



The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Destination Choice

Bachelor Thesis for Obtaining the Degree

Bachelor of Business Administration in Tourism and Event
Management

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Vienna, 23rd May 2022

Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

The thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

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Abstract

In the last two decades alone, influencers have become a marketing phenomenon all around the globe. Companies have started seeing the benefits of implementing influencers into their marketing strategy due to the wide consumer reach these social media users have. Furthermore, influencers allow for a much more personalized connection between consumer and the entity selling the product or service. This paper suggests using this innovative method of marketing to tackle to worldwide problem when it comes to overtourism.

With the travelling trend skyrocketing in the past few years, masses of tourists have become quite a substantial problem in some cities or even countries. This paper suggests the use of newly emerged influencers to re-direct tourism from overcrowded destinations to those that, on the contrary, would benefit from receiving a larger influx of visitors. Amsterdam and Venice were given as examples of overcrowding where influencers could be used to redirect tourism, whilst Cape Verde and Tampere were cited as localities that could benefit from attracting more visitors. Dubai and Tulum demonstrated that influencers, if adequately used, can assist a city in reaching its tourism potential in a positive way.

The main hypothesis on which the paper was based postulates that the trustworthiness of consumers for influencers is higher than that for travel agency websites when choosing a travel destination, was not confirmed. However, the study could confirm that trustworthiness and expertise had a positive impact on booking intention. It remains to be further studied whether the combined use of both methods, influencers and travel agency websites as well as other forms of partnerships would achieve the desired effect of re-orienting tourism from overcrowded areas to less known or less popular destinations, be it within the same country or withing a wider geographic region.

Table of Contents

<i>Affidavit</i>	2
<i>Abstract</i>	3
<i>List of Tables</i>	6
<i>List of Figures</i>	7
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	8
1 Introduction	9
2 Literature Review	11
2.1 The importance of social media marketing	11
2.2 Destination Overcrowding	12
2.2.1 Cases of Destination Overcrowding	14
2.2.2 Strategies to avoid Overtourism	19
2.2.3 Developing a ‘Smart Destination’ to Avoid Overtourism	20
2.3 Destinations that could benefit from more Tourism	21
2.4 Influencers and Destination Marketing	26
2.5 Influencers as Tools to divert Tourism	31
3 Methodology	34
3.1 Research Design	34
3.2 Survey Design and Sampling	35
3.3 Code of Ethics	36
4 Analysis of Results	37
5 Conclusion	41
5.1.1 Implications and Further Studies.....	44
5.1.2 Limitations.....	44
6 Bibliography	46

***Appendices*.....57**

Appendix 1: Survey Design..... 57

List of Tables

Table 1 Sample Characteristics	37
Table 2 Scale Reliability	39
Table 3 Influencer and Travel Agency Website Trust Mean Comparison.....	39
Table 4 Regression Analysis: Trust, Booking Intention	40
Table 5 Regression Analysis: Expertise, Booking Intention.....	40

List of Figures

Figure 1 Removal of IAMSTERDAM sign (Olaf Kraak / Contributor, 2019)	16
Figure 2 Influencer Alex (@alexpreview) promoting Venice and The Gritti Palace.....	18
Figure 3 Venetian residents protesting against overtourism and cruise ships (Redazione ANSA, 2017)	18
Figure 4 Andrea Munoz (@destinationchaser) adventure and travel influencer Andi visiting and promoting Santiago, Cape Verde.....	24
Figure 5 Tiia Maaranen Finish Instagram and YouTube influencers promoting Santa Maria, Cape Verde	24
Figure 6 Visit Tampere (@visittampereofficial) using social media to promote their destination, also through the use of personalized hashtags.	26
Figure 7 Alfie Deyes popular English influencer partnership post for visit dubai	29
Figure 8 visit dubai partnership post with influencer Amelia Liana.....	29
Figure 9 Kerstin Kögler (@kerstinloves) Austrian influencer on a paid partnership with TUI travel agency to promote Tulum and the travel agency during the pandemic.....	31

List of Abbreviations

IT: Information Technology

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

UAE: United Arab Emirates

OECD: The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

DMO: Destination Management Organization

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

WOM: word-of-mouth

EWOM: electronic word-of-mouth

1 Introduction

The world has come a long way from the first recorded social media platform Six Degrees which was created in 1997 (McFadden, 2020). The founding of platforms such as Myspace, Facebook, and YouTube, in the early 2000s, and the later creation of Instagram have given rise to a novel way of living and socializing (Hendricks, 2021). Through a plethora of social media platforms making their way into the world, a new way of advertising was born in the form of influencers.

Influencers are users of a social media platform, who have a large following, and are considered as being a 'professional' or an expert in certain topics of their choosing. These creative individuals generate content that captures the attention of thousands if not millions of other users, and through this, influencers have the power to sway people into liking or buying certain products, services, or generally raise interest in certain topics (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021).

Using these influencers as marketing tools has become and will continue to be part of present-day advertising (Statista, 2021). By 2021, there was around 3.78 billion social media users globally, which greatly facilitates mass marketing for companies all around the world (Statista, 2021). Though influencers have the ability to capture a large audience, this audience must be receptive and interested in the information being given, as they alone have the ability to choose who or what they 'follow' online. Through this, niche markets have been formed such as 'travel blogger' or 'travel influencer' sectors, which this paper will further inspect, to discover the true impact that these popular users have on other's destination choice. If the impact is important enough, the possibility of using social media marketing as a tool to direct or divert tourism into destinations that could profit from it, this could be a paramount way to steer future trends when it comes to tourism (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020).

Currently, there are many cities and country's suffering from overcrowding due to a high number of travelers. This, amongst other things can be the reason for immense hostility of local inhabitants towards tourists such as could be observed in Venice (BBC, 2016). Additionally, it can cause much distress and potentially hinder the

welfare of the local communities (Damnjanovic, 2021). Thus, this paper aims to provide further suggestions to help eliminate similar problems in the future, through the positive use of influencers to steer the population into destinations that are socio-economically in need of tourism and to divert it from overcrowded destinations.

This will be done by quantitative research, in the form of a survey that will be distributed to a sample size of at least 60 people. A convenience sample made up of mainly friends, family, as well as other social media users will be utilized.

This paper aims to discern whether influencers can be used as a way to market new destinations in order to alleviate overtourism in other destinations. The results are expected to positively show that the impact of social media marketing through the use of influencers can have the desired effect if used as a tool to divert tourists from overcrowded destinations to those more in need of the various benefits that the industry may provide.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The importance of social media marketing

Social media marketing has become one of the most popular and successful strategies to advertise anything from products to services, and even destinations. By the end of 2021 a predicted 47.8% of the world's population will be members of a digital platform (Statista, 2021). This number alone shows the massive reach that companies have when choosing to market their products and services online rather than 'traditionally' through billboards, television ads, and so on, which have far higher costs and lack a wide audience reach (Lang, n.d.). Not only that, but social media marketing allows companies to segment and target their audience far better and more precisely than traditional media (Thanasi-Boce, 2017). Through the use of this online marketing tool, businesses can achieve a stronger relationship with their targeted consumers, therefore creating goods and services that are far more suited to the wants and needs of these consumers. According to Simona Vinerean (2017), social media users have a higher willingness to purchase things as the impulse decision to buy something is facilitated when an individual able to purchase goods and services online (Vinerean, 2017). Users of these platforms generally have a more positive reaction to advertisements they see online (Vinerean, 2017). In the United States alone, 40.34 billion dollars were spent on social media advertising in 2020 (Statista, 2021) and in the United Kingdom, a survey conducted by Statista showed that in an age group of 18 to 34 year old, about one third had purchased something through a social media platform (Tighe, 2021).

