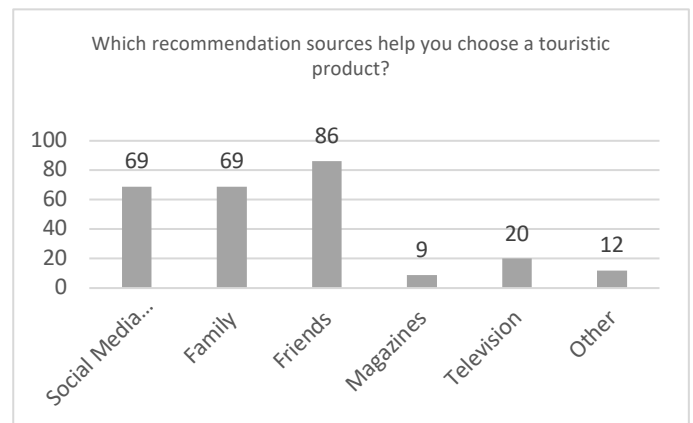


Figure 5.14 - Distribution of sources that help respondents choose a touristic product.

5.1.4 Descriptive Analysis of the Variables

The answers about social media influencers regarding the variable credibility, information value, para-social interaction and experience sharing are presented in table 5.1. These variables were evaluated through a five-point Likert scale.

Table 5.1 – Summary of descriptive measures, factor loading values and VIF.

	Factor Loadings	VIF	Mean	Std. Deviation
Credibility				
I find this digital influencer trustworthy.	0.763	3.027	3.93	0.841
I think this digital influencer cares about his/her followers.	0.651	2.182	3.79	0.837
I find this digital influencer honest.	0.857	6.262	3,99	0.823

I find this digital influencer reliable.	0.868	6.131	3.89	0.795
I find this digital influencer sincere.	0.887	8.484	3.93	0.841
I find this digital influencer expert in his/her domain.	0.566	3.177	3.98	0.894
I find this digital influencer efficient in his/her job.	0.748	3.918	4.18	0.739
I find this digital influencer qualified in his domain.	0.653	4.316	3.92	0.872
This digital influencer shares my values.	0.717	2.526	3.67	0.804
This digital influencer has a lot in common with me.	0.671	2.764	3.49	0.808
This digital influencer behaves like me.	0.632	2.300	3.12	0.728
This digital influencer has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine.	0.728	2.636	3.65	0.736
I think he/she could be a friend of mine.	0.660	2.230	3.68	0.842
This digital influencer treats people like I do.	0.694	2.234	3.41	0.843
Information Value				
The information provided by this digital influencer in social media is accurate.	0.820	2.579	3.95	0.765
The information and suggestions published by this	0.837	2.902	3.87	0.833

digital influencer in social media are reliable.				
The content provided by this digital influencer in social media is updated.	0.854	2.364	4.08	0.749
This digital influencer provides high-quality information in social media.	0.828	2.572	3.99	0.837
I acquire new information through this influencer.	0.876	3.358	4	0.816
The information provided is useful to me.	0.789	2.249	3.89	0.752
Para-social Interaction				
I look forward to watching this digital influencer on his/her social media channels.	0.762	1.830	3.84	0.922
When I'm watching this digital influencer/reading his/her posts, I feel as if I am part of his/her group.	0.829	2.466	3.42	0.844
I think this digital influencer is like an old friend.	0.759	2.634	2.92	1.108
I would like to meet this digital influencer in person.	0.785	1.907	3.77	0.92
This digital influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.	0.804	2.610	3.42	0.932

When this influencer shows me how he/she feels about the products/brands, it helps me make up my own mind about the products/brands.	0.617	1.298	3.75	0.783
Experience Sharing				
I accumulate knowledge from social media influencers who share travel-related information.	0.854	2.931	3.77	0.932
I acquire a variety of travel-related information from social media influencers who share their experiences.	0.904	4.060	3.77	0.932
I obtain useful travel-related information from social media influencers who share their experiences.	0.866	3.380	3.85	0.918
Social media influencers travel-related experiences allow me to gain information (prices, characteristics, and feedback).	0.889	3.478	3.95	0.911
The experience of these social-media influencers and their feedback on travel-related	0.860	3.272	3.67	0.857

