

**SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND THE DECISION
MAKING OF DOMESTIC TOURISTS IN KENYA**

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**Social Media Influencers' and the Decision Making of Domestic
Tourists in Kenya**

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Haydar and Zeina, for being my happy place and my greatest motivation, and for encouraging me to continually better myself and to complete this step in my academic journey. Your love and support have been a great source of my strength.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

e-WOM	Eletronic Word Of Mouth
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
KTB	Kenya Tourism Board
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling Method
PSRs	Parasocial Relationships
ROI	Return On Investment
SMI(s)	Social Media Influencer(s)
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
WTO	World Tourism Organization

DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS

Social Media	refers to internet-based applications that enable users to create, share, and exchange user-generated content and participate in virtual communities and networks (Aichner et al., 2021).
Social Media Influencers	are third party endorsers who influence a large audience through blogs, tweets, and other social media platforms (Freberg et al., 2011).
Decision Making	is a cognitive process in which individuals select a course of action from several alternatives based on information, preferences, and expected outcomes (Lucas & Moore, 2018).
Domestic Tourist	is a person who travels within their own country of residence for leisure, business, or other purposes and stays outside their usual environment for at least one night, without crossing international borders (UNWTO, 2020).
Persuasive Communication	is the intentional use of messages—through speech, writing, or visual media—to influence or change an audience’s attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors in a specific direction (O’Keefe, 2021).
Parasocial Relationship	refers to a one-sided emotional bond where a media user develops feelings of friendship, intimacy, or identification with a media figure (such as a celebrity

or influencer), even though there is no real reciprocal interaction (Giles, 2010).

Content Creator

is an individual who produces and shares digital material such as videos, blogs, podcasts, graphics, or social media posts to inform, entertain, educate, or engage a target audience across online platforms (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

ABSTRACT

Social media has manifested to be a powerful form of media capable of influencing consumer decision-making over the past few years. The increased use of social media has also led to the development of high profile individuals who have a huge following on different social media platforms and applications and who can influence the people on matters of a given industry. The use of the social media influencers in the promotion of tourism activities is evident and more widely used today. Many tourism and tourist-related business now actively use social media to drive clients to their establishments more than ever before. This study aimed to examine the effect of social media influencers on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The study had two target populations, the social media users and tours and travel companies that use social media influencers to promote their businesses. A mixed method research design was used and the study made use of questionnaires and interviews to collect data which was later analysed to achieve the objectives set out. The study population was drawn from Nairobi and Kiambu Counties. Data was collected from 399 respondents through questionnaires and 10 key informant interviews. The findings of the research indicate a moderate relationship between source credibility and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Source attractiveness revealed a strong relationship with decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Moreover, there is a moderate relationship between source power and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Finally, there is a very strong relationship between source metrics and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The study further found that persuasive techniques as a moderating variable positively influences the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The study recommends that stakeholders should adopt an adaptive approach by regularly monitoring the effectiveness of influencer-led campaigns and adjusting strategies based on changing trends and audience preferences. This ensures that campaigns remain relevant and impactful in the dynamic landscape of travel and tourism. Since women play a leading role in making travel decisions, as revealed by this study, tourism-related businesses—like travel agencies, hotels, and tour operators—ought to create targeted campaigns that appeal directly to female audiences. Additionally, tourism stakeholders should give priority to influencers who demonstrate clear credibility and a strong connection with their audience. Finally, stakeholders should integrate persuasive strategies into the design of their social media campaigns. Techniques like liking, reciprocation, and social validation should be strategically embedded within influencer content, as they play a key role in shaping audience responses

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Information

The proliferation of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the global tourism industry by reshaping how destinations are marketed and how tourists search for information, evaluate alternatives, and make travel decisions. The widespread adoption of the internet, smartphones, and social networking platforms has shifted tourism promotion from traditional mass media to interactive digital environments where consumers actively create, share, and consume travel-related content. Consequently, tourism marketing has evolved from organization-controlled communication to consumer-driven engagement, allowing travelers to influence one another through online reviews, recommendations, photographs, videos, and personal travel experiences (Leung et al., 2022; Sigala, 2023). This digital transformation has elevated the role of social media from a communication platform to a strategic marketing ecosystem that shapes destination image, consumer trust, and travel intentions.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Pinterest, and X (formerly Twitter) have become indispensable sources of tourism information. Unlike conventional advertising channels, these platforms facilitate two-way communication, enabling tourists to interact directly with content creators, tourism organizations, and fellow travelers. The participatory nature of social media has accelerated the production of user-generated content (UGC), which has become a primary source of destination information for prospective tourists. Recent studies indicate that travelers increasingly perceive user-generated content as more authentic, credible, and relatable than traditional promotional materials because it reflects actual travel experiences rather than commercial advertising (Filieri et al., 2021; Nusair et al., 2021).

Instagram, a social media site focused on photo sharing, is one of the ways tourism is being promoted. The site was launched in 2010 and has over a billion active users (Statista, 2020). Users create accounts and share photos that can be viewed by friends, family and even strangers. The site uses hashtags with 511 million posts using the travel hashtag and 37.5 million posts using the hashtag tourism (Instagram, 2020). Social media sites like Instagram offer travel destinations and business owners an online presence and a direct connection with tourists through their business accounts (The Voice of Travellers, 2018). Social media allow tourists to express their opinions, experiences, and feelings in an innovative way (Narangajavana et al, 2017). Tourists can search, receive, and read various pieces of information about their potential destination through reviews, which are posted by other travelers on different social media platforms. These reviews on social media are also called user-generated content (UGC) (Narangajavana et al, 2017). According to Xiang and Gretzel (2010), UGC is a significant resource that might support, develop tourists' plans, or ultimately influence their travel decision-making.

Social networking sites or social media are one of the emerging ways through which the promotion of the tourist activities can be done in Kenya (Otieno, 2014; Arika & Moronge, 2017). Businesses in the tourism sector use social media for targeted advertising, promoting special offers, and building a distinct brand personality. The interactive nature allows for storytelling that engages potential visitors emotionally (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest are visual discovery engines. Stunning photos and videos of destinations, hotels, and culinary experiences serve as potent inspiration, often creating "bucket list" travel goals (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

However, consumers do not make any purchase decisions in isolation. They are influenced by several interpersonal and non-personal factors (Rahman & Pial, 2019). These factors include an individual's culture, sub-culture, social class and reference

groups. Schiffman et al. (2014) have defined reference groups as ‘social role models who affect consumer behaviour.’ Traditional reference groups include family, friends, colleagues, club members etc. (Rahman & Pial, 2019). As more people are now online, reference groups now include online communities who are available to provide information, share experiences, answer questions and have discussions about certain brands, companies and products (Bedford, 2019).

The increased use and popularity of social media has also led to the development of high profile individuals known as social media influencers (Abidin, 2016a) that have a following and can influence the people on matters of a given industry. These are individuals who over time through the content they generate have been able to gain followers who are interested in the content they post. Most of their posts are about their personal lives or their experiences and opinions with different brands (Sinn & Syn, 2014). Their opinions are held in high regard by their followers and any other social media users who come across their pages. Travel influencers play a significant role by curating aspirational content that shapes travel desires. Within this evolving digital landscape, social media influencers (SMIs) have emerged as influential intermediaries between tourism destinations and potential visitors. Social media influencers are individuals who have established expertise, credibility, and sizeable online audiences through the consistent creation of digital content within specific niches such as travel, lifestyle, food, fashion, or adventure. Their influence stems not only from the number of followers they attract but also from the perceived authenticity, trustworthiness, expertise, and interpersonal relationships they cultivate with their audiences. Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, influencer marketing is largely based on parasocial relationships, whereby followers perceive influencers as relatable individuals whose opinions resemble those of trusted friends or peers. Such relationships enhance message acceptance and increase the persuasive effectiveness of influencer recommendations (Ki et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2020).

As domestic tourists choose their travel destinations, they are motivated by many individual trait factors that include knowledge and adventure, economic concerns, destination information, as well as the desire to share their experiences (Mutinda & Mayaka, 2012). Tourists are guided by technology and information as they make their travel decisions (Rahman & Pial, 2019). The power of social media influencers has increasingly been used in the tourism industry in Kenya and many parts of the world. Social media has increasingly been adopted by different organizations and the corporate society because of its ability to display the personal experiences proving to be a useful tool in marketing. Social media is a platform for self-marketing of the tourism products. According to Şchiopu et al. (2016), more than 90% of millennials would share of the photos of their travel and tourism experiences. Siegel and Wang (2019) also revealed that 52% of the millennials have been influenced by the photos of friends to take up the same experiences in holidays. The increased use of social media is increasingly having a positive impact on the tourism sector. Additionally, Hays et al. (2013) also observed that more than 57% of the youth plan for their road trips on social media. Social media is presenting unprecedented opportunity for the tourism industry.

According to Sinn and Syn (2014), different forms of social media are authentic and credible and as such, are becoming a better tool for marketing the tourism market. The user generated content in marketing makes social media an incredible platform for advertising and promotion of goods and services. Scholars have also observed the cost effectiveness of using social media in marketing the tourism sector (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013). Most of the social media platforms are free and companies only need to pay social media influencers which is relatively cheaper than advertising through traditional media. Hudson and Thal (2013) also add that the social media is effective in marketing of tourism industry because of its' global reach.

Businesses and marketers alike have recognized the potential and opportunities available to reach a huge number of potential consumers by partnering or collaborating with social

media influencers. Social media influencers are now being used in the promotion of the tourism destinations and activities. Businesses are working with these influencers who are active in creating the content and sharing it with ‘their public’ and in turn help boost their sales. A social media influencer is able to positively impact the tourism sector when their content is authentic and creates a positive brand that has a wide reach within the market (Gretzel & Yoo, 2013; Ghaly, 2023). The social media influencers communicate a brand in their operations through which the target audience can use for identification. The tourist destination, on the other hand, seeking to make use of the social media influencers look into the brand they have created over time and the reach they have with the audience and then engage the social media influencers in order to reach their audiences.

The significance of influencer marketing has grown alongside the expansion of the creator economy. Digital content creation has evolved into a global economic sector in which influencers monetize their online presence through sponsorships, destination partnerships, affiliate marketing, and brand collaborations. As tourism organizations compete for consumer attention in increasingly crowded digital environments, influencer marketing has become a cost-effective strategy for reaching highly segmented audiences. Micro-influencers, who typically possess smaller but highly engaged communities, have gained particular importance because they often generate stronger engagement rates and higher levels of audience trust than macro-influencers or celebrities. This shift reflects a broader transition from follower quantity to relationship quality as a determinant of marketing effectiveness (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the integration of social media into tourism marketing and tourist decision-making. International travel restrictions imposed between 2020 and 2022 severely disrupted global tourism, compelling destination marketing organizations to reconsider their promotional strategies. During this period, digital platforms became the primary means of maintaining destination visibility,

engaging potential visitors, and rebuilding consumer confidence. Influencers played a critical role in communicating travel safety measures, promoting local tourism experiences, and encouraging domestic travel as countries gradually reopened their tourism sectors. The pandemic highlighted the resilience of digital marketing approaches and reinforced the importance of social media influencers in sustaining tourism demand during periods of uncertainty (Sigala, 2023).

Social media influencers have become a pivotal force in shaping domestic tourists' travel decisions across the globe, as their curated narratives and visually rich content significantly impact travelers' motivations and choices. Research shows that influencers contribute to destination discovery and preference formation by combining authenticity, trust, and relatability, which resonate especially well with local audiences (Uniyal, Pant, & Ahmad, 2024). Domestic tourists perceive SMIs as more authentic and trustworthy than corporate advertising because their content mimics the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) of a peer, yet with the reach of a media personality (Leung et al., 2013). This perceived authenticity is crucial for domestic travel, as influencers can highlight hidden gems, local culinary scenes, and unique cultural experiences within their own country, thereby reframing familiar destinations as exciting and worthy of exploration. The effectiveness of this strategy is rooted in social comparison theory and the concept of parasocial relationships, where followers feel a one-sided bond with the influencer, making their recommendations highly persuasive (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Platform-specific dynamics also play a major role: for example, Instagram's visual appeal strongly influences younger generations, while YouTube offers deeper narratives that reinforce decision-making (Uniyal, Pant, & Ahmad, 2024; Hanifah, 2019).

The increasing prominence of influencer marketing has transformed tourism promotion globally. Destination marketing organizations, airlines, hotels, tour operators, and hospitality firms increasingly collaborate with influencers to showcase destinations through immersive storytelling, high-quality visual content, and authentic travel

narratives. These collaborations are intended to increase destination awareness, improve destination image, stimulate travel intentions, and influence tourists' destination choices. Influencer-generated content frequently portrays destinations through experiential storytelling that enables audiences to visualize themselves participating in similar experiences. Such emotional engagement often exerts greater influence on travel intentions than conventional promotional campaigns because consumers perceive influencer recommendations as less commercial and more experience-based (Casaló et al., 2020).

Consequently, tourism boards and businesses worldwide are increasingly allocating marketing budgets to collaborate with local influencers, recognizing their unparalleled ability to shape the travel desires and behaviors of the domestic market by providing curated, visually compelling, and culturally nuanced content that drives both engagement and conversion. Tourism Australia's "Philausophy" campaign (stylised *Come Live Our Philausophy*) was launched in 2019 to promote a particular image of Australia — not just its landscapes, but its people, personality, and way of life. While global in reach, this campaign heavily featured Australian influencers to promote domestic travel, especially during the post-bushfire and COVID-19 recovery periods. They partnered with well-known local content creators to showcase unique Australian experiences to a domestic audience, encouraging locals to "holiday here this year." The campaign was backed by a multi-million-dollar government funding package, a significant portion of which was allocated to social and influencer content creation. Similarly, Tourism New Zealand ran the "Do Something New, New Zealand" that launched in May 2020, amid COVID-19 border closures, when international tourism essentially stopped. This domestic campaign explicitly redirected international marketing funds to stimulate local tourism. A key tactic was partnering with prominent Kiwi influencers across diverse niches to share their domestic travel experiences. This provided culturally nuanced content that resonated deeply with New Zealanders, encouraging them to explore their own backyard.

From an African perspective, the use of social media influencers in shaping the travel decisions of domestic tourists is powerfully linked to the dual movements of reclaiming national narratives and driving economic growth through intra-regional travel. Unlike international campaigns that often perpetuate stereotypical imagery of safari and poverty, African influencers are leveraging platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to present curated, culturally nuanced, and modern portrayals of their home countries that resonate deeply with local audiences. In Nigeria, for instance, influencers like @tundeednut use comedy and relatable skits to showcase destinations like Obudu Mountain Resort, making them aspirational for young, urban Nigerians seeking "local tourism" adventures (Adeola & Evans, 2022). This builds on a foundation of trust and shared identity; domestic tourists perceive these local creators as more authentic and credible sources of information than official government channels, effectively generating persuasive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) within a shared cultural context (Mkono, 2018). In South Africa, the use of influencers on campaigns demonstrates a strategic effort to stimulate the domestic economy by encouraging citizens to explore their own backyards, a trend accelerated by COVID-19 travel restrictions (Ndlovu & Heath, 2023). These influencers masterfully blend visually compelling content with local languages, music, and humour, making travel feel accessible and relevant. Their impact is evident across the decision-making journey, from inspiring travel desires by demystifying nearby destinations to providing practical tips that lower the perceived risk of travel, thereby directly influencing booking intentions and supporting a growing wave of domestic tourism that is vital for the resilience of the African tourism sector.