Although social media platforms have given companies a new way to advertise, they have also created a way for consumers themselves to be able to promote products and services that they have bought or experienced in the tourism sector. This has completely changed the way destinations are marketed. Now, tourists and consumers themselves are able to rate and review a city, country, and the plethora of tourist attractions and amenities available within these destinations. With the rise of websites such as TripAdvisor, where tourists can write about, review and rate their experiences all around the world, destination marketing has morphed into something

much different than what it used to be three or four decades ago. TripAdvisor had about 660 million reviews by 2018 (Kinstler, 2018). These reviews are not always positive, and a study conducted by ReviewTrackers shows that 94.3% of people have at some point decided not to interact with a company solely based on a bad review. Around 63.6% of consumers look up a business's reviews before even considering visiting or purchasing anything from them (ReviewTrackers, 2018). With numbers like these, it is clear to see that social media marketing has become a vital part of the industry on a global scale and has undergone a rapid phase of growth in the past decade (Chaubey, Husain, & Ghufraan, 2016).

Aware of the impact and in order to optimize their entry in digital marketing media, as well as to increase the relationship of trust and proximity with the public, private companies have invested more and more into the use of digital influencers (Glucksman, 2017). According to the YOUPIX survey '*ROI & Influencer Marketing 2019*', 83% of brands took paid actions with influencers in 2019 (up from 64% in 2017). This investment by companies is done in two ways: by rewarding influencers to tell their followers about a particular product or service, or alternatively by sending them products, services, or even trips for 'free' in exchange for a positive review (IMP YOUPIX, 2019).

2.2 Destination Overcrowding

The important role of influencer marketing can be expanded to assist in dealing with a severe problem affecting tourism in many destinations worldwide: overcrowding. In their study regarding destination branding, Qu et al. (2011) found that word-of-mouth is one of the most important factors when it comes to destination image and choice (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). In today's society influencers have one of the widest reaches when it comes to electronic word-of-mouth as they may have a following of thousands if not millions of people (Barreto, 2015).

Recently, tourism or destination overcrowding is becoming a big problem throughout the globe. A lot of cities and countries are being visited by more tourists each year than they can comfortably manage. The rise in popularity of travel could be attributed to a few factors for example: higher disposable income, ease of travel, affordable

transportation, as well as the need to experience more of what is shown on social media. Although tourism can be an important and, in some cases, vital factor for economic and socio-economic growth, it can also cause extreme overcrowding and consequently affect the welfare of local communities (Damnjanovic, 2021).

In his paper titled *The Challenge of Overtourism* (2017), Harold Goodwin lists eleven reasons for and effects of overtourism which are as follows (Goodwin, 2017):

- 1) Travel is becoming increasingly affordable, and more people are choosing to go on holidays including short trips to neighboring countries and so on. Furthermore, Goodwin states that the reason air travel is cheaper than other forms of transport is that airline companies are not forced to pay taxes on fuel or the negative environmental impacts caused by the use of it.
- 2) The use of platforms such as Airbnb, which allows travelers to rent a home from another person directly without a middleman, is causing rental prices to rise, forcing lower income residents out of their homes, as well as causing neighborhood disturbances due to the fact that tourists are now staying in residential communities rather than in hotels or other forms of accommodation specially devised for them.
- 3) Locals within the community have to pay for the fixing of any damages caused by travelers in most areas of a city which are free of charge such as streets and squares.
- 4) Trying to overcome the overcrowding of tourists in cities by dispersing them to more rural areas may cause traffic, crowds, and disturbances in those areas as well.
- 5) Some cities have seen a rise in abnormal drinking and partying behavior due to tourism.
- 6) As some destinations are only popular at certain times of the year, they may experience overcrowding in those certain time periods and may lack in customers at other times.
- 7) Though the industry creates a plethora of employment opportunity, these jobs are usually not very well paid, and do not allow for further career development for individuals.

- 8) The rise of disposable income, and better vacations days within their employment in the middle and upper classes, are allowing more and more people to travel.
- 9) Destination Marketing Organizations or DMOs are more likely to continue marketing popular destinations, as they bring in more money to the economy. Less popular destinations within the country that could potentially benefit from tourists' receipts are ignored as they are more difficult and therefore more expensive to market.
- 10) Transportation is becoming easy, fast, and available in abundance, and this causes an influx of people to arrive at destinations every minute, and since the control of this transportation lies in the hands of local or national authorities, it is impossible to impede the flow of arrivals, as their main goal, more likely than not, is money driven.

From Goodwin's observations described above, it can be noted that a series of factors has recently emerged that facilitate and promote traveling by a great number, almost indiscriminately, often with negative effects on tourism recipient cities. Since it is also stated amongst Goodwin's observations that *"the destinations that are most well marketed are naturally those that attract the most travelers"* (Goodwin, 2017), it is essential to find ways to use influencers to target areas so as to redirect tourism towards destinations where it can be beneficial rather than detrimental (Goodwin, 2017). This study will further delve into this aspect.

2.2.1 Cases of Destination Overcrowding

The following subsection demonstrates the problems associated with overtourism by elaborating on the examples of Amsterdam and Venice respectively. Additionally, it will showcase how these two European cities are currently dealing with the obstacles that accompany overcrowded tourism. In the case of Amsterdam for example it can be noted that the DMOs are already shifting in the direction of using influencers to solve their issues (NBTC Holland Marketing, 2019), whereas Venice has not yet thought about implementing this form of marketing in their tourism strategy.

Amsterdam

The nominal capital of The Netherlands has a population of around 851 thousand (Amsterdam.info, n.d.), and according to the country's national tourism report *Perspective 2030 Destination The Netherlands*, the nation observed an influx of 18 million international tourists in 2017, this number is predicted to double by 2030, and could potentially rise even higher if the tourism situation in the country is not managed (NBTC Holland Marketing, 2019). The plan also states that The Netherlands would like to work more with influencers in the future to achieve their destination goals rather than continuing to work with bigger corporations stating that “*we no longer put our trust in businesses. We ask our neighbours and fellow travellers. Influencers are new sources of information, and we find each other in communities in which we share and create our passions and experiences with each other.*” (NBTC Holland Marketing, 2019).