products influences my perception of travel-related products. I'm likely to consider social media influencers travel-related experiences when making my travel decisions.	0.873	3.413	3.56	0.921
Purchase Intention				
I would purchase the touristic products promoted by this digital influencer in the future.	0.799	2.749	3.35	0.874
I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by this digital influencer.	0.847	3.550	3.53	0.794
I would follow brand recommendations from this influencer.	0.804	3.290	3.44	0.833
I would encourage people close to me to buy the products promoted by this influencer.	0.840	3.302	3.27	0.87
When having touristic experiences, I look forward to purchasing the services this influencer shared.	0.850	3.762	3.23	0.79
I will probably purchase the touristic services	0.840	3.828	3.22	0.879

that this influencer shared. I would purchase the touristic services that this influencer shared if I have the opportunity.	0.849	3.418	3.46	0.898
I expect to purchase the touristic services that this influencer shared in the future.	0.879	4.362	3.33	0.883
I want to have the same/similar touristic experiences that this influencer shared.	0.711	2.024	3.51	1.037

5.2 SEM-PLS Analysis

5.2.1 Measurement Model

Regarding the measurement model, it assesses the quality of the constructs present in the study. The evaluation starts with an analysis of the factor loadings which is followed by an analysis of the construct's reliability and validity.

5.2.1.1 Factor Loadings

Factor Loadings address the extent to which an item correlates with the given construct. Factor loadings fluctuate from -0.1 to +0.1, meaning that higher absolute values indicate a higher correlation of the item with the underlying construct (Pett, Lackey & Sullivan, 2003). The items of the present study did not have factor loading values less than the recommended value of .50 (Hair et al., 2017). Consequently, no items were removed. Factor Loading values are presented on table 5.2.

5.2.1.2 Indicator Collinearity

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) evaluates the multicollinearity present in the indicators (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). Hair et al. (2017) argues that if the value of VIF is below 5, multicollinearity does not present as a problem. Table 5.1 also contains VIF values for the indicators in the study and reveals that VIF for each indicator is below the recommended value except for “I find this digital influencer honest.”, “I find this digital influencer reliable.” and “I find this digital influencer sincere.” with 6.262, 6.131, and 8.484 respectively.

5.2.1.3 Reliability Analysis

Reliability relates with the measuring instrument and whether it is stable and consistent. Reliability is repeatability, meaning that if an instrument is performed repeatedly, it will provide the same results. The methods to lay the foundation of reliability include Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). The values of Cronbach Alpha range from 0.853 to 0.941 whereas Composite Reliability ranged from 0.854 to 0.943, the results for both methods are in table 5.2. Both indicators’ values of reliability are over the minimum value of 0.70 (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011). Thus, construct reliability is confirmed.

Table 5.2 - Reliability analysis of the variables.

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Credibility	0.930	0.936	0.528
Information Value	0.913	0.927	0.696
Para-social Interaction	0.853	0.854	0.581
Purchase Intention	0.941	0.943	0.682
Sharing Experiences	0.938	0.940	0.765

5.2.1.4 Construct Validity

Construct Validity refers to how multiple attempts to measure one certain concept, are in harmony. Here, two or more items from the same construct should covary highly in order to be valid measures of the concept (Bagozzi et al., 1991). The AVE value should be greater or equal than the minimum value of 0.50, hence, items converge to measure the

underlying construct and confirm convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1982). Convergent validity results based on the AVE indicator show that all the constructs have AVE values over 0.50 which means convergent validity is established. Table 5.2 demonstrates the AVE values for each construct.

5.2.1.5 Discriminant Validity

Accordingly, to Bagozzi and Phillips (1991), discriminant validity reflects the degree to which measures of different concepts are distinct. The notion is that if two or more concepts are unique, the valid measures of each should not correlate too highly.

Based on the Fornell and Larcker (1982) criteria, discriminant validity is established when the square root of AVE for a construct is greater than its correlation with all other constructs. In present study, the square root of AVE for a construct was higher than its correlation with other constructs for the exception of Information Value and Credibility, however, when analyzed with the other indicators, it does not present as a problem for the present research. Concluding, the constructs provide strong support for discriminant validity (table 5.3).

Table 5.3 - Discriminant validity of the variables in the study Diagonal values correspond to the square root of AVE values. The other values are correlations.

	Credibility	Information Value	Para-social Interaction	Purchase Intention	Sharing Experiences
Credibility	0.727				
Information Value	0.773	0.834			
Para-social Interaction	0.735	0.611	0.762		
Purchase Intention	0.501	0.552	0.501	0.826	
Sharing Experiences	0.394	0.469	0.407	0.687	0.874

Cross loadings aid to understand whether an item affiliated to a particular construct loads strongly onto its own construct instead of other constructs in the study. Table 5.4 illustrates that factor loading of all items is stronger on the affiliated construct instead of other constructs in the study (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Thus, based on the assessment of cross loadings, discriminant validity is confirmed.