Elnashar (2016) offers one of the earlier analyses of how social media shapes tourism decisions across Africa. She identifies platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TripAdvisor as critical sites where users exchange travel-related content, (videos, photos, personal narratives, reviews) that directly influence tourist resolution (i.e., decision-making). Her study underscores how social media is not merely a

marketing channel but a participatory space where travelers actively co-create destination images. This participatory nature is particularly relevant for domestic tourists, who may rely on peer-generated content to navigate local travel opportunities, validate value propositions, and discover less-publicized attractions. Elnashar's findings suggest that social media fosters a form of democratized tourism information, which can be especially valuable in regions where traditional destination marketing might be less developed.

Social media influencers have emerged as key drivers of domestic tourism in Kenya, reflecting a global trend where digital content creators shape travel decision-making. The Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) has been a pioneer in leveraging social media influencers to enhance domestic tourism. Campaigns such as #TembeaKenya ("Explore Kenya") involve partnerships with local influencers and travel bloggers to highlight Kenya's national parks, coastal destinations, and cultural sites. Innovative strategies within these campaigns included interactive polls, allowing audiences to vote on influencers' itineraries, thereby fostering engagement and co-creation of content (Expedia Group, 2024). Such campaigns demonstrate the strategic integration of influencer marketing in Kenya's domestic tourism promotion and the capacity of influencers to serve as both promoters and facilitators of travel experiences.

Despite the rapid adoption of social media and influencer marketing within the tourism sector, there remains a significant gap in understanding how social media influencers shape the travel decisions of domestic tourists in Kenya. Existing literature has extensively documented the growth of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok as important channels for tourism promotion (Otieno, 2014; Arika & Moronge, 2017; Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013). Studies have also established that user-generated content (UGC), online reviews, and visual storytelling influence destination awareness, image formation, and travel intentions (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Narangajavana et al., 2017). Consequently, tourism organizations

worldwide have increasingly incorporated social media influencers into their marketing strategies to leverage their perceived authenticity, credibility, and ability to engage niche audiences.

Globally, research has demonstrated that social media influencers affect destination choice, travel planning, and booking intentions among tourists (Leung et al., 2013; Uniyal, Pant, & Ahmad, 2024). Tourism authorities in countries such as Australia and New Zealand have successfully integrated influencers into national campaigns to stimulate domestic tourism, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty and post-pandemic recovery. Similarly, across Africa, influencers have emerged as powerful actors in promoting local travel by presenting culturally relevant and relatable destination content that resonates with domestic audiences (Mkono, 2018; Ndlovu & Heath, 2023).

However, despite the widespread use of influencer marketing in tourism promotion, scholarly research in Kenya has largely focused on the role of social media as a marketing tool, destination branding, or the influence of electronic word-of-mouth on consumer behaviour. Much of the existing evidence concerning influencer effectiveness is derived from studies conducted in Western or Asian contexts, whose cultural, economic, and tourism consumption patterns differ significantly from those of Kenya.

Furthermore, existing studies tend to treat social media broadly, often combining influencers, user-generated content, online reviews, and digital marketing into a single analytical category. This approach obscures the unique influence mechanisms associated with social media influencers, such as perceived authenticity, trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and follower engagement. As a result, there is limited empirical understanding of whether Kenyan domestic tourists are influenced by social media influencers in the same way as tourists in other contexts, which influencer characteristics

matter most, and how such influence translates into actual destination choice and travel behaviour.

This study therefore addresses a critical gap in tourism and digital marketing literature by examining the influence of social media influencers on the travel decisions of domestic tourists in Kenya. Specifically, it seeks to move beyond the general assumption that influencers are effective promotional tools and investigate the extent to which influencer attributes and content shape destination awareness, travel intentions, and destination selection among Kenyan domestic tourists. By focusing on the Kenyan context, the study contributes context-specific evidence to a field that is currently dominated by findings from developed economies and provides insights that can inform more effective domestic tourism marketing strategies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The increasing use of social media has transformed how tourists search for information and make travel decisions. Social media influencers have emerged as important sources of travel-related information because they share personal experiences, recommendations, and destination content with large online audiences. Studies have shown that potential tourists rely heavily on social media during different stages of the decision-making process, including need recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives (Gros, 2012). Influencer-generated content is perceived as credible and relatable, enabling influencers to shape consumers' perceptions and travel intentions through electronic word-of-mouth communication (Hanifah, 2019; Mohamad, Vivien & Pei, 2022). Furthermore, consumers increasingly depend on social media platforms to access authentic experiences and reviews from other users when evaluating tourism products and destinations (Evans & McKee, 2010).

Research on domestic tourism behavior in Kenya indicates that many Kenyans value leisure travel and consider holidays important; however, awareness of tourism

destinations remains relatively low. Consequently, domestic tourists tend to visit only a limited number of well-known attractions, mainly coastal destinations and major wildlife parks (Ndivo, Waudu & Waswa, 2012). Studies have further shown that domestic tourism participation is influenced by demographic characteristics such as age, income, occupation, education level, and family life cycle, which affect travel motivations and destination choices (Kifworo, Okello & Mapelu, 2020). Additionally, individual factors such as personal interests, travel preferences, and perceived destination attractiveness have been found to be more influential in destination selection than environmental factors (Mutinda & Mayaka, 2012).

Despite the growing importance of social media in tourism marketing, Kenya has been relatively slow in adopting digital marketing strategies to promote tourism activities. Research indicates that only a small proportion of Kenyan tour operators maintain an active presence on social media platforms such as Facebook (Otieno, 2014). Additionally, domestic tourism in Kenya continues to face challenges related to inadequate information dissemination and limited marketing efforts. Studies have found that many potential domestic tourists lack sufficient information about tourism destinations, attractions, and travel opportunities within the country (Kihima, 2015; Ndivo, Waudu & Waswa, 2012). Poor marketing and advertising have also been identified as significant factors contributing to low visitation rates to local tourist attractions (Okello, Kenana & Kieti, 2012).

While previous studies have established the role of social media influencers in shaping consumer behavior, there is a paucity of research examining their influence on domestic tourism decision-making in Kenya. Existing studies have largely focused on the adoption of social media by tourism stakeholders or on tourism marketing challenges, without specifically investigating how influencer content affects the travel choices of domestic tourists. This knowledge gap limits the ability of tourism stakeholders to effectively leverage influencer marketing as a strategy for promoting domestic tourism.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effect of social media influencers on the decision-making process of domestic tourists in Kenya. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of influencer marketing in the tourism sector and provide insights for developing effective digital marketing strategies to enhance domestic tourism participation in the country.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this research was to examine the effect of social media influencers on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To investigate the effect of source credibility on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya.
- ii. To determine the effect of source attractiveness on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya.
- iii. To examine the effect of source power on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya.
- iv. To establish the source metrics used to identify social media influencers to be used by the travel industry for domestic tourism in Kenya.
- v. To assess the moderating effect of persuasive techniques of SMI's messages on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What is the effect of source credibility of social media influencers on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya?

- ii. What is the effect of source attractiveness of social media influencers on decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya?
- iii. What is the effect of source power of social media influencers on the consumer decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya?
- iv. What source metrics are used to identify social media influencers to be used by the travel industry for domestic tourism in Kenya?
- v. What is the moderating effect of persuasive techniques of SMI's messages on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study on the effect of social media influencers was important to fill the existing gap in the marketing of tourism activities in the country. Researchers like Kara, Chemma, and Benahmed (2024) argue that digital influencers, along with social media, play a significant role in shaping followers' purchasing decisions and enhancing the travel intentions of internet users. Achieving the objectives of this study will also increase the benefits Kenya is likely to get out of tourism through effective use of social media (Kibara, Odhiambo, & Njuguna, 2012).

There was also a need to identify the measures of how effective the use of social media influencers is to influence the behaviour of tourists and provide the conviction of making visits to the regions (Buigut & Amendah, 2016). This study was also necessary to provide data that policymakers can use to understand SMIs and how they influence the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. There was need to have an understanding of the ways in which social media influencers can be used in the tourism industry for the purpose of policy development. The use of the social media influencers is marred with various challenges that would effectively be solved through public policy. However, public policy can be developed effectively when there is a clear understanding

of the nature of operation between the stakeholders in the tourism sector and the social media influencers (Buckley, 2012).

This study on the impact of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya holds substantial significance for various key audiences, including policymakers, academia, and tourism industry stakeholders.

For government bodies and regulatory agencies such as the Ministry of Tourism, Tourism Regulatory Authority, this study provides critical, evidence-based insights that can inform national tourism strategy and policy. The findings validate the efficacy of influencer marketing in stimulating domestic travel. Policymakers can leverage this to design and fund national tourism campaigns that strategically incorporate credible local influencers, moving beyond traditional advertising mediums. A further contribution of the findings of this study is towards informed regulatory frameworks. As the use of SMIs becomes more prevalent, this study highlights the need for potential guidelines or standards around transparency, such as clear advertisement disclosures and authenticity in influencer partnerships, to protect consumers from misleading promotions and ensure the integrity of Kenya's tourism brand.

This study makes several valuable contributions to the academic community, particularly in the fields of digital marketing, tourism studies, and consumer behavior. It addresses a significant gap in literature by focusing specifically on domestic tourists in Kenya, a perspective often overshadowed by research on international tourism. This enriches the global understanding of how digital marketing phenomena manifest in emerging economies. The study also provides quantitative measures of the relationship between key SMI characteristics (credibility, attractiveness, power, metrics) and consumer decision-making. The strong positive relationship found with source metrics and the moderating role of persuasive techniques offer new variables for future research models. This work further serves as a foundational study, opening avenues for

further investigation into areas such as the long-term ROI of influencer campaigns, cross-cultural comparisons of SMI effectiveness, and the impact of different social media platforms on travel decisions.

For businesses in the tourism sector, including tour operators, travel agencies, hotels, and marketing firms, this study offers actionable intelligence to refine marketing strategies and gain a competitive advantage. First, the findings provide a clear framework for selecting the right influencers. Rather than focusing solely on follower count (a metric), the study emphasises credibility, authentic audience connection, and the quality of persuasive content. This enables stakeholders to maximise Return on Investment (ROI) by partnering with influencers who genuinely drive decisions. The confirmed positive moderating effect of persuasive techniques is also a direct tactical tool. Marketing teams can now deliberately brief influencers to weave these psychological principles into their content, making campaigns more effective at converting viewers into customers. Finally, the revelation that women are primary decision-makers for domestic travel is a crucial insight. Stakeholders can now develop highly targeted campaigns and products designed to appeal directly to female audiences, both in general marketing and in influencer briefs.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study focused on social media influencers and their influence on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya, determining whether they lead to the purchase or non-purchase of holidays within the country. To establish the effect social media influencers have on the decision-making of domestic tourists, the study examined influencers who post content about travel in Kenya. The study also considered the tours and travel companies that have used social media influencers to establish the extent to which the strategy was effective.

The study was conducted in two selected counties. The counties selected are Nairobi and Kiambu counties. These counties were chosen because they represent the population with the highest socio economic ability in Kenya (KNBS, 2019). The residents of these two counties were likely to undertake domestic tourism because higher income is a driving factor in participation in travel (Vanhove, 2005). The respondents that were useful in the study included the owners of tours and travel companies, domestic tourists, managers of the tourism destination units and the various tours and travel companies that operate in Kenya.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Quantitative data was collected from domestic tourists and followers of travel-related social media influencers through structured questionnaires, while qualitative data was obtained from owners and managers of tours and travel companies as well as tourism destination units through interviews.

The study measured the independent variables of source credibility, source attractiveness, source power, and source metrics, while persuasive techniques were examined as a moderating variable. Consumer decision-making among domestic tourists served as the dependent variable. Data analysis was conducted using appropriate statistical software to test the relationships among the study variables and determine the extent to which social media influencers affect the travel decisions of domestic tourists in Kenya. This methodological approach enabled the study to generate both statistical evidence and contextual insights regarding the role of social media influencers in shaping domestic tourism behavior in Kenya.

In terms of the theoretical scope, the study used four theories. It was based on the principles of the attribution theory, social comparison theory, source credibility theory and the theory of reasoned action. Attribution theory helped explain how domestic

tourists interpret the motivations behind influencer content and how these interpretations influence their trust, engagement, and ultimately their travel decisions. The more authentic and internally motivated the influencer appears, the greater their impact on the tourist's decision-making process.

The study was also anchored on social comparison theory and source credibility theory to explain how social media influencers affect the travel decisions of domestic tourists in Kenya. The theories collectively provide a lens for understanding both the psychological evaluation process of tourists and the perceived trustworthiness of influencer-generated content.

The theory of reasoned action explained that social media influencers affect travel decisions by shaping attitudes toward certain destinations through persuasive content, influencing subjective norms by acting as social proof or trendsetters, strengthening behavioral intentions to travel, and potentially leading to actual travel behavior, assuming no major constraints exist. Therefore the theory of reasoned action highlights how influencers on social media can play a pivotal role in converting online engagement into real-world tourism activity, particularly among domestic audiences. Through these theories' principles and components, the effect of social media influencers on the decision making of domestic tourists was explained.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The study was limited geographically to Nairobi and Kiambu Counties. While these are key urban centers with active social media users, they may not fully represent the broader demographic and psychographic characteristics of domestic tourists across the entire country, particularly in rural areas. Tourism behaviors, social media engagement patterns, and exposure to influencer marketing may differ significantly across counties, meaning that the results may not fully reflect national trends. Similarly, the qualitative component involved interviews with marketing and social media managers, the number

of participants was limited to 10, and they were purposively selected. Although this enabled in-depth insights from knowledgeable professionals, it may not capture the full diversity of perspectives within the broader tourism and influencer marketing sectors.

Another limitation encountered during data collection was the busy nature of the interviewees, most of whom were marketing and social media managers in tour and travel companies. Their demanding professional responsibilities and tight schedules made it difficult to secure interview appointments within the planned timeframe. Several interviewees requested rescheduling, while others were only available for very short sessions, which occasionally limited the depth of discussion. Coordinating suitable meeting times required repeated follow-ups and considerable flexibility on the part of the researcher. As a result, the qualitative data collection phase extended longer than anticipated.