Though Dutch nationals seem to be quite tame at showing their dislike for tourists, it is very clear to see that the country, and particularly the city of Amsterdam have had enough (Quest, Hardingham-Gill, & Appiah, 2019). Quest et al. (2019) state in their article written for the news outlet CNN, that the nominal capital has seen many damages from visitors, which not only include street congestions, and crowded neighborhoods, but also physical damages (Quest, Hardingham-Gill, & Appiah, 2019). The country is even prepared to close and remove tourist attractions as well as accommodation possibilities. As an example, they have already proceeded to take down the tourist beloved “I Am-sterdam” sign, which saw hundreds of thousands of visitors each day (Quest, Hardingham-Gill, & Appiah, 2019). Furthermore, the *Perspective 2030 Destination The Netherlands* plan states that it would like to disperse tourists from crowded areas such as Amsterdam, to rural or coastal areas of the country which could potentially benefit from tourism (NBTC Holland Marketing, 2019).



Figure 1 Removal of I AMSTERDAM sign (Olaf Kraak / Contributor, 2019)

Venice

A further example, and perhaps a more infamous one is the tourism overcrowding in Venice. The northern Italian city has a population of about 258,600 and sees an inflow of tourists of around 75 times the number of its residents yearly (World Population Review, 2021). The city is long known for its abundance of cultural activities such as the opera, intriguing architecture, and its maze of canals that act as streets made of water for people to get to where they are going (World Population Review, 2021). It is also one of the biggest cases of overtourism the world has ever seen. Referring back to Harold Goodwin in the list of reasons for and effects of overtourism, the Italian city's residents have raised concerns over high rent, as well as lack of living space and apartments due to platforms such as Airbnb. Many have even taken to leaving the city all together (BBC, 2016). A large problem Venice faces is not only over-night staying tourists, but that many cruise ships laden with travelers' dock at the city harbor bringing in a flood of people during daytime hours (BBC, 2016).

A news article written for China Global Television Network (CGTN) reports that the COVID-19 pandemic, which notoriously hit Italy hard, saw Venice without tourists for the first time in decades (Wissgott, 2020). The positive impact of the lack of tourists was very much felt throughout the city, not only were Venetians able to enjoy their own streets and architecture for the first time, but also the bodies of water and canals surrounding and intertwining the city streets became laden with sea life that had

previously never, or very rarely, been observed to roam there (Wissgott, 2020). Furthermore, the article reported that although there were many positive outcomes of closing down the city for a lockdown in order to get the virus under control, there were also negative impacts as about 65% of the city's inhabitants are employed by the tourism industry (Wissgott, 2020).

Venice is said to be one of the cities most negatively affected by influencer marketing, as it's ever-growing social media popularity may be leading to more overcrowding in recent years (Tenbarga, 2019). Influencers tend to over romanticize the city on social media posts and this beckons more and more people to want to visit (Mittal, 2017). Venice can be considered a typical example of a city that could benefit from digital influencers' positive action towards tourism diversification to other regions of a country that has so many other geographical beauties to offer as destinations of choice (Giambona & Grassini, 2019). For that to occur, however, official measures should be taken to elicit concrete support from influencers themselves and their modern ways of accessing potential travelers.



Figure 2 Influencer Alex (@alexpreview) promoting Venice and The Gritti Palace



Figure 3 Venetian residents protesting against overtourism and cruise ships (Redazione ANSA, 2017)

2.2.2 Strategies to avoid Overtourism

The following section will introduce a few suggestions to help diminish overcrowding due to tourism according to Pechlaner et al. (2020) in the book *Overtourism*. The authors divide the suggestions into two main categories of micro, and macro policy measures. Within the micro measures, the authors suggest: Limiting the number of visitors by precisely determining the carrying capacity of a destination, according to the authors *“the physical capacity is determined by the availability of space as well as the form of the landscape or the city architecture”* as well as the physical and mental impact the number of tourists has on the local population. Additionally, they advise limiting the number of amenities available to travelers such as accommodation, and attraction tickets (Pechlaner, Innenhofer, & Erschbamer, 2020). The second suggestion is to apply a pricing policy in which popular tourist sites are no longer to be visited for free. The authors believe that by putting a price on a location, it is less likely to become overcrowded as not as many people will be willing to visit (Pechlaner, Innenhofer, & Erschbamer, 2020). As an example, the Galapagos Archipelago, in the Equator is strictly administered by its own Governing Council to ensure that its unique nature is preserved. Foreign visitors must pay an entrance fee to the Galapagos Park in the value of U\$ 100 (Galapagos Conservancy, 2022). This measure should, in principal, function as a natural deterrent to an overcrowding of this unique set of island, and could be applied in other locations under similar circumstances.

As for the macro policy measures, Pechlaner et al. (2020) suggest the following: Imposing an energy consumption tax which in turn will not only stop unnecessary pollution caused by the need to accommodate such a large amount of people but will also allow for a relaxation on *“labor-related taxes, hence making labor cheaper and reducing unemployment (Kosonen, 2012)”*. Lastly, a suggestion to have a European wide structural change of school holidays could allow for the seasonal related influx of tourism to be dampened, however this would take acceptance by many nations in order to work. Relating to this, the authors suggest a change in labor market policies in order to relieve the workload of individuals working long hours as well as weekends and holidays (Pechlaner, Innenhofer, & Erschbamer, 2020) and (Kosonen,2012).

2.2.3 Developing a ‘Smart Destination’ to Avoid Overtourism

In order for influencer marketing to divert tourism to a certain destination, it is vital that such destinations start following the frameworks mentioned below to become a smart destination (Lee, Hunter, & Chung, 2020). It is only this way that they will be able to provide a better or similarly coveted experience as their overcrowded counterparts whilst still being able to promote sustainable and manageable tourism growth within their destination (Lee, Hunter, & Chung, 2020).

A suggestion made by Sorokina et al. (2022) would be to make a change towards becoming a ‘smart destination’. A smart city is one which implements technology and innovation into all features of everyday life, in order to facilitate a resident’s life (Sorokina, et al., 2022). A smart destination is one that implements these technologies and innovations and uses them to market itself and gain an advantage over its competitors (Buhalis & Leung, 2018). If done correctly, developing a destination into a smart one, means that all systems that a tourist comes across are interconnected and this facilitates the entire experience for the individual from booking all the way to accommodation and activities (Sorokina, et al., 2022). Developing a smart destination would be a vital way for new locations to be able to supervise their tourism industry, and to avoid overtourism as seen in the cases of Amsterdam and Venice (Lee, Hunter, & Chung, 2020). Developing a smart destination entails:

Information Technology (IT): Developing the implementation of technologies; information technology is one of the main pillars of developing a framework to creating a smart city (Sorokina, et al., 2022). It is also the cornerstone of being able to implement successful social media marketing, therefore it is vital for cities and other destinations to always seek to improve on this in order to keep up with the ever-developing world (Oklevik, et al., 2019).