	Credibility	Information Value	Para-social Interaction	Purchase Intention	Sharing Experiences
Q19_1	0.763				
Q19_2	0.651				
Q19_3	0.857				
Q19_4	0.868				
Q19_5	0.887				
Q20_1	0.566				
Q20_2	0.748				
Q20_3	0.653				
Q21_1	0.717				
Q21_2	0.671				
Q21_3	0.632				
Q21_4	0.728				
Q21_5	0.660				
Q21_6	0.694				
Q22_1		0.820			
Q22_2		0.837			
Q22_3		0.854			
Q22_4		0.828			
Q22_5		0.876			
Q22_6		0.789			
Q23_1			0.762		
Q23_2			0.829		
Q23_3			0.759		
Q23_4			0.785		
Q23_5			0.804		
Q23_6			0.617		
Q25_1				0.799	
Q25_2				0.847	
Q25_3				0.804	
Q25_4				0.840	
Q25_5				0.850	
Q25_6				0.840	
Q25_7				0.849	
Q25_8				0.879	
Q25_9				0.711	
Q24_1					0.854
Q24_2					0.904
Q24_3					0.866
Q24_4					0.889
Q24_5					0.860
Q24_6					0.873

Table 5.4 - Cross loadings values for the constructs of the study.

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) relates to the estimate of the correlation between the constructs. Discriminant validity is established based on the HTMT ratio and although maximum values are discussed in the literature, for the present study, it will be considered a 0.90 value (Teo, Luan & Sing, 2008). Table 5.5 illustrates the HTMT ratio results that are less than the required value.

Table 5.5 - HTMT values.

	Credibility	Information Value	Para-social Interaction	Purchase Intention	Sharing Experiences
Credibility					
Information Value	0.852				
Para-social Interaction	0.803	0.689			
Purchase Intention	0.548	0.575	0.554		
Sharing Experiences	0.428	0.487	0.449	0.727	

5.3 Structural Model

After performing the measurement model, we perform the structural model to evaluate the structural path and path coefficients (relationships between the constructs) and their statistical significance. Results of the model are presented in table 5.6.

H1 estimates if social media influencer's credibility significantly and positively affects para-social interaction between a social media influencer and consumers. The results revealed that social media influencer's credibility has a significant impact on the para-social interaction between a social media influencer and consumer ($B = 0.735$, $T = 11.981$, $p = 0.000$). Hence, H1 was supported/validated.

H2 estimates if para-social interaction between a social media influencer and his/her followers significantly and positively affects sharing experiences. The results revealed that para-social interaction has a significant impact on sharing experiences ($B = 0.407$, $T = 3.218$, $p = 0.001$). Thus, H2 was supported/validated.

H3 estimate if experience sharing significantly and positively affects the user intention to purchase a featured touristic product/service. The results revealed that sharing experiences has a significant impact on the user intention to purchase a featured touristic product/service ($B = 0.550$, $T = 6.794$, $p = 0.000$). Therefore, H3 was supported/validated.

Ultimately, H4 estimates if the information value significantly and positively affects the user intention to purchase a featured touristic product/service. The results revealed that sharing experiences has a significant impact on the user intention to purchase a featured touristic product/service ($B = 0.294$, $T = 11.981$, $p = 0.000$). Therefore, H4 was supported/validated.

Table 5.20 - Structural Model with the conceptual model of the study.

Relationships	Betta Coefficient	Standart deviation	T statistic	P value
Credibility -> Para-social Interaction	0.735	0.061	11.981	0.000
Information Value -> Purchase Intention	0.294	0.079	3.706	0.000
Para-social Interaction -> Sharing Experiences	0.407	0.126	3.218	0.001
Sharing Experiences -> Purchase Intention	0.550	0.081	6.794	0.000

¹

5.4 Mediation Analysis

Regarding a mediator's analysis, we can confirm that, in the present study, every variable influences Purchase Intention.

Sharing experiences is the variable that most influences Purchase Intention ($B = 0.550$, $p < 0.01$) through a direct effect. Similar to the last variable, Information value influence Purchase Intention ($B = 0.294$, $p < 0.01$), even if it is with less intensity.

Para-social interaction also influences Purchase Intention through Sharing Experiences (indirect effect of $B = 0.224$, $p < 0.01$).