Since the study collected data at a single point in time, it captured respondents' perceptions and behaviors only within that specific period. Changes in social media trends, influencer marketing strategies, and domestic tourism patterns over time were not examined, limiting the study's ability to establish causal relationships or observe long-term effects.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review chapter reviews the works of different scholars on the social media influencers and their influence on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The study looked into the theoretical framework and the empirical studies on the impact of social media influencers on tourism industry. Further, the chapter developed a conceptual framework to be used in the research.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Attribution Theory

Attribution Theory, originally introduced by Heider (1958) and later refined by Kelley (1967, 1973) and Weiner (1985), provides a valuable framework for examining how consumers interpret influencer behavior, credibility, and persuasive intent. Attribution Theory explains how individuals infer the causes of behaviors and events. Heider (1958) argued that people strive to make sense of social situations by attributing actions either to internal (dispositional) or external (situational) causes. Heider's fundamental distinction was between internal (or dispositional) attributions, where a behaviour is ascribed to the actor's personal characteristics, such as their beliefs, attitudes, or personality, and external (or situational) attributions, where the behaviour is explained by outside forces, such as monetary reward, social pressure, or contractual obligation.

Kelley's (1967) covariation model further proposed that individuals use information about consensus, distinctiveness and consistency to assess behavioral causation. If an influencer promotes a ubiquitous brand in a saturated market, consensus is high, leading to an external attribution. If they champion a unique, undiscovered brand, consensus is

low, supporting an internal attribution. Social media users are also alert to the distinctiveness of a social media influencer. An influencer known for sustainable tourism who promotes an eco-friendly lodge shows high distinctiveness, supporting an internal attribution. A celebrity influencer who promotes everything from software to snacks shows low distinctiveness, prompting an external attribution to their general role as a paid promoter. Information on consistency presents as how often an SMI has been part of a campaign or partnership with a brand. Long-term use demonstrated on social media (high consistency) can strengthen an internal attribution, suggesting genuine affinity. A one-off post for a brand never mentioned again (low consistency) suggests a transient contractual obligation, an external attribution.

Weiner (1985) later expanded the theory to include the emotional and motivational consequences of attributing outcomes to different causal dimensions. He identified three dimensions of causality: locus (internal/external), stability (whether the cause is permanent or temporary), and controllability (whether the cause is under the actor's volition). In the context of influencer marketing, a consumer's attribution process involves asking: "Is this influencer promoting this product because they truly like it (internal, stable, controllable), or simply because they are being paid to do so (external, unstable, controllable)?" The answer to this question profoundly shapes their subsequent attitudes and behaviours.

Attribution theory is concerned with how individuals interpret events and how this relates to their thinking and behavior. Attribution theory assumes that people try to determine why people do what they do. A person seeking to understand why another person did something may attribute one or more causes to that behavior. According to Heider (1958) a person can make two attributions 1) internal attribution, the inference that a person is behaving in a certain way because of something about the person, such as attitude, character or personality; 2) external attribution, the inference that a person is behaving a certain way because of something about the situation he or she is in.

The internal attribution is the influence of the behavior of the internal forces in regards to a product. In such a case, the followers consume a product as a result of the attributes associated with the social media influencer. The personality, therefore, should also have a particular set of good habits that would connect to the consumers. Similarly, there are the external attributions. These are the cases where the consumers agree to be part of the campaign for a product, service, or even when they are not able to purchase or be part of the campaign directly. A company, therefore, should be at a position of getting the best social media influencers to help in getting more potential clients to attribute their products.

A defining feature of influencers is their ability to foster parasocial relationships (PSRs)—one-sided emotional bonds in which followers feel connected and intimate with influencers (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Chung & Cho, 2017). PSRs significantly shape attribution processes. Consumers who feel emotionally close to influencers tend to make benevolent internal attributions, interpreting endorsements as genuine expressions rather than commercial persuasion (Yuan & Lou, 2020). This “attributional shielding” means that followers may overlook or reinterpret commercial motives. As a result, influencers with strong PSRs generate higher purchase intentions, brand attitudes, and trust (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). Moreover, influencers who present themselves as authentic—sharing personal struggles, behind-the-scenes content, or unpolished imagery—reduce consumers' likelihood of making external attributions. Authenticity cues lead followers to believe endorsements are rooted in personal conviction rather than financial gain, enhancing persuasion outcomes (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020).

In the context of influencer marketing, consumers continuously evaluate the motives behind product recommendations. When followers infer altruistic motives—such as an influencer wanting to help their audience—purchase intentions and brand attitudes increase (Xiao, Wang, & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). Studies show that when consumers

attribute influencer recommendations to intrinsic enjoyment or personal product experience, perceived usefulness and purchase likelihood rise (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020). This perceived authenticity is the currency of influence. Research by Schouten et al (2020) found that internal attributions lead to higher perceived authenticity, which in turn positively affects brand attitude. The consumer perceives the message as authentic advice from a trusted peer, not as a corporate advertisement.

When consumers make a clear external attribution to a sponsorship, it activates their "persuasion knowledge" (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This is the consumer's awareness of and coping strategies for persuasive attempts. Recognizing the commercial motive can lead to persuasion coping mechanisms such as skepticism, counter-arguing, and ultimately, rejection of the message. This can manifest as "influencer skepticism," where the audience becomes cynical about the influencer's motives, potentially damaging the long-term parasocial relationship (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2015). However, there are ways of mitigating external attributions. influencers can use transparency to foster internal attributions. By pairing a disclosure such as #ad with a narrative that emphasizes personal use, genuine results, or a brand story that aligns with their values, the influencer can make the internal cause for the endorsement more salient than the external one (Evans et al, 2017).

The attribution theory was developed as a way of explaining how personalities would affect how their followers decide on products. The perception of the personalities towards a product would be useful in developing a brand for the consumers to follow through. The attribution theory explains the reaction of the followers through the actions of the social media influencer. The ability of people to justify their actions affects the rate at which people would develop counteractions on the same. According to Martinko (2018), attribution theory assumes that a person can change what people think, how they act, and their opinions regarding a product, a service, or a behavior. The followers of a social media influencer have the belief that their views are the exact position about the

product, event, or a service. The consumers, therefore, attribute the characteristics and the traits of the personality to the thing that they are advertising.

Attribution Theory provides a comprehensive and nuanced way to understand how consumers interpret influencer behavior and how these interpretations shape consumer attitudes, trust, and purchase intentions. As social media continues to blur the boundaries between commercial promotion and personal expression, attributional processes become increasingly central to consumer psychology. By examining how individuals infer motives, assess credibility, and assign responsibility, this theory highlights the complex psychological mechanisms behind influencer persuasion and effective marketing practice.

2.2.2 Social Comparison Theory

Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory posits that people have an innate drive to assess themselves through comparison with others when objective means are unavailable. These comparisons can be upward, toward people perceived as better off—or downward—toward those perceived as worse off. Upward comparison may inspire self-improvement or provoke envy and dissatisfaction, while downward comparison often yields self-enhancement and relief.

Upward comparison involves comparing oneself to someone perceived as superior, which can be inspirational but also risks feelings of inadequacy and diminished self-worth. Downward comparison, looking at those perceived as worse off, can enhance self-esteem but may also foster contempt or a false sense of security (Festinger, 1954). Later research expanded these concepts, introducing the distinction between contrast (focusing on differences that make one feel inferior) and assimilation (focusing on similarities to feel connected to the superior other) (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). Furthermore, Social Comparison Theory differentiates between comparisons of ability (e.g., who is more successful?) and opinions (e.g., are my views correct?). The theory's

core insight is that these comparisons are not passive observations but active processes that shape an individual's self-concept and emotional state.

When Leon Festinger proposed Social Comparison Theory (SCT), positing that individuals have an innate drive to evaluate their own opinions and abilities by comparing themselves to others, this fundamental human tendency, was confined to immediate peer groups and mass media. But it has been radically amplified and reconfigured in the digital age. Social media environments, with their highly curated and quantifiable self-presentations, provide fertile ground for both types of comparison, but especially for upward and contrastive comparisons.

The rise of the social media influencer, a persona built on curated personal branding and perceived authenticity, has created a new, pervasive, and highly potent class of comparison targets. By fostering environments of constant, upward, and often unrealistic social comparison, social media influencers significantly impact the self-esteem, body image, and psychological well-being of their audiences, illustrating the enduring and intensified relevance of Festinger's theory in contemporary digital culture. Social media influencers function as idealized figures who blend relatability with aspirational lifestyles. Followers often develop parasocial relationships with influencers, perceiving them as quasi-friends or role models. These relationships intensify the impact of comparisons because influencers feel personally meaningful, even though the interactions are not reciprocal.

Research shows that when people view influencer content, they frequently engage in upward social comparison. A study by R  ther et al, (2023) demonstrated that exposure to positivity-biased images of female SMIs triggered upward comparisons, which in turn mediated a decrease in state self-esteem. Interestingly, the same study found that such exposure also had a direct positive effect on other dimensions of self-esteem, suggesting a complex interplay of contrastive, assimilative, and affective processes.

Moreover, social media influencer content often embodies culturally ideal standards—beauty, success, wellness, consumption—which followers use as benchmarks. This creates a comparison environment unlike traditional in-person social comparison: it is constant, visible, curated, and quantifiable through likes, comments, follower counts. Social media influencers represent the ultimate evolution of the reference group. They are not distant celebrities but "aspirational peers," making upward comparison more potent and relatable (Schouten et al., 2020). Their power lies in the "authenticity paradox"—they present highly curated lives as attainable reality, seamlessly integrating products into narratives of personal success, beauty, and wellness.

Beyond self-perception, comparisons with influencers also drive behavioral outcomes, particularly in consumption choices. Dinh and Lee (2024) studied how exposure to influencers triggers social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), and materialism, which in turn fuel conspicuous consumption. Their model shows that social comparison mediates the relationship between influencer exposure and consumer behavior, highlighting how comparison-conjured emotions can encourage spending. As De Veirman et al. (2017) argue, influencers' perceived authenticity and parasocial relationships with their followers lead to higher brand engagement and purchase intention than traditional celebrity endorsements. The consumer is not just buying a product; they are buying a piece of the idealized identity the influencer represents.

Rahman (2022) theorized that different types of influencers (mega, macro, micro, mini) evoke varying degrees of mimicry in their audiences. This model underscores that follower behavior is not simply reactive: it depends on the influencer's perceived expertise, reach, and authenticity, and the follower's predisposition to compare and imitate. These behavioral effects illustrate a cyclical feedback loop: influencer content → social comparison → emotional response → consumption → reinforcement of influencer status.

Social Comparison Theory provides an essential lens for understanding the complex, often emotional, drivers of modern consumer behavior. It moves analysis beyond price and utility into the realms of identity, status, and belonging. In the digital marketplace, where social media influencers act as perpetual comparison targets, the desire to consume is systematically stoked by the innate human drive to evaluate oneself against others. This theory helps to understand the psychological and behavioral consequences of social media influencers.

2.2.3 Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory originates from early communication and persuasion research, particularly Hovland and Weiss's (1951) foundational work demonstrating that credible sources significantly increase persuasive impact. The theory generally encompasses three principal dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Credibility is not an inherent trait of the source but a perception held by the receiver. Classical research, rooted in the works of Hovland et al, (1953), established that a communicator's persuasiveness is largely determined by their perceived expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise refers to the degree to which the communicator is perceived as a valid source of accurate assertions, often signaled by credentials, experience, or knowledge. Trustworthiness is the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate without deception, reflecting their character and honesty. McCroskey and Teven (1999) later added a third dimension: goodwill, or perceived caring, which assesses the communicator's genuine concern for the audience's welfare.

These constructs shape message acceptance: the more credible a source appears, the more likely the audience is to accept the message as valid and align their behaviors accordingly. In digital environments—where information abundance and misinformation proliferate—credibility signals play an even more critical role. Consumers rely on

heuristics such as likes, comments, follower counts, and social endorsements to infer credibility quickly (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013).

Social media influencers do not typically rely on traditional credentials. Instead, they build credibility through a carefully curated performance that mimics the dimensions of the classical model, with a heavy emphasis on what is perceived as "authenticity." Influencers who demonstrate specialized knowledge, such as beauty experts, fitness coaches or travel bloggers, are typically judged as more knowledgeable, enhancing their persuasive effectiveness (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Likewise, trustworthiness is crucial: consumers are more receptive to influencers who are transparent about sponsorships and maintain authenticity. Research shows that perceived authenticity increases trust and reduces skepticism toward sponsored content (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2018).

Attractiveness in the digital age extends beyond physical beauty to include lifestyle appeal, relatability, and perceived similarity. Influencers who present aspirational yet attainable lifestyles often evoke stronger consumer identification and emotional connection (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This perceived similarity strengthens the credibility of the influencer and heightens persuasive impact.

Social media influencers (SMIs) are often perceived as more relatable and accessible than traditional celebrities, which enhances their persuasive impact (Abidin, 2016). By applying Source Credibility Theory to SMIs, researchers have found that influencer credibility significantly predicts consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. The link between influencer credibility and consumer decision making is well-established across marketing and communication research. Influencer endorsements influence the entire decision-making process, from problem recognition and information search to evaluation of alternatives and post-purchase behavior.

Research shows that influencer credibility significantly predicts positive attitudes toward endorsed brands and increases purchase intentions (Jin & Phua, 2014). When influencers

are perceived as credible, consumers evaluate brand messages as more trustworthy and relevant, thus reducing uncertainty and perceived risk. Influencers also affect long-term consumer behavior. Consistent exposure to credible influencers can foster brand loyalty, habitual purchasing, and ongoing engagement. When influencers' personal brands align with the products they endorse, consumers perceive endorsements as more authentic and trustworthy (Breves et al., 2019).

Source Credibility Theory provides an essential framework for deconstructing the power and appeal of the social media influencer. In the digital arena, credibility is no longer solely bestowed by institutions but is performatively built through strategies that emphasize authenticity, niche expertise and parasocial goodwill. This constructed credibility is the primary asset that allows influencers to effectively persuade millions, driving consumer markets and shaping public discourse.

2.2.4 Theory of Reasoned Action

Ajzen and Fishbein formulated in 1980 the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) after trying to estimate the discrepancy between attitude and behavior. According to TRA, behavior is primarily determined by behavioral intention, which in turn is shaped by two key constructs: attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms. The theory suggests that a person's behavior is determined by his/her intention to perform the behavior and that this intention is, in turn, a function of his/her attitude toward the behavior and his/her subjective norm. The best predictor of behavior is intention because it can predict, explain or influence the actual use (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2013). Intention is the cognitive representation of a person's readiness to perform a given behavior, and it is considered to be the immediate antecedent of behavior.

This intention is determined by two things: their attitude toward the specific behavior and their subjective norms (Fishbein, 2008). If a follower has a positive or negative attitude towards a social media influencer, they may or may not perform the purchase

function encouraged by the SMI on their posts. They may not be willing to travel to a destination suggested by the SMI because of the attitude they have towards the SMI.