E-governance: E-governance, or electronic governance is also a vital part of converting to a smart destination. Within e-governance, a government uses Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in order to administrate and deliver governmental services whether it be Government-to-Citizen, Government-to-Business, or Government-to-Government (IGI Global, n.d.). Sorokina et al. (2022) take e-

governance a step further to include all tourism organizations, as it is vital for a countries governmental and hospitality entities to be on the same page (Sorokina, et al., 2022). Social media has also become a crucial trend in the world of e-governance, including, but not limited to, having easy access to communication between government and citizens or government and businesses, as well as providing an easy flow of instant information (Criado, Sandoval-Almazan, & Gil-Garcia, 2013).

Sustainability: Sustainability is a paramount focus of any smart destination. In today's society it is one of the most heavily discussed subjects and is very much necessary to discuss when it comes to tourism. Under sustainability in this case, it is understood that both the environment needs to be protected, but also that the growth of tourism in a certain destination should be manageable throughout the years and that tourism overcrowding does not occur (Lee, Hunter, & Chung, 2020).

Livability: A smart destination should not only focus on bettering tourism and attractiveness towards visitors, it should also focus on its own residents welfare (Sorokina, et al., 2022). The lack of this can clearly be seen in the above-mentioned examples of Amsterdam and Venice. Therefore, it is important that a destination plans and develops a way to prosper in the tourism industry, without the welfare of its citizens becoming jeopardized (Sorokina, et al., 2022).

As indicated earlier, the adoption of some or all of these measures is likely to provide influencers and DMOs with tools to orient their followers towards less traditional but more intelligently governed locations (Criado, Sandoval-Almazan, & Gil-Garcia, 2013).

2.3 Destinations that could benefit from more Tourism

In order for tourism to successfully be diverted to countries that could benefit from it, it is essential to research which destinations not only want to attract more tourists, but to also make sure that these destinations have the capacity to do so. This section will use two nations, Cape Verde and Finland, as examples of destinations where tourism could be diverted to.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) predicts that tourism numbers could decline by 60-80% in the coming years, due to the current Covid-19 pandemic (UNWTO, 2020). Confirming these predictions with an end of year report, the UNWTO reported that the Americas saw a decline of 69% in international tourism arrivals, Europe saw a 70% decrease, Africa and the Middle East a 75% decrease each, and Asia and the Pacific saw a decline of 84% (UNWTO, 2020). The three main reasons for these steep declines were attributed to travel restriction, lack of containment of the virus, and the economic environment as many people around the world lost their jobs (UNWTO, 2020). Instead of seeing this situation as a loss however, it would be beneficial for countries to start reforming and rewriting their tourism policies to adapt to future trends. As reported by Daniella Middleton (2022) destinations and influencers alike will have to start working more closely together to finetune destination marketing *'to make sure they are hitting the right messages'* (Middleton, 2022), meaning that influencers can be used as an example to consumers to show them that travel is safe and the correct safety measures are being taken within destinations. The post-pandemic period would be an optimal time for DMOs and destinations to develop a strong and sustainable plan for their tourism industry that includes social media and influencer marketing (Southan, 2022).

In the following sections, Cape Verde and Tampere will be introduced. Cape Verde is a destination that does not yet incorporate influencer marketing into their branding but has seen a slight rise in promotions by social media users who travel there by choice. On the other hand, Tampere is pioneering in this field, but has not yet seen a rise in popularity when it comes to choice of destination by consumers. Therefore, they would be the ideal candidates to help disperse tourism from overcrowded locations.

Cape Verde

Cape Verde, or Cabo Verde, is a collection of islands off the west coast of Africa with a population of about 563,800 in 2021. The capital city is called Praia and is located on the island of Santiago. The temperatures on Cabo Verde are very mild, and in the coldest month will go down to only about 20 degrees Celsius (Lobban, n.d.). Cape

Verde primarily attracts landscape tourism which refers to tourism with the main focus being the natural environment of a destination (Terkenli, 2021). Cape Verde would be an ideal beach, water sport, and adventure destination as it is made up of not only beaches, but also mountainous regions depending on which island one chooses to visit (CapeVerdelands , n.d.). Cape Verde is also a hot spot for sailors who are planning on crossing the Atlantic Ocean (Kunc, n.d.). This could be developed into a larger event such as the annual regatta similar to that seen in Henley on Thames, England, which sees thousands of tourists visiting the small town for the boating event each summer (Henley Royal Regatta, 2022).

In 2019 Cabo Verde's GDP was made up of about 38.1% by the tourism industry. In 2020 this number decreased dramatically to about 16.2% (Statista, 2021). Therefore, it would be an ideal candidate as a suggestion of where tourism could be dispersed to. Cape Verde is as a destination similar to places like the Canary Islands or Tenerife, which are frequented by tourists far more often (CapeVerdelands , n.d.). If the nation were to develop and follow a smart destination framework, as well as work together with influencers to promote itself, it could easily become a tourist hotspot similar to its competitors due to similarities in climate as well as landscape (González-Gómez, 2021). Tourism would not only benefit the country's economy, it would also allow for improving and expanding education, transportation, infrastructure, sustainability, as well as overall benefiting the welfare of its residents, as Cape Verde sees a large quantity of young men emigrating out of the country for hopes of better job opportunities elsewhere (Lobban, n.d.). It must be noted that Cape Verde is most easily accessible through European connections from places such as Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, as well as the Northern African country of Morocco. Therefore, the destination would be well suited for dispersing overtourism from likewise European destinations (World Travel Guide, 2022). Though Cape Verde is just one suggestion, many more destinations around the world exist in which tourism could bring countless benefits. The nation has seen a slight rise in popularity within the past couple of years, and influencers have already started to visit and promote the destination (as depicted below). Their role could be improved and expanded with official support from the government of Cape Verde.



Figure 4 Andrea Munoz (@destinationchaser) adventure and travel influencer Andi visiting and promoting Santiago, Cape Verde



Figure 5 Tiia Maaranen Finish Instagram and YouTube influencers promoting Santa Maria, Cape Verde

Tampere

Tampere in Finland, on the other hand, similarly to Dubai and Amsterdam, is already using influencers in their DMOs marketing plans (Javits, 2019). Tampere is a city in the south of Finland with around 230,000 residents, that is located between two great lakes (Visit Finland, 2022). As Finland's second largest city, Tampere is an educational and industrial hub, and boasts a handful of museums including the world's only Moomin Museum (a popular cartoon character created by Tove Jansson) (Visit Finland, 2022). Tampere University of Applied Science is also the world's very first institute to initiate a program for influencers making it an excellent choice of destination to divert tourism towards, through the use of influencers (Teivainen, 2021). The Finish cities official DMO understands that WOM or EWOM is one of the most important aspects of travel and tourism and therefore uses social media and influencers to promote their destination (Litvin & Pan, 2008). Under the DMOs official webpages, it is possible for journalists, YouTubers, Instagrammers, or other social media users with a substantial following to apply for a so-called 'media visit' where the DMO guides them through the destination. Within this application process the influencer (or similar) is asked what type of travel content they would be most interested in posting about, with topics ranging from: City & Culture, Nature & Saunas, Eat & Drink, Family fun, to 'other' (Visit Tampere, 2022). Though the destination is pioneering in terms of using influencers as destination marketing tools, there is still quite a bit of work to be done (Javits, 2019). The tourism sector was responsible for 2.6% of the country's GDP in 2017, whilst employing 5.5% of the nation's residents (OECD, 2020). According to Rahman (2014) tourism in Finland is most negatively affected by high living expenses of the country, lack of easy or direct travel access from other destinations, as well as a feeling of unfamiliarity in the minds of consumers as it is not a popular destination as far as tourism goes. Therefore, it has been identified as a destination that could greatly benefit from tourism, as well as from continuing to work with influencers in order to attract a higher number of visitors.