From the analysis of the indirect effects, we can conclude that (1) all indirect effects between variables are significant and (2) PSI is a total mediator of the relationship Credibility – Sharing Experiences, just as, Sharing Experiences is a total mediator of the relationships PSI – Purchase Intention and Credibility – Purchase Intention.

Table 5.21 - Total indirect effects.

Relationships	Betta Coefficient	P values
Credibility -> Purchase Intention	0.164	0.013
Credibility -> Sharing Experiences	0.299	0.005
Para-social Interaction -> Purchase Intention	0.224	0.006

¹ Notes. B = Beta Coefficient, SE = Standart Error, T = t – Statistics, P = Probability (P) value. Relationships are significant at $P < 0.001$.

5.5 Discussion of the Results

This subchapter concerns the discussion of the results regarding the quantitative study, that contains an interpretation and clarification of the results.

Firstly, results about the determinants that have a positive impact on purchase intention of a touristic product showed that there is a significant positive relationship between credibility and para-social interaction. Thus, digital influencers credibility positively influences para-social interaction, which translates in credibility positively fostering a SMI-consumer relationship. These results are aligned with Zhang (2020) which argues that perceived attractiveness and expertise could affect the PSI consumer-celebrity. As argued in this study, attractiveness and expertise belong to credibility. This demonstrates the importance of credibility to foster para-social interactions between digital influencers and consumers.

Furthermore, a significant positive relationship between para-social interaction and sharing experiences was identified, meaning that para-social interaction positively influences experience sharing. This result supports the research from Hwang and Zhang (2018) where para-social interactions positively affect followers' purchase intentions and eWOM intentions. Consequently, experience sharing as an example of eWOM demonstrates to be affected by PSI. When a PSI is strength, experience sharing increases.

Also, a significant positive relationship between sharing experiences and purchase intention was found. Therefore, for the present study, digital influencers sharing experiences with their followers positively influences purchase intention of a recommended touristic product/service. This result suggests that consumers' purchase intention of a recommended touristic product/service is likely to occur if followers view their experiences shared on their platforms, therefore influencing others with their feedback, opinions and content. These results are consistent with past studies (Boswijk, Peelen & Olthof, 2012; Crouch, Huybers, & Oppewal, 2016; Jørgensen, Law, & King, 2020) which illustrated that experiences act as critical factors to explain and forecast consumer behavior. As the search for information in social media has grown, experiences shared by digital influencers in these platforms have become a primary source that influences the consumers' purchase intention.

Moreover, a significant positive relationship between information value and purchase intention was found, meaning, that if consumers perceive the information shared

by digital influencers valuable and useful for them, it can generate the purchase intention of a touristic product/service. The results corroborate the study of Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021) which argues that perceived information value increases the influence of digital influencers on followers, potentially generating purchase intention. In the present context, if followers perceive information shared by digital influencers as valuable, the probability of that generating a purchase intention regarding a touristic product/service is high.

To conclude, it was identified that all variables have an indirect effect in Purchase Intention. Sharing experiences, in the present study, is the variable that most influences Purchase Intention. However, it also acts like a total mediator of the relationship Credibility – Purchase Intention and PSI – Purchase Intention. PSI is a total mediator of the relationship Credibility – Sharing Experiences.

Chapter Six – Conclusions

The following chapter aims to discuss the conclusions of this study. It also contains the research limitations, contributions and future recommendations.

6.1 Conclusions

The aim of the present dissertation was to assess the role of digital influencers on consumers' purchase intention regarding tourism. For this research, different objectives were identified, and crucial variables were extracted from the literature review.

In the literature review, the principal concepts were adapted to the research context such as source credibility (Ohanian, 1990; Lou & Yuan, 2019), para-social interaction (Labrecque, 2014; Horton & Wohl, 1956), information value (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021) and experience sharing (Seeler et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2010).

Regarding the methodology, a quantitative method was selected, more specifically a questionnaire addressed to consumers who follow or search for digital influencers. Although the sample is composed by 113 respondents, only 91 follow/search for digital influencers and were considered for the hypotheses testing. Regarding the data analysis and the hypotheses test, IBM SPSS 28 and Smart PLS was used.

The results from the quantitative method, illustrated that information value and experience sharing significantly influence purchase intention. Also, credibility significantly influences para-social interaction and para-social interaction significantly influences experience sharing. Furthermore, PSI is a total mediator of the credibility-sharing experiences relationship and sharing experiences is a total mediator of the relationships PSI-purchase Intention and credibility-purchase intention. Consequently, in this research, the concepts of credibility, para-social interaction, information value and experience sharing have a positive impact on purchase intention.