In addition to measuring attitudes toward the behavior, we also need to measure people's subjective norms – their beliefs about how people they care about will view the behavior in question. To predict someone's intentions, knowing these beliefs can be as important as knowing the person's attitudes. For example, an individual may not like travelling to a local tourist destination, but they value the opinion of their friends or idols when it comes to travel. This individual will likely take that opinion into consideration when planning to travel proving that influencer marketing can influence the subjective norm of individuals. Therefore, a consumer's attitude toward a behavior (in this case purchase or non-purchase of a holiday) together with the consumer's perception of the behavior affects the consumer's decision to undertake the behavior.

TRA has been widely applied to explain decision-making related to product purchases, brand choices, online shopping and digital media engagement. Consumers form intentions to purchase when they evaluate a product positively (attitude) and believe significant others expect or support the purchase (subjective norms). Research confirms that attitudes toward branded content, perceived product usefulness, and social pressures from peers or online communities significantly shape consumer intentions (Hansen, Jensen, & Solgaard, 2004; Speck & Elliott, 2020). TRA thus offers a systematic lens for understanding how psychological evaluations and social influences jointly shape consumer purchasing decisions.

The rise of social media influencers (SMIs) introduces a new category of social actors who shape consumer attitudes and subjective norms. Influencers act as opinion leaders, creating content that frames how audiences evaluate products, lifestyles, and consumption practices. Followers often view influencers as credible, relatable, and

aspirational figures, giving their recommendations significant persuasive weight (Lou & Yuan, 2019). As a result, influencer content affects both TRA constructs.

Attitude formation is influenced when followers perceive an influencer's endorsement as trustworthy, authentic, or aligned with their own values. Positive attitudes toward the influencer often transfer to the featured product, a process supported by the source credibility and parasocial relationship literature (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). Because attitudes are a core pathway in TRA, influencer-driven brand attitudes can strongly reinforce purchase intentions.

Subjective norms are also shaped by influencers, who function as salient social referents within digital communities. TRA posits that subjective norms emerge when individuals perceive social pressure from important others; in digital environments, influencers constitute these "important others" by modeling desirable consumption behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Chetoui, Benlafqih, & Lebdaoui, 2020). Influencers cultivate online communities where sharing, liking, and discussing endorsed products create perceived social expectations about consumption. This makes influencer content a powerful determinant of subjective norms.

The theory is used in understanding what factors motivate consumer behavior. TRA was developed to explain influences on behaviors that involve conscious decision making. It explains behavior that is straightforward and voluntary for the consumer (Sheppard et al. 1988; Armitage & Conner 2001). The Theory of Reasoned Action has been used in this study to examine the effect of social media influencers on the decision making of domestic tourists as attitudes and subjective norms have been strongly associated with intention to perform behavior.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Consumers are influenced by many factors before making a purchase decision. These factors maybe internal or external. Social media and its content forms a big part of the external influences that affect consumer decision making and behavior. The type of content posted on social networking sites, who posts it and the manner in which the message is relayed have an effect on whether the consumer buys a product or service or does not buy the product or service.

If a message or image about a holiday destination is posted by a social media influencer who an audience member is familiar with and likes, the probability of the audience member responding to the message is high. If the audience trusts the source of the message on social media, they will also respond positively in purchasing a product or service. On the other hand, the persuasive techniques used to convey messages also has an effect on the buying behavior of many consumers. Messages that use humour or the bandwagon techniques receive a higher response from consumers than those who use jargon or formal language for example.

This conceptual framework proposes that source credibility, source attractiveness, source power, and source metrics directly influence consumer decision-making. Consumers are more likely to make favorable purchase decisions when information originates from sources perceived as credible, attractive, powerful, and influential. The framework further proposes that persuasive techniques—specifically liking, reciprocity, and social validation—moderate these relationships by enhancing or diminishing the effectiveness of source characteristics. The framework is grounded in Source Credibility Theory, Source Comparison Theory, and Theory of Reasoned Action, which collectively explain how source-related attributes and persuasive mechanisms shape consumer purchasing behavior.

This study had six variables. Source credibility, source attractiveness, source power and source metrics were the independent variables. Persuasive techniques were the moderating variables and the consumer decision making was the dependent variable. Persuasive techniques strengthen or weaken the relationship between source characteristics and consumer decision-making. The dependent variable represents the outcome influenced by the source-related factors and persuasive techniques. The relationships between these variables is demonstrated in the conceptual framework.

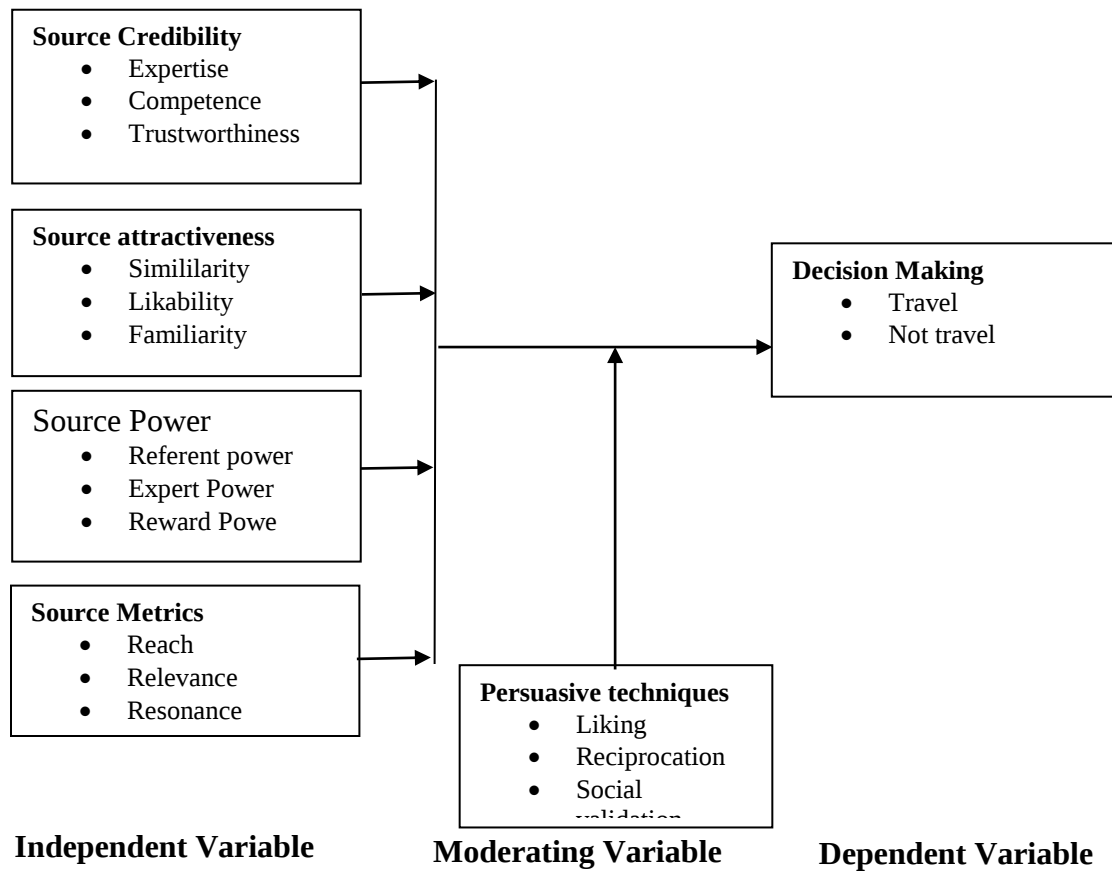


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.4 Review of Variables

Variables are central components of research because they represent the concepts that are measured and examined to establish relationships within a study. According to Leavy (2017), a variable is a characteristic, attribute, or phenomenon that can vary across individuals, groups, situations, or over time. The identification and operationalization of variables enable researchers to empirically investigate theoretical relationships and test research assumptions. This study sought to investigate the relationship between the dependent variable (Consumer decision making) and the independent variables (source credibility, attractiveness, power and metrics). It also observed the persuasive techniques which act as the moderating variable.

2.4.1 Source Credibility

Source credibility has long been recognized as a central determinant of persuasive effectiveness and information evaluation. Classic persuasion research conducted at Yale University identified the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of a source as key factors influencing message acceptance (Hovland et al., 1953). This framework built on Aristotle's concept of *ethos*, which emphasized a communicator's character, intelligence, and goodwill as the foundation of credible persuasion (Aristotle, trans. 2007). Subsequent work extended the definition of credibility, with Ohanian (1990) proposing a three-factor model—expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness—particularly influential in advertising and celebrity endorsement research. Across these traditions, source credibility is consistently conceptualized as a judgment that audiences make based on both the perceived competence and perceived integrity of the communicator.

Many scholars have offered definitions of source credibility. Pop et al., (2022) define it as “judgments made by a perceiver (e.g., a message recipient) concerning the believability of a communicator.” Credibility is the extent to which the receiver of a

message perceives a source as having the relevant knowledge, skill or experience and trust the source to offer unbiased and objective information (González-Rodríguez et al, 2022). According to González-Rodríguez et al. (2022) source credibility refers to the honesty and believability of a source. Scales such as ‘honest/dishonest, trustworthy/untrustworthy, open-minded/closed-minded, just/unjust, fair/unfair, and unselfish/selfish’ are used to describe the trustworthiness of a source. If the receiver of a message perceives the source as trustworthy with no selfish interests, they are more inclined to believe the source. For a communicator to be seen as credible, they need to have at least one of these qualities (Ayeh, 2015).

There are two dimensions of source credibility; expertise and trustworthiness. According to Berhanu & Raj (2020) expertise is the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions.’ Expertise is commonly defined as the extent to which a source is perceived to possess relevant knowledge or competence. Research grounded in dual-process theories indicates that expertise can function as a heuristic cue, especially when individuals have limited motivation or capacity to process information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Under such conditions, expert sources increase message acceptance even when the arguments are weak. Trustworthiness, in contrast, reflects the degree to which a source is seen as honest and unbiased. In contexts such as political communication and risk messaging, trustworthiness frequently outweighs expertise because audiences may discount even highly expert information if they suspect ulterior motives (Siegrist & Cvetkovich, 2000).

In an attempt to measure source credibility, researchers have developed different measurement scales. Choi and Stvilia (2015) proposed the measurement of source credibility in terms of trustworthiness, competence (professionalism), dynamism, and objectivity. Others came up with a scale expertise and trustworthiness to measure perceived corporate credibility (Berhanu & Raj, 2020).

Source credibility is likely to influence the consumer decision making. If a communicator or in this case a social media influencer is seen as knowledgeable and trustworthy, they are more convincing than one who has less knowledge and is less trustworthy (Berhanu & Raj, 2020). The message source greatly determines if people accept information and ideas presented to them (Filieri, Alguezaui, & McLeay, 2015). The rise of digital media has shifted how credibility is assessed, as users navigate information-rich environments that heighten reliance on heuristic cues. Online, individuals often evaluate source credibility based on platform reputation, interface design, or social signals such as likes and shares (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). User-generated content, including online reviews and social media posts, introduces new credibility markers such as account verification, posting history, and linguistic clarity (Liu & Park, 2015).

2.4.2 Source Attractiveness

Another source characteristic that influencer's consumer decision making is source attractiveness. Endorsers who are perceived to be attractive by a message recipient lead to a purchase in the consumer decision making process (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2021). Source attractiveness refers to the perceived appeal of a message source based on characteristics such as physical appearance, likability, similarity, and familiarity (McGuire, 1985; Belch & Belch, 2020). Source attractiveness encompasses other characteristics such as personality and athletic ability (Hugh Wilkie et al, 2022).

Within marketing and advertising research, attractiveness has been repeatedly shown to enhance the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers. Ohanian's (1990) influential three-component model of source credibility identifies attractiveness as a critical factor driving endorsement success. Attractive endorsers can increase consumers' attention, positive affect, and brand evaluations, particularly for products related to beauty, fashion, or personal enhancement (Kahle & Homer, 1985). The attractiveness-product

match-up hypothesis further suggests that the persuasive impact of attractiveness depends on congruence between the source and the product; endorsers who visually or symbolically “fit” the product generate stronger attitudes and purchase intentions (Kamins, 1990). This research highlights that attractiveness is not universally effective but contextually moderated.

The role of attractiveness extends beyond literal physical beauty. Scholars argue that source attractiveness often encompasses likability, similarity, and familiarity, all of which contribute to a communicator’s interpersonal appeal. Social psychology research shows that perceived similarity increases source attractiveness and facilitates persuasion by fostering identification and reducing psychological distance between communicator and audience (Basil, 1996). Celebrity endorsers, influencers, and even ordinary individuals in peer-generated content benefit from attractiveness cues that signal warmth, relatability, or lifestyle desirability (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). These findings suggest that attractiveness operates through both aesthetic appeal and socio-emotional connection.

In the context of travel marketing, the attractiveness of a source—be it a celebrity, social media influencer or an ordinary user—can significantly influence a potential tourist’s decision-making process. If a consumer finds the source of the message attractive, in this case, a social media influencer, they are more likely to make a purchase decision during the consumer decision making process. Attractive and relatable social media influencers who share travel experiences can create parasocial relationships with followers, thereby increasing destination appeal (Marques et al., 2021). Photos and reviews from similar travelers on platforms like TripAdvisor or Instagram are trusted more than traditional advertising due to perceived authenticity and similarity (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012).

According to Lim et al. (2017), the people who stand out and share content that is likable by a majority to the level when they can shape the opinion of their followers are referred to as the social media influencers. A personality should develop a considerable level of relationship with their followers on the social media platforms such that the audience looks forward to getting information from them. Glucksman (2017) and Okonkwo and Namkoisse (2023) agree that social media influencers would only be critical in an advertisement when they have a relationship with the target audience and, as such, would create an opportunity for the brands to get an association with the consumers.

In digital media environments, the importance of attractiveness has grown with the rise of influencer culture, visual-centric platforms, and parasocial interactions. Online, visual cues such as profile photos, filters, and curated self-presentation significantly shape perceived attractiveness and, by extension, message credibility and persuasive impact (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Research on social media influencers shows that perceived attractiveness increases followers' trust, engagement, and intentions to follow recommendations, mediated by parasocial relationships and perceived authenticity (Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, scholars note potential downsides, including skepticism toward overly polished or "too perfect" influencers, which can decrease perceived authenticity and reduce persuasive power. Thus, in digital contexts attractiveness interacts with authenticity, transparency, and self-presentation norms.