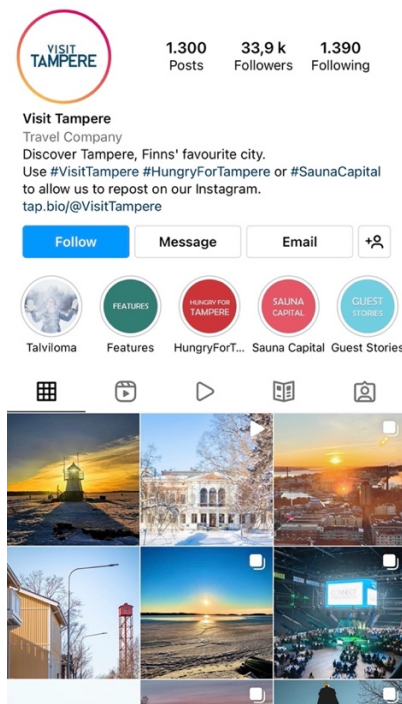


Figure 6 Visit Tampere (@visittampereofficial) using social media to promote their destination, also through the use of personalized hashtags.

2.4 Influencers and Destination Marketing

The following section will discuss examples of destinations that have in the recent years become popular or ‘cool’ through developing their tourism appropriately and largely using social media and influencers to build their reputations and increase their visitor numbers. The reason influencers are such strong marketing tools is thought to come down to the fact that they are, in the eye of the consumer, more trustworthy than larger corporations (Carmelo, 2021). This could be due to a number of different factors. Firstly, influencers may be perceived as being more relatable to a consumer than a business or corporation. It is far easier for an everyday social media user to relate to an individual influencer as they may present themselves in similar ways, have similar hobbies, likes, and dislikes (Al-Darraj, Al Mansour, & Rezai, 2020). Furthermore, influencers may be perceived as being more credible than their corporate counterparts, as they have a far more personalized relationship with not only their followers, but also the subjects they choose to market whether that be a

brand or a destination (AlFarraj, et al., 2021). Adding to this sense of similarity and familiarity the consumers feel towards these influencers, comes the fact that human beings naturally tend to imitate others (Wood, 2020). According to Wood (2020) imitation is at the heart of human behavior, as such acts helps human beings to survive and excel in society. Consequently, people tend to imitate those they admire and respect, which in today's society could be the reason why consumers want to imitate the luxurious lives of influencers, particularly when it comes to travel and the experiences they share on their social media profiles (Wood, 2020).

Secondly, in recent years, DMOs have slowly uncovered the potential of using influencers to market their destinations (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). According to Femenia-Serra & Gretzel (2020) the use of influencers allows destinations to reach a much larger segment of consumers, such as females and younger generations, as well as allowing the DMOs to curate their brand image more closely, combating factors such as destination cliches and stereotyping. Moreover, the authors also mention that *'despite being one of the potential instigators of overtourism in given locations, influencers can also be used to drive behavioral change and redirect tourism flows to less saturated areas'* (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). Against this background, the following hypotheses are tested in the current thesis:

H1: Influencer marketing is perceived as more trustworthy compared to information provided at a travel agency's website.

H2: Trustworthiness has a positive influence on booking intentions.

H3: Expertise has a positive influence on booking intentions.

Dubai

Dubai is a wealthy city of the United Arab Emirates and saw an influx of almost 16 million tourists in 2018, it is additionally the most populated city in the UAE (Puri-Mirza, 2020). Nearly one million of these tourists came from India, half a million from Saudi Arabia, and almost four hundred thousand travelled from the United Kingdom (Dubai Online, 2022). Dubai was able to build their tourism through investing in event

and shopping tourism. The city put great focus on building malls, shopping centers, beaches, islands, and many more attractions, as well as always making sure their image was kept in a positive light towards the rest of the world (Martens & Reisner, 2017). It has been well known that Dubai works closely with influencers to help boost its image as a tourism destination. Influencers have even become an integral part of Dubai's tourism marketing approach (Michaelson, 2021). However, the United Arab Emirates' success with influencer marketing may not be as transparent as it really should be. The Emirates' National Media Council enforces the policy that every individual who makes their money through social media in the UAE can only be paid for their work if they acquire a license to operate (Michaelson, 2021). Furthermore, the Emirati authorities closely observe and inspect the videos, photos, and other work being created and published by influencers, making sure that the country is never shown in a negative light, or slandered (Michaelson, 2021). This may be the reason why Dubai's influencer marketing is so successful to the rest of the world. The destinations DMO closely monitors the brand image and eventual stereotypes by keeping a close eye on the influencers and precisely on the context of what they are marketing and posting about Dubai (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020).

The main difference between these destinations to one like Tampere mentioned earlier, is that the use of influencers as a destination marketing tool has been able to sky-rocket tourism in Dubai and Tulum. This may be due to the fact that they attract influencers with a much larger following than their European counterpart (AlFarraj, et al., 2021). Pictured below are popular influencers promoting Dubai through the destination's official tourism board 'visit dubai'.



Figure 7 Alfie Deyes popular English influencer partnership post for visit dubai



Figure 8 visit dubai partnership post with influencer Amelia Liana

Tulum

Tulum is a coastal town in Mexico near Cancun. In the 1970's the Mexican government appointed Cancun and many coastal regions along the Riviera Maya such as spots to direct mass tourism (Friedman, 2020). The plan was successful, and the coastal regions witnessed a flood of tourists both Mexican as well as international, mainly from the United States. Tulum however remained a rather hidden gem for another few decades, being frequented only by hippies and free-spirited travelers brave enough to explore the rural areas outside of Cancun (Friedman, 2020). To put it into perspective, Tulum had a population of 92 people in the sixties, and by 2018 that number skyrocketed to 40,000, with 2.5 million tourists visiting the town in that same year (Friedman, 2020). With the recent growth of the niche market for spirituality on social media, including activities such as yoga, Tulum has seen an inundation of American as well as international influencers choosing to visit or even spend a few months at a time (Friedman, 2020). Furthermore, unlike many other popular tourist destinations, Tulum saw a rise of visitors in the years of the ongoing pandemic, due to its less strict anti-pandemic regulations (Friedman, 2020). In addition to using their own DMOs to market themselves as can be seen in the above example of Dubai, destinations may also be marketed by intermediaries such as travel agencies who partner with influencers, in the case of Tulum and it's 'loose' regulations during the pandemic, it has also been a popular marketed destination as exemplified below (Sieff, 2020).