All variables influence purchase intention, however, experience sharing revealed to influence the most purchase intention. This result corroborates studies such as Boswijk, Peelen and Olthof (2012), Crouch, Huybers and Oppewal (2016), Jørgensen, Law and King (2020). This translates in experience sharing being a crucial form to promote touristic products/services since experiences are intangible and experience sharing becomes a source of information capable of instigating purchase intention.

To sum up, the present dissertation gathered significant data and helped to shrink the gap in the literature review in the areas involved in this study.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions of the Study

Although research in the digital influencer's topic has been increasing, regarding the tourism context, the literature is scarce and further research is needed (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Escalas & Bettman, 2017).

This research shrinks the research gap by evaluating the role of digital influencers on purchase intention in the tourism industry which adds knowledge on the recent area of influencer marketing. The main contributions are related to experience sharing which was identified as having a significant and positive impact on purchase intention of a touristic product/service. Furthermore, findings regarding the SMI characteristics revealed that credibility, para-social interaction and information value also positively and significantly affect purchase intention of a touristic product/service. Also, variables as mediators were identified and demonstrated to affect, even if it is in an indirect way, purchase intention.

Moreover, para-social interaction and experience sharing revealed to have the mediator effect in the respective relationships which as not addressed in past research were the variables directly influenced purchase intention (Hwang & Zhang, 2018, Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

These findings helped to emphasize the importance of the growing economy of influencer marketing which added knowledge about the role of digital influencers on purchase intention, in this case, for the tourism industry.

6.3 Managerial Contributions of the Study

This research addressed issues like influencer marketing in tourism regarding digital influencers. Tourism is an industry of experiences which translates in relying on other people's experiences to minimize the risks. Based on the results, brands and businesses should promote themselves through social media influencers that have a good credibility among their followers, foster a strong para-social relationship with them and ultimately provide them with useful information. This can be evaluated based on the content produced by the digital influencers.

Moreover, managers and marketers should be aware of the growing influencer-marketing area where more and more funds are being allocated because it is a cost-effective marketing strategy that has already showed results in many areas and could be especially important in the tourism industry.

For digital influencers, this research can help them identify potential areas of improvement whether it is content related, or more consumer-SMI relationship related. This way, they can be more effective on influencing audiences regarding purchase intention.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

The following limitations should help future research to have a better outcome. First, a convenience sample was used and consequently the results cannot be representative to the population, meaning the generalizability of the results is reduced. Second, the size of the sample is small, and the questionnaire was in English performed in a Portuguese audience which means that people who are not secure about their linguistic skills could have rejected the possibility to answer the questionnaire. Furthermore, the sample only gathered people who follow/search for digital influencers. Thus, future research should use a larger sample base to have a more appropriate representation of the population.

As for future research, the topic of influencer marketing in tourism should be addressed in more studies. It is also interesting to see the differences in the behavior of variables influencing purchase intention in different age groups such as Millennials and Generation Z. Also, to enrich the literature in this topic, further research on the reasons behind a follower's interest to engage with a SMI would be interesting. To sum up, the variables considered in this study can be replicated in other sectors, more specifically, the present conceptual model can be applied in other areas of research.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Questionnaire

Within the scope of the master's in management of ISCTE Business School, I request your participation in this questionnaire to contribute to this academic investigation.

The aim of this questionnaire is to better understand the role of social media/digital influencers in the purchase intention of consumers regarding the tourism sector.

All the answers are anonymous and will be used only for academic purposes. The estimated time of the survey is around 5 to 8 minutes.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Juliana Pereira

Part I

1.1 How often do you use Social Media?

Mark only one option.

- More than 2 times a day
- Once a day
- More than 3 times a week
- Once a week
- Less than one week
- Never -> Skip to question 5.1

1.2. What are your social media channels?

Tick all that apply.

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Tiktok
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Youtube
- Pinterest

1.3. How often do you use any of these social media channels to search for information about products and brands?

Mark only one option.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Very often
- Always

1.4. How often do you use any of these social media channels to search for information about tourism (hotels, restaurants, experiences, rent-a-car, etc)

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Very often
- Always

Part II

Definition of social media influencer

As defined by Chung-Wha & Youn-Kyung, social media/digital influencers are people who have established credibility with a significant social media audience because of their knowledge and expertise on topics and have a certain influence on their followers and their consumers' decisions.