2.4.2 Source Power

Source power has long been examined as a persuasive cue in communication and social influence research, often conceptualized alongside source credibility and attractiveness as a component of message effectiveness. Early theoretical foundations can be traced to French and Raven's (1959) taxonomy of social power identified several bases of influence—reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert power—that shape the extent to which a source can alter another's attitudes or behaviors. According to this

framework, power arises not only from a source's actual control over outcomes but also from an audience's perception that the source possesses authority, status, or the ability to impose rewards and punishments. These power bases laid the groundwork for subsequent communication research examining how authority or status can enhance compliance, message acceptance, or behavioral conformity (French & Raven, 1959). More recently, the framework has been extended to digital and social media contexts, where influencers, content creators, and online opinion leaders exercise referent and expert power to shape consumer attitudes, health behaviors, and political opinions (Vrontis et al., 2023). Contemporary studies suggest that audiences are more likely to trust and adopt recommendations from communicators perceived as authentic, knowledgeable, and credible, even in the absence of formal authority, demonstrating the continued relevance of French and Raven's taxonomy in understanding influence within digital communication environments (Vrontis et al., 2023)

The social power of a source is an important factor in decision making (Winterlin, 2020). Uth et al. (2021) argue that a source has power when he or she can offer rewards and administer punishments to a receiver. In the social media setting, influencers are able to offer discounts to their followers as a reward and this demonstrates their power. Social media influencers possess power which is the ability to influence the behavior of others (Pop et al., 2022). In the influence process, a source is seen as possessing power through a process known as compliance (Sari et al., 2021). A social media follower will accept persuasive messages from a social media influencer if they believe they will attain favour with the influencer.

In digital and mediated communication, perceptions of source power have taken on new forms. Online influencers, content creators, and microcelebrities frequently possess referent power, derived from admiration, identification, and parasocial relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Their influence stems less from formal authority and more from perceived social status, authenticity, and expertise within online communities.

Contemporary research has shown that influencers' persuasive power is largely driven by their ability to cultivate trust, perceived expertise, and emotional connections with audiences, thereby extending French and Raven's concept of referent and expert power into digital environments (Vrontis et al., 2023; Lou & Yuan, 2019). At the same time, platform-level cues, such as verification badges, follower counts, engagement metrics, and institutional affiliations function as signals of symbolic power that shape users' credibility assessments and behavioral intentions. Recent studies indicate that these digital cues influence how audiences infer legitimacy, authority, and persuasive strength, even in the absence of formal expertise (Ki et al., 2023; Vrontis et al., 2023). Consequently, digital environments have expanded the meaning of source power beyond traditional hierarchical authority to encompass social capital, network visibility, algorithmic prominence, and perceived authenticity. Raven (2017) identifies five types of power; expert power, reward power, legitimate power, referent power and coercive power. This research will focus on three types of power; referent, expert and reward power. Expert power comes from what one knows based on their experiences, skills or talents. Expert power is the knowledge the audience perceives the source as possessing regarding a certain topic or issue (Tedeschi & Bonoma, 2017). Referent power is based on the affiliations we make and the groups/organizations we belong to. Winterlin (2020) argues that referent power is based on the desire of audiences to identify and associate with the opinion leader or the source of a message. Social media influencers have the ability to elicit feelings of acceptance and approval from their audience members (Bedford, 2019). The followers of social media influencers look up to them and emulate their behaviour (Berhanu & Raj, 2020).

Reward power is defined as a person's ability to influence others' behavior by providing valued outcomes or incentives (Lunenburg, 2012). It is based on a leader's capacity to offer tangible, social, or psychological rewards that encourage compliance and desired behaviors. Similarly, reward power arises from an individual's ability to control or mediate rewards that others value (Faiz, 2013). Beyond organizational settings, reward

power has been widely applied in communication, marketing, and digital environments, where incentives such as discounts, exclusive content, loyalty benefits, social recognition, or platform-based rewards are used to influence attitudes and behaviors (Vrontis et al., 2023). More broadly, power shapes compliance, message legitimacy, and perceived source credibility across interpersonal, organizational, marketing, and mediated communication contexts (French & Raven, 1959). Contemporary research suggests that while powerful sources can effectively generate short-term behavioral change, the long-term effectiveness of persuasion depends on the nature of the power being exercised. Expert, referent, and legitimate power are generally associated with greater trust, internalization, and sustained attitude change than coercive or purely reward-based influence, particularly in digital communication where authenticity and perceived expertise are critical determinants of persuasive success (Vrontis et al., 2023; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

2.4.5 Source Metrics

Source metrics generally refer to measurable indicators that reflect the prominence, activity, or perceived impact of a communicator or content originator. These metrics include quantitative measures such as follower counts, engagement rates (likes, shares, comments), publication volume, citation counts, and other indicators of visibility and influence (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In marketing and influencer research, source metrics play a critical role in determining perceived authority and persuasive potential. High follower counts and engagement metrics are often interpreted as indicators of social proof, signaling popularity, legitimacy, and potential influence over audiences (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). These metrics can affect both consumer perception and advertiser decisions, as marketers increasingly rely on data-driven assessments to identify credible or impactful endorsers. Engagement metrics are particularly salient because they reflect active audience responses rather than passive exposure, which enhances the perceived effectiveness of the source (Lou & Yuan,

2019). Importantly, research has shown that while raw follower numbers can inflate perceived influence, engagement quality and audience relevance are often stronger predictors of persuasion and conversion outcomes.

Social media influencers (SMIs) are seen as a new type of independent third party endorser who have the ability to shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2021). Through their research, Freberg et al (2010) found that SMIs were seen as verbal, smart, ambitious, productive, and poised. Social media influencers are judged and chosen to promote businesses only if they possess certain characteristics. Some of those characteristics include good credibility, high activity, distinct brands, large followings, and great exposure (Ioanid, Militaru, & Mihai, 2015). Other characteristics that are valued include a high number of followers, a high level of engagement and promising business value (Li, 2018). More recent studies emphasize that while follower count remains important, authenticity, perceived expertise, and strong parasocial relationships are stronger predictors of influencer effectiveness and consumer trust than popularity alone (Vrontis et al., 2023; Ki et al., 2023). These findings suggest that contemporary influencer effectiveness depends not only on visibility but also on the ability to establish credible, trustworthy, and enduring relationships with audiences.

Contemporary research has expanded Backaler's classification by distinguishing additional influencer tiers based on follower count and engagement, including nano-influencers (typically fewer than 10,000 followers), micro-influencers (approximately 10,000–100,000 followers), macro-influencers (100,000–1 million followers), and mega-influencers (more than 1 million followers) (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Vrontis et al., 2023). While macro- and mega-influencers provide greater visibility and reach, recent studies consistently show that nano- and micro-influencers often generate stronger engagement, higher perceived authenticity, and greater consumer trust because they cultivate closer, more personal relationships with their audiences (Ki et al., 2023;

Vrontis et al., 2023). These findings suggest that influencer effectiveness is determined not only by audience size but also by perceived credibility, expertise, authenticity, and the strength of parasocial relationships with followers.), but they are very passionate about a specific topic, brand, or product category.

The emergence of social media influencers has significantly transformed tourism marketing by providing destinations and tourism businesses with effective channels for reaching targeted audiences. In Kenya, social media influencers have become increasingly important in promoting tourist destinations, cultural experiences, wildlife attractions, and hospitality services through visually engaging and interactive content. Sinn and Syn (2014) argue that identifying and understanding the target market is a fundamental consideration in developing effective marketing campaigns. Accordingly, social media influencers enhance tourism promotion by creating content that resonates with specific audience segments based on their interests, demographics, and travel preferences. The selection of an influencer should therefore align with the characteristics, values, and social context of the intended audience to maximize campaign effectiveness. Korotina and Jargalsaikhan (2016) further contend that organizations should consider the social media platform on which an influencer has the greatest reach and engagement when selecting influencers to promote tourism products and services. Beyond audience size, however, contemporary research suggests that influencer effectiveness is increasingly determined by audience engagement, perceived authenticity, credibility, and the quality of the relationship established with followers rather than by follower count alone (Vrontis et al., 2023; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Consequently, successful tourism marketing campaigns increasingly prioritize influencers whose content is perceived as trustworthy, relatable, and capable of inspiring travel intentions and destination choices through authentic storytelling and meaningful audience interactions.

The role of source metrics is critical in digital environments. Users frequently rely on cues such as the number of shares, likes, or comments to infer source authority or reliability, particularly when encountering unfamiliar content (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). These heuristic indicators can streamline decision-making in environments overloaded with information, serving as peripheral cues in dual-process models of persuasion, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However, contemporary research highlights the limitations of relying solely on quantitative metrics, as inflated follower counts, fake engagement, automated accounts, and purchased interactions can distort perceptions of actual influence and credibility (Taddeo & Floridi, 2018; Vrontis et al., 2023). Therefore, effective evaluation of digital sources requires consideration of both quantitative indicators, such as reach and engagement, and qualitative dimensions, including expertise, authenticity, content quality, and the strength of audience relationships.

Research on source metrics emphasizes the interaction between metric visibility and perceived credibility. Studies in scientometrics demonstrate that sources with higher citation counts are more likely to be perceived as authoritative, shaping attention, trust, and subsequent dissemination of ideas (Bornmann & Daniel, 2008). In the social media context, visibility-enhancing metrics such as verified status, follower endorsements, and algorithmic recommendations similarly act as signals of source legitimacy, guiding user engagement and trust (Utz, 2010). Contemporary research on influencer marketing further demonstrates that audiences frequently use these platform-based cues as shortcuts for assessing influencer credibility, expertise, and popularity, particularly when making judgments under conditions of information overload (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Vrontis et al., 2023). However, metric-based evaluations are not independent determinants of influence; rather, they interact with relational factors such as authenticity, parasocial connections, perceived expertise, and community trust. Consequently, source metrics should be understood as socially constructed signals whose persuasive effects depend on the broader communication context, platform

architecture, and the quality of relationships between influencers and their audiences (Ki et al., 2023). These findings suggest that metrics do not function in isolation but interact with contextual, relational, and platform-specific factors to influence perceptions of credibility and persuasive effectiveness.

2.4.6 Persuasive Techniques

Zakhaova (2020) defines persuasion ‘as a symbolic process in which communicators try to convince other people to change their attitudes or behavior regarding an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice’. Persuasion is the attempt by an individual to change the behavior of others without coercion or deception (Chung & Han, 2017). The tourism industry persuades potential customers a mix of marketing communication strategies, such as advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing, sponsorship and public relations (Francesconi, 2007; McCartney, Butler, & Bennett, 2008). The use of social media influencers to persuade potential tourists is now part of the tourism communication mix (Alic, Pestek and Sandinlija, 2017). Contemporary research highlights that influencers persuade potential tourists through perceived authenticity, credibility, expertise, and emotional connections with followers, allowing destinations and tourism organizations to communicate experiences in more personalized and engaging ways (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Vrontis et al., 2023). Furthermore, recent studies indicate that influencer-generated content can shape destination image, travel motivation, and tourists’ behavioral intentions because audiences often perceive influencers as more relatable and trustworthy than traditional advertising sources (Jin et al., 2019; Ki et al., 2023). Thus, contemporary tourism persuasion extends beyond one-way promotional communication toward interactive, relationship-based influence processes occurring within digital communities.

Huang et al. (2018) identifies six principles that explain one person’s influence over another’s attitudes and behaviour. These principles are: liking, reciprocation,

consistency, scarcity, social validation, and authority. This study will focus on three persuasive techniques namely; liking, reciprocation and social validation. Social media influencers who are liked by their followers have a high level of influence on them and their behavior (Kapoor, Balaji, Jiang, & Jebarajakirthy, 2022). The use of images and videos further enhances the liking effect because visual destination content allows audiences to mentally experience places, develop expectations, and form emotional associations with tourism destinations. Recent studies demonstrate that influencer credibility and destination-related content significantly affect destination brand trust and tourists' intention to visit (Najar et al., 2024)

Reciprocation occurs when individuals feel motivated to respond to benefits or value received from others. In social media environments, influencers create reciprocal relationships by providing followers with useful travel information, recommendations, exclusive offers, discounts, giveaways, and personalized content. These exchanges can increase follower engagement and strengthen trust, which subsequently enhances the likelihood of accepting tourism recommendations (Meng et al., 2024). Therefore, tourism influencers who combine destination promotion with perceived value creation may increase followers' willingness to consider and adopt travel suggestions.

Social validation is based on the tendency of individuals to rely on others' behaviors and opinions when making decisions, particularly in situations involving uncertainty. Travel decisions are often influenced by social proof because potential tourists use influencer experiences, audience reactions, comments, and engagement indicators as signals of destination attractiveness and credibility. Recent evidence shows that parasocial relationships between tourism influencers and followers can increase information adoption, word-of-mouth intentions, and destination visit intentions by reducing uncertainty and strengthening trust (Meng et al., 2024; Dinc, 2024). Consequently, social media influencers who share authentic travel experiences and demonstrate

credible engagement with followers can influence tourists' destination perceptions and behavioral intentions through liking, reciprocation, and social validation..

2.4.7 Consumer Decision Making

Tourism decision making is a dynamic, complex and unstructured process (Wang & Pizam 2011). Tourists have to make choices on the type of accommodation they prefer, length of their stay or preferred location for their stay (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2016). The decisions to be made by a traveler can change at any time affecting the number of days, the site, and activities to be done among others. Social media can have an influence at any stage of the consumer decision making process. Before one chooses to travel, they have to plan and go through the different stages of the decision making process. One can see a post by a social media influencer about a holiday destination that triggers their need to travel. Social media also offers a great repository of information when a consumer is searching for information before making a purchase. Social media are a powerful tool in travel searches and decision-making (Di Pietro et al., 2012) that leads to purchase or non-purchase of holidays.

During the information-search stage, social media platforms provide travelers with extensive user-generated content, reviews, images, videos, and influencer recommendations that assist in evaluating potential destinations. Recent studies indicate that social media influencers increasingly shape tourism decision-making by providing credible, experiential, and relatable destination information that reduces uncertainty and enhances travel confidence (Najar et al., 2024; Meng et al., 2024). Furthermore, influencer-generated content can affect destination image formation, perceived authenticity, and travel intentions by allowing potential tourists to observe others' experiences and socially validate their choices (Dinc, 2024). Thus, social media has evolved from being merely an information source into an interactive persuasion

environment where influencer credibility, engagement, and electronic word-of-mouth contribute significantly to tourism purchase decisions.

Solomon et al. (2010) define consumer behaviour as “the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires.” Similarly, Fotis (2015) conceptualizes consumer behaviour as the physical and mental activities individuals undertake when they search, evaluate, obtain, consume, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, and experiences within both physical and virtual environments. These definitions highlight that consumer behaviour extends beyond the act of purchasing to include psychological, social, and contextual processes that influence decision-making.

In contemporary digital environments, consumer behaviour has become increasingly shaped by online interactions, social networks, and user-generated content. Social media platforms have transformed consumers from passive recipients of marketing messages into active participants who seek information, share experiences, and co-create brand meanings. Recent studies indicate that digital content, online reviews, influencer recommendations, and electronic word-of-mouth significantly influence consumer perceptions, trust, and purchase intentions, particularly within experience-based industries such as tourism (Najar et al., 2024; Meng et al., 2024). In tourism contexts, consumer behaviour involves not only destination selection and travel purchasing decisions but also the formation of expectations, emotional attachments, and post-travel evaluations influenced by digital experiences and social interactions. Consequently, contemporary consumer behaviour research increasingly considers the role of social media influencers, online communities, and digital credibility signals in shaping how consumers discover, evaluate, and choose tourism experiences.

Kotler & Keller (2016) came up with a model that shows the process a consumer goes through as they are making a purchase decision. The process is depicted in the figure below.