Figure 9 Kerstin Kögler (@kerstinloves) Austrian influencer on a paid partnership with TUI travel agency to promote Tulum and the travel agency during the pandemic

2.5 Influencers as Tools to divert Tourism

While many countries have established tourism policy and planning reports, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted many of these plans. They will have to be reevaluated and rewritten in order for destinations to be able to fight the negative impacts the virus has had on their economies as a result of lack of tourism and tourist revenue (OECD, 2020). While many may perceive this as negative, since tourism plans take an extreme amount of time, effort and monetary investment for all stakeholders involved, it could also be an exceptional opportunity for destinations such as Amsterdam and Venice to rewrite their policies and come to a solution that allows them to redevelop their tourism in a sustainable manner in the future. As mentioned above in the heading 'Cases of Destination Overcrowding' Amsterdam's 2019 report had already mentioned a plan to work with influencers rather than businesses to market their destination in the way that benefits them the most (NBTC Holland

Marketing, 2019). This is an approach that should undoubtedly be looked into by more, if not most, destinations that suffer from overcrowding.

In order for tourism to be diverted to a different destination, it would be vital for these new locations to also develop themselves into smart destinations. This would not only make them more attractive, but it would also help them manage tourism in a much more effective way than traditional tourism has done so far. Implementing 'smart' changes to IT, E-governance, sustainability, and livability, would set a solid foundation for a new destination to gain more visitors (Sorokina, et al., 2022).

Though influencer marketing can be used successfully to divert tourism to a chosen destination, it should be combined with developing that destination into a smart destination (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). This way, the new tourist hub can successfully grow and keep up with that growth, rather than growing beyond its means (Sorokina, et al., 2022). It is important that overcrowding is not transferred from one destination to another, but rather that tourists really be dispersed, so that all locations can comfortably juggle the wellbeing of all stakeholders involved whether it be the visitors themselves, or the inhabitants of the destination (OECD, 2020).

Furthermore, the cases of Tulum and Dubai have shown that popularity of destinations within the world of influencers can increase these destinations attractiveness to the everyday consumer and traveler (Michaelson, 2021). These destinations are prime examples of places that had no significance about a decade or two ago and are now booming with thousands of tourists every year (Friedman, 2020).

Using influencers to market a destination is vastly more affordable than traditional media and allows for a much more personal connection to be made between destination and audience (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2019). The popular social media users can be used as a means to divert tourism into other parts of the country to disperse the crowds and make popular cities livable for locals again, seeing as social media promotes imitation and consumers covet the same experiences as their social media counterparts (Zhong & Zhang, 2020). Furthermore, each individual influencer can be used to target certain types of consumers (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). For example, Amsterdam has a problem with certain types of tourists as it has an

infamous image of being very lenient with recreational drugs, this in turn attracts the type of traveler that locals do not want in and around their community, and influencers could help to modify that image (Holligan, n.d.).

In view of the above, the subsequent methodology section aims to investigate the potential benefits of using influencers as a tool to aid destinations suffering with overtourism, as well as through the same means enhance the status of destinations that could benefit from expanding its tourism industry.

3 Methodology

The research conducted in this paper aims to test the following hypotheses.

H1: Influencer marketing is perceived as more trustworthy compared to information provided at a travel agency's website.

H2: Trustworthiness has a positive influence on booking intentions.

H3: Expertise has a positive influence on booking intentions.

3.1 Research Design

There are three main forms of research. Qualitative methods, which gather information from observation, interviews, human experience through focus groups and other forms of communication that are in most cases open-ended (Fossey, Harvey, Mcdermott, & Davidson, 2002). This type of research aims to delve deeper into the human aspects of a phenomenon (Creswell, Research Design, 2009). Quantitative methods, which obtain its information by gathering statistical or numerical data in order to explain a somehow measurable phenomenon (Watson, 2015). Lastly, multimethod, or mixed method, a form of research that combines both qualitative and quantitative research collection methods in the same study (Creswell, 1999). As the research conducted in this paper aimed to collect statistical data that will aid in predicting future trends of destination choice with the use of influencer marketing, a quantitative method was chosen in the form of an online experiment. Though qualitative methods are important when it comes to psycho-social research, quantitative research collection is arguably the more reliable form of data collection when it comes to the quality and correctness of numerical data (Leung, 2015). Quantitative research generally consists of data collection in the form of experiments or surveys, where said data is saved on programs or applications that then provide statistical data in return (Williams, 2007). The purpose of the data collection is to predict, confirm, or explain a given phenomenon (Williams, 2007). The study carried out in this thesis will use an experimental survey method, between subjects design with influencer marketing representing the manipulated variable in order to test

influencer trust, expertise and booking intention as compared to that of a travel agency.

3.2 Survey Design and Sampling

A convenience sample was used in the form of family, friends, and other social media users. A convenience sample is one that utilizes easily assessable participants such as over the internet (Edgar & Manz, 2017). Snowball sampling was also practiced whilst carrying out the study, which means that participants were asked to share the survey with acquaintances (Goodman, 1961). For the purposes of this research the survey was only taken by people who are users of social media as non-users were not of relevance.

The survey was conducted through socsisurvey, which allows experiments such as the one at hand to be carried out. The participants were randomly allocated to 'Group A' or 'Group B'. Group A was shown the following text:

Imagine you are looking for your next vacation destination. You are having a look at posts from an influencer that has recently visited this destination. Please indicate in the following section how you would evaluate the information you see.

On the contrary, group B was shown an alternative option:

Imagine you are looking for your next vacation destination. You are having a look at information at the travel agency's website where you want to book the vacation. Please indicate in the following section how you would evaluate the information you see.

Both groups then continued to answer the same questions regarding trustworthiness and expertise of information source, as well as booking intention after the stimulus exposure. Participants were randomly allocated to one of the two experimental conditions.

Trustworthiness was measured on a five item 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from: Undependable- Dependable, Dishonest-Honest, Unreliable-Reliable,

Insincere- Sincere, Untrustworthy-Trustworthy (Ohanian,1991). While Expertise was measured on a five item 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from: Not an expert- Expert, Inexperienced- Experienced, Unknowledgeable- Knowledgeable, Unqualified- Qualified, Unskilled- Skilled (Ohanian, 1991). Lastly, booking intention was measured on a three item 7-point Likert scale ranging from: very low- very high. The items were as follows:

'If I were going to book a vacation, the probability of booking this vacation is. The probability that I would consider booking this vacation is. The likelihood that I would book this vacation is.' (Shin & Noone & Robson, 2020).

Additionally, information regarding demographics such as level of education, age, gender, and income were collected to enrich the data. The research had a sample size of 81 people.

3.3 Code of Ethics

The researchers code of ethics as written in Seymore Sudman's *Advances in Consumer Research (1998)*, which include keeping the data collected private and making sure that there has been no breach in privacy of all participants involved, as well as making sure no people taking part in the questionnaire, or involved in the research have been deceived, misinformed, or harmed in any way, have been upheld for the entirety of the study (Sudman, 1998).