2.1. Do you follow or search for any digital influencers in any area?

- Yes
- No

2.2 How many digital influencers do you follow/search for?

Mark only one option

- 1
- 2-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- >15

2.3. What are your favourite areas in which digital influences are present?

Tick all that apply

- Beauty
- Cooking
- Fashion
- Fitness
- Tourism
- Other: _____

Part III: Social Media Influencers in Tourism/Travel Influencers

3.1. How many Social Media Influencers in Tourism/Travel Influencers do you follow/search for?

Mark only one

- None
- 1
- 2-5
- >5

tabela

3.2. Who are your favourite Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers? If you only have one favourite, mention his/her name.

3.3 How many followers does this influencer have?

- < 5.000
- 5.000 – 100.000
- 100.000 – 1.000.000
- > 1.000.000

3.4. Have you ever known about a touristic product/brand exclusively through Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers? (Ex: an hotel, an experience, etc)

Mark only one

- Yes
- No

3.5. Which recommendation sources help you to choose a touristic product?

Tick all that apply

- Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers
- Family
- Friends
- Magazines
- Television
- Other: _____

3.6. Have you ever purchased a touristic product recommended by Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers?

Mark only one option

- Yes
- No

Part IV: Opinion about Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers

4.1. Considering the Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers you follow, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences:

Mark only one option per row.

- 1) Strongly disagree
- 2) Somewhat disagree
- 3) Neither agree or disagree
- 4) Somewhat agree
- 5) Strongly agree

- I find this digital influencer trustworthy.
- I think this digital influencer cares about his/her followers.
- I find this digital influencer honest.
- I think this digital influencer reliable.
- I think this digital influencer sincere

4.2. Considering the Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers you follow, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences:

Mark only one option per row.

- I find this digital influencer expert in his/her domain.

- I find this digital influencer efficient in his/her job.
- I find this digital influencer qualified.

4.3. Considering the Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers you follow, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences:

Mark only one option per row.

- This digital influencer shares my values.
- This digital influencer has a lot in common with me.
- This digital influencer behaves like me.
- This digital influencer has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine.
- I think he/she could be a friend of mine.
- This digital influencer treats people like I do.

4.4. Considering the Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers you follow, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences:

Mark only one option per row.

- The information provided by this digital influencer in social media is accurate.
- The information and suggestions published by this digital influencer in social media are reliable.
- The content provided by this digital influencer in social media is updated.
- This digital influencer provides high-quality information in social media.
- I acquire new information through this influencer.
- The information provided is useful to me.

4.5. Considering the Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers you follow, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences:

Mark only one option per row.

- I look forward to watching this digital influencer on his/her social media channels.
- When I'm watching this digital influencer/reading his/her posts, I feel as if I am part of his/her group.
- I think this digital influencer is like an old friend.
- I would like to meet this digital influencer in person.
- This digital influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.
- When this influencer shows me how he/she feels about the products/brands, it helps me make up my own mind about the products/brands.

4.6. Considering the Social Media Influencers in Tourism/ Travel Influencers you follow, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences:

Mark only one option per row.

- I accumulate knowledge from social media influencers who share travel-related information.
- I acquire a variety of travel-related information from social media influencers who share their experiences.
- I obtain useful travel-related information from social media influencers who share their experiences.
- Social media influencers travel-related experiences allow me to gain information (prices, characteristics, and feedback).
- The experience of these social-media influencers and their feedback on travel-related products influences my perception of travel-related products.
- I'm likely to consider social media influencers travel-related experiences when making my travel decisions.

4.7. Considering your favourite tourism digital influencer, indicate your level of agreement on the following sentences:

Mark only one option per row.

- I would purchase the touristic products promoted by this digital influencer in the future.
- I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by this digital influencer.
- I would follow brand recommendations from this digital influencer.
- I would encourage people close to me to buy touristic products promoted by this digital influencer.
- When having touristic experiences, I look forward to purchasing the services this influencer shared.
- I will probably purchase the touristic services that this influencer shared.
- I would purchase the touristic services that this influencer shared if I have the opportunity.
- I expect to purchase the touristic services that this influencer shared in the future.
- I want to have the same/similar touristic experiences that this influencer shared.

Part V: Demographics

5.1. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Rather not say

5.2. Age

- <18
- 18-24
- 25-31
- 32-39
- 40-45
- 46-50
- >51

5.3. Professional status

- Student
- Student and worker
- Employed
- Unemployed
- Retired

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.