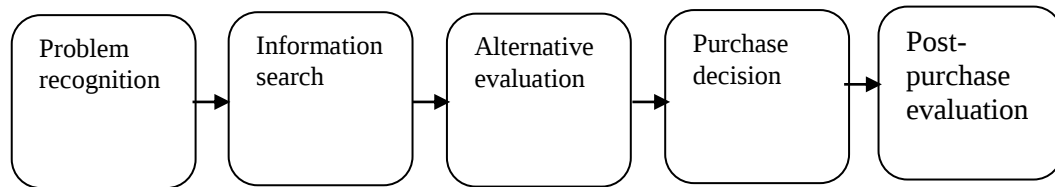


Figure 2.2 Five-Stage Model of the Consumer Buying Process

(Kotler & Keller, 2016)

First a consumer recognizes a problem they may have which occurs when the consumer perceives a need and becomes motivated to solve the problem. This initiates the decision-making process.

The second stage in the consumer decision-making process is information search. Once a person has identified a problem or need that can be satisfied by the purchase of a product or service, they begin to search for information needed to make a purchase decision. Social media are mainly used at this stage in the travel decision making process (Rahman & Pial, 2019). Travelers are relying more everyday on social media to search for information on travel destinations and this affects their decision making (Rezdy 2017; Xiang & Gretzel 2010).

The initial search effort often consists of retrieving knowledge in memory from previous purchases or past experiences. This information retrieval is referred to as internal search (Chung & Han, 2017). If this does not yield any information stored in memory, the consumer then seeks external sources of information which include: Personal sources, such as friends, relatives, or co-workers; Marketer-controlled (commercial) sources, such as information from advertising, salespeople, or point-of-purchase displays and the Internet; Public sources, including articles in magazines or newspapers and reports on

TV; Personal experience, such as actually handling, examining, or testing the product (Berhanu & Raj, 2020). Studies suggest that travelers consider information from friends and family more useful than any other source while planning a trip and choosing a destination (Huang et al., 2018).

After acquiring information during the information search stage of the decision process, the consumer moves to alternative evaluation. In this stage, the consumer compares the various brands or products and services he or she has identified as being capable of solving the consumption problem and satisfying the needs or motives that initiated the decision process. The various brands identified as purchase options to be considered during the alternative evaluation process are referred to as the consumer's evoked set. The evoked set is generally only a subset of all the brands of which the consumer is aware. The consumer reduces the number of brands to be reviewed during the alternative evaluation stage to a manageable level. The exact size of the evoked set varies from one consumer to another and depends on such factors as the importance of the purchase and the amount of time and energy the consumer wants to spend comparing alternatives.

At some point in the buying process, the consumer must stop searching for and evaluating information about alternative brands and make a purchase decision. As an outcome of the alternative evaluation stage, the consumer may develop a purchase intention or predisposition to buy a certain brand. Purchase intentions are generally based on a matching of purchase motives with attributes or characteristics of brands under consideration.

The consumer decision making process does not end with the purchase. After using the product or service, the consumer compares the level of performance with expectations and is either satisfied or dissatisfied. Positive performance means the brand is retained in the evoked set and increases the likelihood it will be purchased again. Unfavorable outcomes may lead the consumer to form negative attitudes toward the brand, lessening

the likelihood it will be purchased again or even eliminating it from the consumer's evoked set. Other contemporary models of consumer behavior exist such as The Nicosia Model developed in 1966 that present four components in decision making behavior: The firm's attributes; the search for information and evaluation; the act of purchase and feedback of the purchase behavior.

As consumers make decisions they rely on internal and external factors. One of those external factors is word of mouth (Choi & Stvilia, 2015). Research has found word of mouth (WOM) to be a powerful factor in affecting consumers and the decisions they make (Ayeh, 2015; Chung & Han, 2017; Wintterlin, 2020). Consumers seek the opinion of others online in the form of e-WOM so as to reduce the amount of time and effort that will lead them to a gratifying outcome (Wiedmann & Von Mettenheim, 2021). Consumers are now using social media to help collect information about certain brands and ultimately this has an effect on their purchase decisions (Sharma & Sheth, 2010).

2.4.8 How Social Media Influencers Affect Consumer Decision Making

Social media is seen as a key source of information in all stages of a tourist's travel decision making (Dwityas and Briandana, 2017). It is used in the decision making of tourists at the dreaming stage of the holiday travel process, during the trip and even after the trip (Fotis, 2015). According to Slabbert et al., 2020, social media is a vital instrument for the significant success of tourism in most developing countries. Instagram posts for instance, affect the decision making of potential tourists and can influence their decision to travel or not during the pre-visit stage (Shuqair and Cragg, 2017). Tourism is counted amongst the most competitive service industries in developing countries, which calls for effective management of resources available. Tourism is associated with relevant infrastructures and services that are intended to improve consumer satisfaction.

Countries with high internet penetration intensity tend to utilize them for booking tourism-related services remotely (Slabbert et al. 2020).

Consumers often develop parasocial relationships with influencers, perceiving them as relatable or trustworthy friends despite the one-sided nature of these interactions. Such relationships increase engagement and the persuasive power of the influencer's content (Lou & Yuan, 2019). When followers perceive an influencer as genuine and approachable, they are more receptive to product recommendations and more likely to act on them, ultimately affecting purchase intentions. Parasocial relationships not only increase emotional engagement but also influence consumer actions. Multiple studies demonstrate that stronger parasocial bonds correlate with higher purchase intentions for products recommended by the influencer (e.g., Chen et al., 2024 on credibility and purchase intentions).

Social media influencers are seen as market influencers who have a great depth of implications on consumers' purchasing opinions (Chopra et al., 2020). The implications are either direct or indirect. It won't be an error to thank the social media influencer's skills and individual personality for their influence on consumers buying decisions. In contrast to marketing strategies that use social media, the roles are done by social media stars and influencers who use their attitude and convincing power to influence the consumer's buying opinion (Martínez-López et al. 2020). The influence has a significant impact on the product's demand. Specifically, in developing countries, Kenya included, marketing strategies that have significantly increased, representing certain types of social media marketing programs (Chopra et al., 2020). Scientifically, social media have been developed to systematize the knowledge and roles of influencers, who are referred to provide opinion guidance to intended consumers. The systematization of social media influencers helps to identify the intensity of impacts on consumer's purchasing options.

Influencer marketing affects multiple stages of the consumer decision-making process, including problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and post-purchase evaluation. High-quality, authentic content reduces perceived risk and enhances trust, leading to higher likelihoods of purchase (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Furthermore, influencers can shape consumer preferences by highlighting specific product attributes, offering reviews, and demonstrating product usage in everyday contexts. This influence is particularly significant among younger consumers who increasingly rely on social media rather than traditional advertising for guidance.

2.5 Empirical Studies on the Impact of Social Media Influencers in the Tourism Industry

There are different studies that have demonstrated the impact of using social media influencers on the hotel and tourism industry. Hanifah (2019) studied the influence of Instagram travel influencers on visiting decisions of tourists in Indonesia. Purposive sampling technique was used to select Instagram users who followed travel influencers and had made the same visit after the SMI posted in on their account. The study was also limited to the ages of 17-38 years. This yielded a sample size of 43 respondents. The findings of this study indicated a strong correlation—measured at 0.634—between travel influencers and individuals' decisions to visit tourist destinations. Additionally, 59.1% of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the combined effect of all independent indicators. This study revealed that travel influencer had an influence on their followers' choice to visit a tourist destination based on what they posted in their account. The study revealed by using Instagram, users can easily find information to evaluate alternatives before deciding to visit a tourist destination.

Madondo (2016) conducted a study on the influence of social media in promoting the tourism industry in Durban, South Africa. A structured questionnaire with 42 questions was administered to 272 respondents who were picked as the sample through

convenience and purposive sampling. The respondents were tourists that visited the Durban tourist destinations. The results from respondents were scientifically analyzed and established the significance of social media in the tourism industry in South Africa. The findings in the research showed that social media had a great impact on the promotion of tourism in South Africa. Most of the respondents indicated that they were active on social media platforms and believed that social media was not an option for businesses in the tourism industry if they are to succeed in today's highly competitive business environment.

Karim (2018) conducted a study on the impact of social media on tourism industry growth in Bangladesh. The study issued questionnaires to 1060 respondents that included students, teachers, business persons and private and public employees aged between 15 to 45 years. Results from the study revealed that the travel decisions of people were influenced by the comments and reviews of friends, family, relatives and colleagues on social media. Social media was seen as the main source of travel related information. People were inspired to travel after seeing the experiences shared by others on social media. Respondents indicated that they easily found information about tourist attractions, hotels and transport on social media. 97.26% of the respondents also indicated they believed social media had significant impact on tourism industry growth in Bangladesh.

Aljafari and Elsharnouby (2019) explored social media influencers, their characteristics, relationships with the audience, and how effective they would be for the tourism industry. The research uses the Parasocial Theory and Social Influence Theory as a way of explaining the relationship between social media influencers and their audience. The parasocial interaction between a social media influencer and the audience creates a collaboration brand and, as such, assists in influencing the audience. The social media influencers are effective because they bring on board the purpose of purchase, an improved brand image, and advocacy. The research analyzed responses from 252

participants who agreed that physical attractiveness, awareness, and credibility would affect the image of the brand. Therefore, they bring about a collaborating brand which is useful in the tourism industry.

A study by Ragab (2022), aimed to examine how social media influencers (SMIs) affect travel behavioral intentions among Digital Natives 2.0—individuals born after 1990—in Egypt. Data were gathered from 391 participants, and the PLS-SEM method was used to test the research hypotheses. The findings revealed that argument quality, attractiveness, and credibility are key elements influencing Digital Natives 2.0's attitudes toward tourism-focused SMIs. Together, these factors explain 77.4% of the variation in their attitudes. Additionally, the study's model accounted for 45.3% of the behavioral intention to travel to destinations promoted by SMIs. These results highlight the strong impact of SMIs on the travel choices of this demographic, emphasizing their importance in the decision-making process. Consequently, the research underscored that both public and private tourism sectors in Egypt should leverage SMIs as a strategic marketing tool to engage domestic travelers—particularly Digital Natives 2.0, who make up over 30% of the country's social media users.

Raafat et al., (2023) conducted a study on the impact of social media influencer's credibility on the travel intentions of the Egyptian millennials as it applies to domestic tourism. The study population was Egyptian millennials. An online questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 581 Egyptian millennials that was picked through convenience sampling. The results indicated that the three dimensions of a SMI's credibility (trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise) had a positive impact on the domestic travel intentions of Egyptian millennials. Moreover, the findings pointed out that all of SMI's credibility elements had a significant effect on domestic travel intentions except for SMI's expertise, which was considered the credibility dimension least affecting the domestic travel intentions of Egyptian millennials.

Research studies in Kenya also show that the use of social media influencers is an increasing trend in the tourism industry. Otiende (2018) focused on studying the Instagram influencers in Kenya to establish their impact on brand communication. The study analyzed 304 responses using inferential and descriptive statistics to assess the impact of the Instagram influencers on brand communication. According to Otiende (2018), the attributes of the social media influencer would be the one to persuade them to take the brand seriously. Attributes like trust, authenticity, persuasion, and knowledge would guide the audience in taking serious the brand communication. The study also found that when there is trust and persuasion, the social media influencer can expand on their influence, which is useful in the tourism industry.

Agalo (2018) conducted a study on social media and tourism awareness in Homabay County, Kenya. Specifically, the research sought to identify the social media platforms used in creating tourism awareness; to investigate how tourism destinations can exploit social media strategies in creating tourism awareness and to examine the salience of user generated content in influencing tourists' decision-making behavior. The study had a total sample of 80 respondents who included hotel managers and tour operators and tourists. Results of this study showed that only about half (57%) of tourism and hospitality establishments in Homabay county used social media platforms to create awareness while the rest still used traditional media. The study also revealed that none of the service providers who were part of the study had a social media strategy. The researcher also found that user generated content contributes in the decision-making behavior process of guests when they are searching for service providers. This amplifies the role of user generated content in influencing tourist behavior especially through of social media.

2.6 Critique of Existing Literature Relevant to the Study

The reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that social media influencers (SMIs) have a measurable impact on domestic tourists' behaviors, travel intentions, and decision-making processes. Across contexts—from Indonesia (Hanifah, 2019) and Bangladesh (Karim, 2018) to Egypt (Ragab, 2022; Raafat et al., 2023) and Kenya (Otiende, 2018; Agalo, 2018)—research consistently shows that SMI attributes such as credibility, attractiveness, and trustworthiness positively influence tourists' destination choices. Several studies also highlight the role of user-generated content and parasocial relationships in shaping perceptions of destinations (Aljafari & Elsharnouby, 2019), reinforcing the value of SMIs as strategic marketing tools for the tourism industry.

Despite these insights, methodological limitations are prominent. Many studies, such as Hanifah (2019) and Raafat et al. (2023), use small or non-representative samples (e.g., 43 respondents, purposive sampling, or convenience sampling), raising questions about the generalizability of findings. Similarly, demographic constraints—often restricted to younger cohorts or digital natives—may overlook older or less digitally active domestic tourists. Karim (2018) and Ragab (2022) provide broader samples, but differences in measurement approaches and survey instruments complicate comparisons across studies. Furthermore, several studies rely on self-reported behavioral intentions rather than actual travel behaviors, leaving uncertainty about whether observed attitudes translate into concrete tourist actions.

The conceptual frameworks also vary. Some studies (Aljafari & Elsharnouby, 2019; Ragab, 2022) employ theoretical models such as parasocial interaction or social influence theory, while others focus primarily on descriptive correlations without clear theoretical grounding (Hanifah, 2019; Madondo, 2016). This inconsistency limits the cumulative development of theory on how influencers shape domestic tourist behavior. Additionally, most research centers on Instagram, with limited exploration of other

platforms like TikTok or YouTube, which may appeal to different demographics or influence decision-making differently.

The use of the social media influences should also be approached with the caution. Deborah et al. (2019) cast doubt on the ability of social media influencers to revolutionize the tourism industry because of the difficulty in quantifying the influence of the personalities on their followers. The influence on the people does not necessarily mean that when there are big numbers, then there would be big numbers of followers. Studies show that the mid-level celebrities on social media are likely to have more influence than the big influencers (Zhang et al., 2018). The cost effectiveness of using the upcoming social media influencers is greater than in the case where the influencers have a high number of followers.

In conclusion, while existing research confirms that SMIs significantly affect domestic tourist behavior, the evidence is constrained by limited sample diversity, inconsistent theoretical frameworks, overreliance on self-reported measures and platform-specific biases.

Solis and Breakenridge (2009) mention the magic middle principles used in the social media marketing. The influencers with lower number of followers are likely to have more followers engaged than the influencers with higher number of followers. These cost challenges are issues that need be addressed when referring to the social media influencers.