4 Analysis of Results

To begin the data analysis, an assessment of the characteristics of the participants was made. This assessment shows the age, gender, education and income of the sample collected. Some general information on social media usage was also recorded. To assure more reliable results, the answers from surveys that were incomplete were not counted and removed from the data set before analysis.

Table 1 Sample Characteristics

Sample Characteristics		
N= 81		
Age	Mean Age	34
Gender	Male	31
	Female	49
	Transgender	1
	Prefer not to say	0
Education	University	57
	High school	19
	Vocational school	2
	Apprenticeship	0
	Compulsory schooling	1
Income	Less than €10,000	14
	€10,000- €29,999	21
	€30,000- €49,999	19
	€50,000- €74,999	21
	€75,000 or more	6

Social media user	Yes	81
	No	0
Follow influencers	Yes	63
	No	18
Social media platform used to follow influencers	YouTube	47
	Instagram	67
	Facebook	20
	Twitter	17
	Snapchat	19
	Other	13
Booked vacation based on information provided by an influencer	Yes	36
	No	45

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the sample that completed the survey for this research. 81 participants completed the survey, and the mean age of these participants was 34. Furthermore, 38.2 % of the sample were male, 60.4% were female, and 1.2 % were transgender. The majority of the sample population has a university degree with 70.3%, following with 23.4% having finished high school, 2.4% vocational school and 1.2% finishing compulsory schooling. When it comes to income, it was devised that 17.2% of participants earn less than €10,000, 26% earns €10,000-€29,999, while the same percentage earns €50,000- €74,999, and the remaining 7.4% categorized themselves as earning €75,000 or more a year. All participants are social media users. 77.7% of participants follow influencers and the majority (82%) have an Instagram account as well as 58% having a YouTube account.

To access if the manipulation check worked as intended (i.e., if participants realized a difference between influencers and travel agency websites), a Chi-Square test was

conducted to test if the manipulation was successful. The test showed that 28 of 43 people understood that they were evaluating an influencer and 29 of 37 people understood that they were evaluating a travel agency website ($\chi^2(1, N=80) 98.8, p\text{-value} = .001$).

In a next step, a reliability test was conducted to verify the reliability of the scales used to measure trustworthiness, expertise and booking intention. The Cronbach's Alpha for all scales showed a moderately high to satisfactory level of reliability as seen in Table 2 (trustworthiness= .880, expertise= .824, booking intention= .788).

Table 2 Scale Reliability

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Items
Trustworthiness	.880	5
Expertise	.824	5
Booking Intention	.788	3

To test the validity of the **H1**: Influencer marketing is perceived as more trustworthy compared to information provided at a travel agency's website, in Table 3 an ANOVA test was used to compare the means of trustworthiness for the influencer group versus the travel agency group. The test concluded that H1 cannot be accepted as there was no significance found ($p\text{-value} = .901$). Furthermore, the mean comparison showed that although the results were very close, travel agencies actually have a slightly higher level of trustworthiness than influencers in the eyes of the participants. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Table 3 Influencer and Travel Agency Website Trust Mean Comparison

	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	Significance
Influencer	6.480	1.61	.015	.901
Travel Agency	6.488	1.63		

A linear regression analysis in Table 4 for **H2**: Trustworthiness has a positive influence on booking intentions, was carried out and showed that trustworthiness ($\beta=.336$, $p<.002$) did in fact have a positive influence on booking intention. The general goodness-of-fit for the linear regression model was (R Square=11.3%) which is rather on the low side, however H2 can be accepted and H0 rejected.

Table 4 Regression Analysis: Trust, Booking Intention

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Beta	P-value
Constant	3.504	.503	.336	.002
Trustworthiness	.242	.076		

A regression analysis in Table 5 for **H3**: Expertise has a positive influence on booking intentions, showed that expertise ($\beta=.270$, $p<.015$) indeed has a positive influence on booking intention. The goodness-of-fit for the linear regression model was (R Squared= 7.3%) which is rather low, meaning that expertise only accounts for about 7.3% of booking intention, however H3 can be accepted and H0 rejected.

Table 5 Regression Analysis: Expertise, Booking Intention

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Beta	P-value
Constant	3.812	.515	.270	.015
Expertise	.345	.139		

5 Conclusion

Throughout the decades, influencer marketing has become increasingly popular (Statista, 2021). Due to this fact, this paper set out to prove that influencers could be used as a tool to divert tourism from an overcrowded destination to one that could benefit from more tourism. Overcrowded destinations such as Amsterdam and Venice suffer from having too many tourists in one place simultaneously and this phenomenon can be unfavorable for many stakeholders involved, but primarily affects residents of these destinations (Damjanovic, 2021).

Some reasons for overcrowding may be the ease of travel in today's day and age, seasonal popularity, higher disposable income, as well as DMOs continuing their marketing campaigns in order to bring in revenue regardless of the community's welfare (Goodwin, 2017). There have been many suggestions proposed to improve destination overcrowding, ranging from limiting the number of people coming into a destination, limiting the availability of accommodation and other tourism amenities such as museum tickets and other forms of traveler entertainment being limited by the government (Pechlaner, et al., 2020). The suggestion made in this paper, would also require destinations to develop into smart destinations which would entail the implementation of technology and similar innovations into most, if not all, aspects of everyday life including e-governance, sustainability and improving livability within the community (Sorokina, et al., 2022).

Along with the above-mentioned suggestions, this paper proposed two destinations that could potentially benefit from more tourism, essentially as a destination where tourism from overcrowded destinations could be diverted. Cape Verde, which is a collection of islands off the coast of Africa, was one of the places suggested as it has a very similar climate and environment as many popular destinations such as the Canary Islands and Tenerife (CapeVerdelands, n.d.). Another destination proposed in this context was Tampere, Finland. This destination is already exceedingly innovative when it comes to using influencers as a marketing tool (Javits, 2019). The city was even the first to offer an influencer program at the Tampere University of

Applied Sciences. Such factors would make it an ideal destination to attract tourists using influencers (Teivainen, 2021).

The use of influencers as marketing tools for destinations is not a completely new concept. Previous research has shown that influencers are seen as more trustworthy than large companies, making them a better tool to sell products and services than traditional forms of marketing such as travel agencies in the tourism industry for example (Carmelo, 2021). Many popular destinations such as Dubai and Tulum have taken advantage of this, with Dubai even having implemented influencer marketing into their official DMO (Michaelson, 2021).