2.7 Research Gaps

Based on the studies reviewed, several empirical gaps emerge. First, most of the studies were conducted outside Kenya, including in Indonesia (Hanifah, 2019), South Africa (Madondo, 2016), Bangladesh (Karim, 2018), and Egypt (Ragab, 2022; Raafat et al., 2023). While these studies established that social media influencers and social media

platforms significantly affect tourists' travel intentions and destination choices, their findings may not be directly applicable to the Kenyan tourism context due to differences in culture, tourism markets, digital adoption, and consumer behavior.

Second, many of the studies focused broadly on the influence of social media or social media influencers on tourism promotion and travel intentions without specifically examining the dimensions of influencer credibility, such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. Although Raafat et al. (2023) investigated influencer credibility, the study was limited to Egyptian millennials, creating a contextual gap regarding the influence of these credibility dimensions on domestic tourists in Kenya.

Third, the Kenyan studies reviewed concentrated on related but distinct issues. Otiende (2018) examined the role of Instagram influencers in brand communication, while Agalo (2018) focused on social media platforms, tourism awareness, and user-generated content in Homa Bay County. Neither study specifically investigated how social media influencers' credibility influences domestic tourists' destination choice behavior. This presents a conceptual gap in understanding the mechanisms through which influencer characteristics affect tourism decisions in Kenya.

Fourth, most previous studies employed quantitative approaches and survey methods, limiting the depth of understanding regarding industry perspectives on influencer marketing. There is therefore a methodological gap for studies that combine quantitative data from tourists with qualitative insights from tourism marketing practitioners.

Accordingly, the current study sought to fill these geographical, contextual, conceptual, and methodological gaps by examining the influence of social media influencers' credibility dimensions—trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness—on domestic tourists' destination choice behavior in Kenya, while incorporating both tourists' and tourism practitioners' perspectives.

2.8 Summary

This chapter focuses literature on social media, its use and the influencers and explains how they can impact the tourism industry. It also highlights the types of social media influencers and the level of influence they possess over their followers. The theoretical framework as well as the conceptual framework are also presented in this chapter. This study is informed by the Theory of Reasoned Action, Social Comparison Theory, Source Credibility Theory and the Attribution Theory.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological decisions taken in order to answer the research questions posed by this study. The research design, research population, sampling technique, data collection procedure and data analysis methods that were used to achieve the objectives of this study have been described in depth. This chapter also outlines the ethical issues that were considered while conducting the research.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This study adopted the pragmatism research philosophy. Pragmatism is considered appropriate where a study seeks to provide practical solutions to a research problem through the integration of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The philosophy emphasizes the use of methods that best address the research problem rather than relying exclusively on a single philosophical orientation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The choice of pragmatism was informed by the nature of the study objectives, which required the examination of both measurable relationships and subjective insights regarding the influence of social media influencers on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to determine the effects of source credibility, source attractiveness, source power, and persuasive techniques on consumer decision making, while also identifying the source metrics used by the travel industry to select social media influencers. These objectives required the collection and analysis of both numerical and descriptive data.

Pragmatism assumes that reality is not singular and fixed but can be understood from multiple perspectives depending on the context of the study (Morgan, 2014). In this regard, the study acknowledged the existence of objective realities that could be measured quantitatively, such as the relationship between influencer characteristics and tourists' decision-making behavior, while also recognizing subjective realities derived from participants' experiences and perceptions concerning influencer selection and persuasive communication.

From an epistemological perspective, pragmatism supports the generation of knowledge through multiple methods of inquiry and encourages researchers to use approaches that best answer the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The pragmatic philosophy was therefore suitable for this study because it facilitated methodological flexibility and enabled the researcher to draw on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in addressing the research objectives comprehensively (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

3.3 Research Design

The objectives of this study called for a mixed method research design. A mixed method research design is used when qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis are used in a study (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). Mixed method research 'involves collecting and integrating quantitative and qualitative data in a single project and therefore may result in a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation' (Leavy, 2017). Specifically, this study used convergent parallel design, a type of mixed method design. Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in research can provide a deeper and more complete understanding of a phenomenon. Mixed methods research enables researchers to collect and integrate data from multiple sources when examining complex issues (Poth & Munce, 2020), while also allowing them to explore a problem through diverse perspectives and research

approaches (Shorten & Smith, 2017). The use of interviews (qualitative tool) and closed ended questionnaires (quantitative tool) informed the use of convergent parallel design.

This study aimed to examine social media influencers and how they affect the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Convergent parallel design was used because this study sought to find out what effect(s) source credibility, attractiveness, power and metrics have on the decision making of the domestic tourist. The design assisted the researcher study the characteristics of social media influencers and determine what effect if any they have on the decision making of domestic tourists through the content they post on their social media accounts. In order to understand the effect that social media influencers have on the decision making process of domestic tourists, neither qualitative nor quantitative methods will be sufficient in themselves and its necessary to use them in combination. The convergent parallel design allows for the simultaneous collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, with findings merged to provide a more complete understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Triangulation was applied at the interpretation stage of this study to strengthen the findings for the objective of establishing the source metrics used to identify social media influencers for use by the travel industry in domestic tourism in Kenya. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were utilized to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the metrics considered important in influencer identification. Data gathered from the questionnaires and interviews was analyzed and then compared to confirm consistency across the perspectives of a domestic tourist and tours and travel companies.

3.4 Target Population

3.4.1 Domestic Tourists

To achieve the objectives of this study, the target population comprised domestic tourists who use social media and are exposed to social media influencer content when making travel decisions in Kenya. This population was considered appropriate because the study sought to examine the influence of social media influencers on tourists' decision-making processes. Consequently, respondents needed to possess two key characteristics: they had to be active users of social media platforms and have experience participating in domestic tourism activities. These characteristics ensured that respondents could provide informed opinions regarding the extent to which influencer-generated content affects their travel choices.

The study focused on Nairobi and Kiambu counties because these counties constitute some of the most economically developed and urbanized regions in Kenya. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2019), Nairobi and Kiambu record among the highest household incomes, internet penetration rates, smartphone ownership levels, and educational attainment levels in the country. These socio-economic characteristics make residents more likely to access digital technologies and actively engage with social media platforms, thereby increasing their exposure to influencer marketing campaigns.

Additionally, Nairobi serves as Kenya's commercial and technological hub, hosting a large population of digitally connected consumers who frequently use platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube for information search and travel inspiration. Kiambu County, which borders Nairobi, shares similar demographic and socio-economic characteristics, including a high concentration of middle-income earners, professionals, and young adults who are among the most active social media users in the country. As a result, the two counties provided a suitable

context for examining the relationship between social media influencer activities and domestic tourism decision-making.

3.4.2 Tour and Travel Companies

To help fulfil the fourth objective of this study, which is to determine the source metrics used to identify social media influencers to be used by the travel industry for domestic tourism in Kenya, the target population was owners and managers of tours and travel companies in Nairobi County, Kenya. This population comprises of all registered tour operators and travel agencies operating within Nairobi County. According to the Tourism Regulatory Authority (2020) the total number of tour operators and travel agencies licensed to operate in Nairobi County was 939. This population category must have engaged a social media influencer in promoting their existing tourism businesses in the past. This was necessary so as to be able to provide information on how they selected the social media influencers and, therefore, answer the question of what metrics were used to identify social media influencers used to promote domestic tourism in Kenya.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

3.5.1 Domestic Tourists Sample

According to Tracy (2013) sampling is ‘the process by which you select a number of individual cases from a larger population’. This study made use of stratified random sampling for the first target population of internet users. This is because the target population does not constitute a homogenous group and stratified random sampling would enable the researcher to obtain a more representative group (Kothari & Garg, 2019). The strata were formed by dividing the two counties under study into their respective sub counties. Nairobi County was be divided into; Westlands, Dagoretti North, Dagoretti South, Langata, Kibra, Roysambu, Kasarani, Ruaraka, Embakasi South, Embakasi North, Embakasi Central, Embakasi East, Embakasi West, Makadara,

Kamukunji, Starehe and Mathare. Kiambu county was divided into; Githunguri, Kiambaa, Lari, Limuru, Kabete, Gatundu North, Gatundu South, Juja, Kikuyu, Thika town, Ruiru and Kiambu Town. This made the total number of strata 29 and ensured that residents of these different sub counties are in the sample making it more representative of the total population under study.

To calculate the appropriate sample size for this study, the researcher utilized the Yamane Formula, which enables the findings and conclusions from the survey to be generalized to the entire population from which the sample was selected.

$$n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$$

Where:

n is the required sample size from the population under study

N is the whole population that is under study (1,980,099)

e is the precision or sampling error, which in this case was 0.05

This yielded a sample size of 399 respondents, which was proportionally distributed based on the population of the two counties. The sampling matrix table is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Sampling Matrix

County	Sampling Frame	Sample Size	Population Percentage
Nairobi	1,367,593	299	75%
Kiambu	612,506	100	25%
Total	1,980,099	399	100%

3.5.2 Tours and Travel Companies Sample

Determining an appropriate interview sample size remains a widely debated issue in qualitative research, with scholars emphasizing that adequacy should be assessed based on the depth, richness, and relevance of the data rather than numerical representation alone (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The concept of information power suggests that the more relevant, specific, and comprehensive the information provided by participants is in relation to the research objectives, the fewer participants may be required to generate meaningful findings (Malterud et al., 2016). Similarly, Fusch and Ness (2015) argue that qualitative sample size should be guided by factors such as the research questions, the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation, participant diversity, and the point at which data saturation is achieved.

Considering the characteristics of the target population, the scope of the study, available resources, and the exploratory nature of the research, this study employed a sample of 10 interview participants to investigate the source metrics used by tour and travel companies when identifying social media influencers for promoting domestic tourism in Kenya. This sample size is consistent with qualitative research recommendations, where relatively small samples can provide rich and in-depth insights when participants possess specialized knowledge or direct experience of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2023). Furthermore, Bernard (2013) notes that samples ranging from 10 to 20 knowledgeable participants are often sufficient for identifying key themes in studies focused on participants' experiences and professional practices.

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted because participants were selected based on their direct relevance to the research objectives. Purposive sampling enables researchers to intentionally recruit information-rich cases from individuals or organizations with specific knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Tracy, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, tour operators and travel companies were selected

because they had actively incorporated social media influencers into their marketing activities, maintained an active online presence, and were willing to participate in interviews.

A total of 10 tour operators and travel companies were included as interview respondents (see Appendix V). The inclusion of multiple organizations allowed for comparison of different influencer marketing practices, source evaluation criteria, and operational approaches within Kenya's domestic tourism sector. This comparative approach enhanced the richness of the findings by capturing diverse organizational perspectives and strengthening the credibility and contextual understanding of the research.

3.6 Research Instruments

A research instrument is a tool used in the process of collecting data to be used in research. This study employed two research instruments: questionnaires and interviews.

3.6.1 Questionnaires

This study used questionnaires as a research instrument. This research instrument was chosen because it offers many advantages. It is cheap, especially when the respondents are widely spread geographically; it's free from interviewer bias, and it gives the respondents ample time to answer the questions (Kothari & Garg, 2019).

The questionnaires were in English and were structured with closed-ended questions. They began with an introduction in the form of a cover letter describing the purpose of the study. It also included a section which allowed respondents to give their consent and explained that all information provided would be used solely for academic purposes and handled with strict confidentiality. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were anonymised during data processing and analysis. It also

highlighted the expected time of completion of the questionnaire as well an acknowledgement for participation. The next section of the questionnaire sought to gather the demographic data of the respondents. The last section of the questionnaire was useful in answering the questions regarding the use of social media and its effect on the decision making of domestic tourists. The analysis of the responses was useful in analyzing the impact of social media influencer posts on the decision making of domestic tourists.

3.6.2 Interviews

In addition to the questionnaires, the researcher also used the interviews as a tool for collecting information. Interviews were useful in asking open ended questions that needed more explanation and helped answer the fourth research question. They were administered to the management of different tours and travel companies on their experience with using the social media influencers in marketing their businesses.

The interviews were structured with pre-determined questions laid down and asked in a form and order that was prescribed in the interview guide. Structured interviews are advisable especially when you employ research assistants as this research intends to (Tracy, 2013). The interviews were conducted in person for the 10 respondents requiring the interviewer to ask questions in a face-to-face setting. The interviews were conducted for not more than 30 minutes. The interviewer made use of an audio recorder and notepad during the interview. The conversations were then transcribed before coding and analysis.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

The first phase of the data collection procedure involved drafting the research instruments to be used in the study as well as recruiting the research assistants. A team of four research assistants was picked to support the data collection process. Selection

was based on prior experience with survey administration and familiarity with Nairobi and Kiambu counties. Consent was obtained from all participants. The purpose of the study was clearly explained, and confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were assured.

The second phase of the data collection procedure involved quantitative and qualitative data collection. The questionnaire was filled by 399 respondents that had been sampled in Nairobi and Kiambu Counties, areas known for their vibrant social media presence and tourism activity. They were administered both physically and online, depending on respondent accessibility and preference. Research assistants facilitated physical distribution at strategic locations such as malls, parks, travel hubs and social events, while online forms were shared via social media platforms and travel-related social media groups and forums. The respondents were allowed enough time to complete the questionnaire before returning it to the researcher.

A total of 10 interviews were conducted with marketing and social media managers from tour and travel companies that use influencer marketing. Prior to the interviews, participants were contacted and provided with information about the purpose of the study, after which informed consent was obtained. An interview guide was used to direct the discussion toward the source metrics employed by tours and travel companies in identifying social media influencers for domestic tourism in Kenya. The respondents individuals were purposively selected based on their expertise and relevance to the study. The interviews were scheduled and arranged with the help of research assistants and conducted by the principal researcher in person. The interviews were conducted in a quiet, neutral and professional setting to minimize distractions and ensure participant comfort. The rooms were free from interruptions to maintain confidentiality and focus. With informed consent, all interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for thematic analysis.

3.8 Pilot Study

The pilot test was necessary because it's always advisable especially when the study will use questionnaires as a method of data collection (Kothari & Garg, 2019). A pilot study is a small study that enables the researcher test data collection instruments as well as the sample recruitment strategy before the larger study is undertaken. In order to ensure the research instruments designed for this study were adequately designed, they were needed to pilot test them. This was done with a small sample in order to clear any areas of misunderstanding or confusion without wasting time and money (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

The pilot test involved twenty-five participants who answered the questions as they are presented in the questionnaire. This was based on an average of some studies that recommend a pilot study sample size of twelve participants (Julious, 2005) while others recommend thirty participants (Browne, 1995). The twenty-five respondents represent 4% of the sample population matching Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) who recommend that for a pilot test to be successful, it must represent 1% to 10% of the sample size. The pilot study ensured validity and reliability of the data collection instrument. The design of the questionnaire was confirmed and all stages of the research were managed at the initial stage of the research. The pilot study was undertaken to evaluate the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, ensuring that the questions were clear, relevant, and capable of generating the required information. It also provided an opportunity to test the overall research process, including questionnaire administration, data collection procedures, and respondent understanding of the items. Feedback obtained from the pilot study informed necessary revisions and improvements to the instrument before the main survey was conducted.