The results of the survey data collected however, showed that influencer marketing is not perceived as more trustworthy than that of travel agency websites specifically. These results may very well have been due to the mean age of the participants being 34. A survey conducted by Influencer Marketing Hub in 2022 showed that 13–24-year-olds were twice as likely to follow influencers than their older counterparts. Additionally, the survey showed that younger generations were more inclined to follow influencers, while the older generations were more inclined to follow traditional celebrities (Santora, 2022). It must be mentioned however that the mean between trustworthiness of influencers and that of travel agency websites is quite similar. This would imply that a partnership such as that seen between Kerstin Kögler and TUI travel agency described in section 2.4 Influencers and Destination Marketing above, may be a perfect combination to guarantee the trust of the consumer when it comes to social media marketing. Additionally, these partnerships could be mainly focused on a target market of consumers under the age of 25 in order to reach their maximum potential. Partnerships like this would not just be limited to influencers and travel agency websites, but could also be made between influencers and DMOs, accommodation booking websites, tour booking websites and many more. It must also be mentioned that the manipulation with scenarios used in this study represents an artificial setting, and field studies would have to be conducted in order to replicate the findings of this thesis.

The study did show that trustworthiness has a positive impact on booking intention. However, trust or trustworthiness is not the main factor pushing booking intention. Some other factors that may play into this could also be prior experience, price vs quality and more personal factors such as disposable income. This study alone found that trustworthiness does have an impact on booking intention. However, to find out the driving factors that lead consumers to actually book a destination would need further investigation. Previous studies such as that of Kim et. al., which focused on finding an effect on website and hotel trust on booking intention, corroborated the fact that trust indeed has a positive effect on consumers intention to book, whether that be a holiday, or a hotel stay (Kim et. al., 2017). The data also showed that expertise has a positive impact on booking intention. This finding is supported by the original study of which the items measuring expertise in this paper are based. In this previous study conducted by Ohanian, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise of celebrities was measured to ascertain whether these had an impact on purchase intention. The study found that out of these three factors, only expertise had a positive impact on purchase intention (Ohanian, 1991).

Lastly, a very interesting result showed that travel agency websites in this specific study were perceived as generally more trustworthy than influencers and were also ranked higher in all categories measuring trustworthiness which were: dependable, honest, reliable, sincere and trustworthy. This is a surprising result due to the fact that as mentioned in section 2.4 Influencers and Destination Marketing, other studies have shown that generally influencers are perceived to be more trustworthy than traditional companies (Carmelo, 2021). The results found in this study however could be due to the fact that a very specific industry was chosen. The tourism industry has been around for far longer than influencers have, and so have companies that cater to the industry such as travel agencies and booking portals. This could most definitely have an impact on their perceived trustworthiness when comparing the two. Additionally, and less of a surprise, as travel agencies' sole purpose is offering travel and tourism services, was also the fact that travel agency websites were seen as offering more expertise than influencers. Another implication of this result could lead

to influencers needing to become more knowledgeable of the destination they are promoting in order to improve the level of expertise perceived by their followers.

5.1.1 Implications and Further Studies

The results of this study showed that using influencers alone as a means to divert overtourism from one destination to another may not have the desired impact. Destinations would have to analyze their tourist data to see the demographics, mainly age ranges, of their tourists to be able to test whether using influencers as a marketing tool to divert or attract travelers would be sufficient or worthwhile. However, using both influencers and travel agencies in a partnering marketing campaign could prove to be very effective as it would capture consumers from a very large range of demographics. Further studies conducted within this same field should be carried out to not only test the theory that influencers can impact destination choice but should also focus on who exactly can be impacted to make certain choices when it comes to travel destination. Furthermore, the results of this study have shown that travel agencies may actually have an impact on destination choice, and this should be further investigated as it may assist in diminishing the phenomenon of overtourism. Travel agency websites may also be a substantial source of information for most people looking to travel. A study conducted by Jansen van Rensburg in 2014 showed that many people are still willing to pay travel agencies for their services since it allows for human interaction, as well as relieves the traveler of the inconvenience of having to do their own research about a destination in order to be confident enough to book the trip (Jansen van Rensburg, 2014). In addition to this, the digitalization of the world has also allowed for travel agencies to implement innovative ways to reach their consumers, for example through the use of mobile apps, leading to a substantial growth of popularity of online travel agencies such as Booking.com and Hotels.com (Talwar et. al., 2020).

5.1.2 Limitations

Seeing as the study was carried out mostly through snowball convenience sampling, one of its limitations included the lack of demographic diversity of its participants. As mentioned above, the study also omitted answers from persons not using social

media. Furthermore, the study mainly focused on samples obtained within Europe, and Brazil. It should also be noted that the study conducted lacked the input of a younger generation, which undoubtedly skewed the results and perhaps showed less of a correlation between the impact influencers have on the decisions made by each potential traveler from certain age groups. Some additional limitations to the study included the questions at hand not being interpreted in the same manner by all participants, rendering the data slightly less reliable. For example, not everyone may have the same interpretation of what exactly an influencer is. Some may include traditional celebrities as influencers while others may only count social media users with a certain number of followers and fame as an influencer. This most definitely would have had an effect on the answers to 'Do you follow influencers' and 'Have you ever booked a vacation based on the information provided by an influencer?'.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Design

Dear Participant,

I invite you to take this survey about the impact of influencer marketing on destination choice.

I would very much appreciate your participation. Please note however, that it is important for the accuracy of this study that you only carry out the following survey if you are a social media user. Many thanks in advance.

The participation and completion of this questionnaire is completely voluntary, and you may choose to end the survey at any time.

Please note that your answers and personal data will be kept confidential at all times during and after the research.

By clicking the 'NEXT' button, you are agreeing to take part in this study.

SM Do you use social media?

Yes

No

Measurement Scale

Respondents from Group A

Imagine you are looking for your next vacation destination. You are having a look at posts from an influencer that has recently visited this destination. Please indicate in the following section how you would evaluate the information you see.

Respondents from Group B

Imagine you are looking for your next vacation destination. You are having a look at information at the travel agency's website where you want to book the vacation. Please indicate in the following section how you would evaluate the information you see.

TW Trustworthiness ([Ohanian, 1991](#))

Measured on five item 7-point semantic differential scales

Undependable - Dependable

Dishonest - Honest

Unreliable - Reliable

Insincere - Sincere

Untrustworthy - Trustworthy

EX Expertise ([Ohanian, 1991](#))

Measured on five item 7-point semantic differential scales

Not an expert - Expert

Inexperienced - Experienced

Unknowledgeable - Knowledgeable

Unqualified - Qualified

Unskilled - Skilled

BI Booking Intention ([Shin & Noone & Robson, 2020](#))

Measured 3 item 7-point Likert scale

(1 = very low; 7 = very high)

If I were going to book a vacation, the probability of booking this vacation is

The probability that I would consider booking this vacation is

The likelihood that I would book this vacation is

Additional Information

SM Which social media platform do you most use to follow influencers?

- YouTube
- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Snapchat
- Other

SM Do you follow influencers?

Yes- No

SM Have you ever booked a vacation based on the information provided by an influencer?

Yes- No

GI How old are you?

- Short answer text

GI What is your annual income?

- Less than €10,000
- €10,000- €29,999
- €30,000- €49,999
- €50,000- €74,999
- €75,000 or more

GI What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Prefer not to say

GI Highest completed education

- University
- High school
- Vocational school
- Apprenticeship
- Compulsory schooling