3.9 Data Processing and Analysis

3.9.1 Quantitative Analysis

The data collection was grouped and coded. The results were analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) to get the descriptive data. SPSS analysis was used to get the inferential statistics out of the data. The SPSS tool is useful in the research as it is useful in organizing random data (Cronk, 2019). The software provided a summary of the frequency of the responses, get the means, standard deviations, and the percentages where necessary. The data was analyzed such that there was both descriptive and the inferential statistics to establish the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables. Linear regression models were used to show the significance of the independent variables in determining the dependent variable. Pearson's correlation test was used to test for relationships between independent and dependent variables.

3.9.2 Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data from the interviews was transcribed verbatim into English. Data was then imported into a qualitative data analysis tool specifically Nvivo version 11 for thematic analysis. The qualitative data obtained from the ten in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach was selected because it allows for the systematic identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns and meanings within qualitative data relevant to the study objectives. Qualitative data was also presented in narratives as quotations in the report.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Procedural safeguards were implemented throughout the research process to enhance the credibility, validity, and ethical integrity of the study. Prior to data collection,

participants were contacted through direct messages and provided with clear information regarding the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and the reasons for their selection. This ensured transparency and minimized uncertainty or misunderstanding among participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before their involvement. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

To maintain confidentiality and protect participant privacy, the researcher did not collect personally identifiable information, and all responses were handled anonymously. Data collected during the study was securely stored and used strictly for academic and research purposes related to the objectives of the study. Additionally, consistent data collection procedures were followed throughout the research process to ensure reliability and reduce the possibility of bias or inconsistencies in the handling of participant responses.

The study was conducted with the approval of the university as part of the PhD programme and adhered to the ethical guidelines and research regulations established by the institution. Furthermore, the research process upheld principles of academic integrity, including originality of work and avoidance of plagiarism, in accordance with accepted standards of responsible research conduct (Chowdhury, 2015).

3.11 Research Reliability and Validity

Joppe (2000) defines reliability as ‘the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study’. Research reliability is the process of ensuring that the study will be able to get consistent results under a similar methodology. The researcher carried out a pilot study and compared the results of the survey to the main survey to show if there was consistency in the two research studies. The same research procedure was used in the pilot study and the main research

study and the results compared to establish if there are similar features between the two studies (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). When the results are consistent, the results of the research can, as such, be considered to be reliable.

In addition to making the research reliable, the researcher also worked to ensure there was validity in the type of research done. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) define validity as the accuracy and meaningfulness of any interpretations that are founded on research results. Similarly, Cook and Campbell (1979) define validity as "best available approximation to the truth or falsity of a given inference, proposition or conclusion." Content validity begins through the construction of the research questions. The questionnaire had questions that have a proper theoretical construct that helped the researcher in meeting the objectives of the research. The researcher developed simple, clear, and easy to understand questions that the respondents were able to respond to. During the pilot study, an evaluation of the responses of the respondents was done to ensure that there was clarity and consistency in answering the questions. In the analysis, statistical methods like the Cronbach's alpha tests were used in proving there was reliability in the research results (Taber, 2018).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data analysis, results interpretation, presentation, and discussion of the study findings. The chapter covers the findings of the study on the effect of social media influencers on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to examine the following objectives: investigate the effect of source credibility on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya, (2) determine the effect of source attractiveness on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya, (3) examine the effect of source power on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya, (4) establish the source metrics used to identify social media influencers to be used by the travel industry for domestic tourism in Kenya, and (5) to assess the moderating effect of persuasive techniques of SMI's messages on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. To achieve these objectives, the chapter presents the response rate, demographic data, quantitative findings and qualitative findings, and discussion of research findings. This includes the use of descriptive statistical techniques, t-tests, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

4.2 Pilot Study Findings

Kothari and Garg (2019) noted that before using a questionnaire as a data collection method, conducting a pilot study of the questionnaires is always advisable. This helps to bring into light the weaknesses (if any) of the questionnaires, and the experience gained in this way can be used to effect improvement. Tayie (2005) suggests that samples of 25-50 are commonly used for pretesting measurement instruments. For this study, the pilot study was done using 5% of the population, giving twenty five respondents in

Mombasa and Nakuru Counties. The respondents of the pilot study were not included in the main research study.

4.2.1 Reliability of Research Instrument

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of a research instrument in measuring what it is intended to measure over time (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this study, the instrument's reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha constant, which measured the internal consistency and average correlation among the indicators under consideration. Cronbach's values usually range between 0 and 1, with the commonly accepted alpha value of at least 0.70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). A reliability coefficient (alpha) of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable reliability (Groves, 1987). Nevertheless, the study did not include data acquired from the pilot test. The researcher ensured that all the Cronbach alpha values of the variables under investigation were above 0.7.

From the findings, the domestic tourists decision making had an average Cronbach's reliability alpha of 0.789; source credibility had a Cronbach's reliability alpha of 0.803, source attractiveness had an average Cronbach's reliability alpha of 0.805, source power had a Cronbach's reliability alpha of 0.813, source metric had a Cronbach's reliability alpha of 0.827 and persuasive techniques had an average Cronbach's reliability alpha of 0.825. This shows the study questionnaire met the reliability criteria ($\alpha > 0.7$) as shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Domestic tourists decision making	0.789	Reliable
Source Credibility	0.803	Reliable
Source Attractiveness	0.805	Reliable
Source Power	0.813	Reliable
Source Metrics	0.827	Reliable
Persuasive techniques	0.825	Reliable

4.2.2 Validity of Research Instrument

According to Creswell & Creswell (2022), validity indicates the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. It is the extent to which differences found with a measuring instrument reflect actual differences among those being tested. Bryman and Bell (2011) highlighted that validity is the most significant criterion for research. The study collected data from 25 respondents in Mombasa and Nakuru Counties and the questionnaire's test face, content and construct validity was conducted. Content validity in this investigation was increased by obtaining expert opinions in this specific field of study, more so the supervisors. In addition, the research instrument's face validity was increased by conducting a pilot test and altering ambiguous and indistinct questions.

4.3 Response Rate

The level of response rate is an important, sometimes crucial, factor in assessing the value of research findings (Baruch and Holton, 2008). Data for the study was collected from the Nairobi and Kiambu counties after the two counties were picked because they represent the counties with the highest socio-economic capability in the country. Then study distributed 399 questionnaires to internet users drawn from the followers of the social media influencers after requesting them to participate in the survey. The

participants who participated in the research through submission of online questionnaires were 380 respondents. This gives a response rate of 95.2%, which was considered adequate for analytical purposes for the study. Metsamuuronen (2017) indicates that a response rate above fifty percent is considered adequate for data analysis and reporting, while a response rate above 70% is classified as excellent. The response rate for the second target population of tours and travel companies was 100%. The results are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Response Rate

Target Population	Sample Size	No.of Respondents	Response Rate
Domestic Tourists	399	380	95.2 %
Tours and Travel Companies	10	10	100%

4.4 Demographic Information

Table 4.3 Demographic Information

		Freq.	Percent
Gender	Male	164	43.16
	Female	216	56.84
Year of Birth	Between 1961 and 1970	50	13.16
	Between 1971 and 1980	44	11.58
	Between 1981 and 1990	144	37.89
	Between 1991 and 2000	142	37.37
Social Media Influencer Following	Yes	216	56.84
	No	164	43.16
Why follow influencers	I follow SMI's for discounts/giveaways	24	6.32
	I follow SMI's for inspiration	68	17.89
	I follow SMI's for entertainment	92	24.21
	I follow SMI's for to be updated on trends	196	51.58
How did you choose the destination of your last travel in Kenya?	Friend/family recommended it	2	0.53
	Saw photos/videos on social media	329	86.58
	I saw an ad on TV	49	12.89
Do you search travel related content on Social Media?	Sometimes	36	9.47
	Only when I intend to Travel	255	67.11
	Never	89	23.42
Have you discovered new destinations/places when using Social Media?	Yes, I have discovered some	39	10.26
	Yes, Once	45	11.84
	No, I haven't discoverd any new places	296	77.89
Social Media Influence	Somewhat influence	45	11.84
	great influence	295	77.63
	very great influence	40	10.53

The first section of the questionnaire consisted of ten items, which sought to determine the demographic characteristics of the respondents who agreed to provide their opinions on the effect of social media influencers on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The first question sought to know the gender of the respondents. According to the findings, the majority of the respondents (56.84%) were female counterparts, while the males were (43.16%). These findings show the differences between males and females in information processes and decision-making, especially for travel and tourism. According to (Bartels, 2015), women have an influential role in family vacation decision-making.

The second item in this section enquired about the year of birth of the respondents. According to the responses from the study, the research categorized the year of birth into four categories, as shown in Table 4.3. The majority of the respondents were born between 1981 and 1990 (37.89%), closely followed by 1991 and 2000 with 37.37%. 13.16% of the respondents were born between 1961 and 1970 while 11.58% were born between 1971 and 1980. These findings contradict the empirical research findings of Bernini, Matteucci and Mignani (2015), who found that though demographic factors significantly influence the travel behavior of families, age exhibits a negative impact on the inclination to travel but a positive influence on the amount spent on tourism.

The data shows that a majority of respondents report following social media influencers. Specifically, 216 individuals (56.84%) indicated “Yes,” while 164 respondents (43.16%) indicated “No.” This suggests that influencer engagement is relatively common among the sample, with more than half of participants actively following influencers. However, a substantial proportion just over two-fifths do not follow influencers, highlighting that while the practice is widespread, it is not universal.

The fourth item in the questionnaire sought to understand why respondents follow social media influencers. The majority of the respondents, 196 (51.58 %), follow social media

influencers to be updated on trends about travel and vacations. The findings resonate with Cholprasertsuk, Lawanwisut, and Thongrin (2020), who concluded that social media users engage SMIs based on the number of followers, types of created content, reliability, and communicative style. This, therefore, influences the choice of their travel plans and, subsequently, their destinations.

The five item in the questionnaire sought to determine how the respondents chose their travel destination in Kenya. The majority of the respondents, 230 (60.53%), saw it on social media, either Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn or Snapchat. In contrast, only 49 respondents (12.89%) were influenced by television advertisements, while a very small proportion—just 2 respondents (0.53%)—relied on recommendations from friends or family. This suggests that visual content shared online is far more impactful than traditional media or personal referrals in shaping travel decisions among the sampled population. These findings are in agreement with Gretzel (2018), who found that social media largely impacts the appeal of tourism owing to its social, visual and information-intensive nature. Social media channels amplify the appeal of tourism experiences through plasticity and flexibility of characterization (Berryman, Abidin, & Leaver, 2021). Moreover, consumers access social networking sites to research trips in order to make decisions and share their personal experiences of a hotel, restaurant, visitor attraction, or airline.

The sixth item in this section asked the question ‘Do you ever search travel related content on Social Media?’. The findings indicate that most respondents actively use social media as a resource when planning travel. A majority, 255 respondents (67.11%), reported that they search for travel-related content only when they intend to travel, suggesting purposeful and need-based engagement. Meanwhile, 36 respondents (9.47%) indicated that they sometimes search for such content, reflecting occasional interest. On the other hand, 89 respondents (23.42%) stated that they never search for travel-related content on social media. Overall, the results suggest that while a significant portion of

individuals rely on social media during the travel planning stage, a notable minority do not use it for this purpose at all.. These findings resonate with Mehraliyev, (2021), who indicated that most participants in their survey follow travel and tourism influencers on YouTube, an online video-sharing platform, the most. There is a good possibility that videos are visually attractive and memorable since it is the easiest way for audiences to understand a message. It is also the most effective way to convey lots of information related to a destination at once via light and sound, which could also build an emotive response from audiences.

The seventh question in the section asked the respondents ‘Have you discovered new destinations/places when using Social Media?’. The data suggests that most respondents have not discovered new destinations through social media. A large majority, 296 respondents (77.89%), indicated that they have not discovered any new places using social media. In contrast, a smaller proportion reported some level of discovery, with 39 respondents (10.26%) stating that they have discovered new destinations, and 45 respondents (11.84%) indicating that they have done so at least once. Overall, these findings imply that while social media has some influence in introducing new places to users, its impact on destination discovery among this sample appears relatively limited.

The last question in the section asked the respondents whether social media influenced their search for travel and vacation ideas. The majority of the respondents, 295 (77.63%), indicated that social media has a great influence on their travel decisions. These findings resonate with Xie-Carson et al (2023), who found out that Instagram posts from social media influencers that combine images of tourism settings with rational messages attract the most engagement from the audience.

4.5 Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

This section outlines the research findings through both descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, the section explains the findings of each objective. The

independent variables of source credibility, source attractiveness, source power and source metrics were measured using five-point Likert scale items each, which ranged from Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The percentages, means, and standard deviation for each item are discussed in the following sections.

In determining the influence of the four independent variables of source credibility, source attractiveness, source power, and source metrics on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya, the study conducted a one-sample *t*-test. The one-sample *t*-test is used when we want to know whether a sample comes from a particular population, but we do not have full population information available to us. The one-sample *t*-test is used only for tests of the sample mean. In order to test the positivity of the influence of the independent variables on the decision-making of the domestic tourists, the test value of 3.4 was arrived at based on the five Likert scale items, which were assigned codes of 1 to 5 where 5 = Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3 = Neutral (N), 2 = Disagree (D), and 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD). The main disadvantage of the Likert scale is that it is unidimensional and only gives 5 to 7 options of choice, and the space between each choice is not equidistant. In order to address this disadvantage, the values between 1 and 5 were further enumerated in order to establish an accurate range between each code. These ranges include (1) 1 to 1.8, which represents “strongly disagree,” (2) 1.8 to 2.6, representing “disagree,” (3) 2.6 to 3.4, representing “neutral,” (4) 3.4 to 4.2 representing “agree,” and (5) 4.2 to 5 representing “strongly agree”. To explain the test value $\mu = 3.4$, the following method was used. The four spaces between the five Likert scale items (Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, and Strongly Agree = 5) were divided by the five numbers, which equals 0.8. This, therefore, implied that Neutral and below fell below $\mu = 3.4$.

The study, therefore, concluded that any value < 3.4 was below the neutral and thus didn't show positivity in the influence on the decision-making of domestic tourists in

Kenya. The *t*-test was used in this study to test hypotheses and determine whether the four independent variables influenced the decision of domestic tourists in Kenya.

$$H_0 : \nu = 3.4$$

vs

$$H_1 : \nu > 3.4$$

The *t*-test findings are represented in Table 4.4 and explained under each objective.

Table 4.4 One-Sample t-test

Variables	obs	Mean	St Err	t value	p value
Source Credibility	380	36.676	.297	112.054	0
Source Attractiveness	380	39.458	.377	95.698	0
Source Power	380	16.303	.149	86.638	0
Source Metrics	380	38.479	.248	141.328	0

4.5.1 Effect of Source Credibility on the Decision-making of Domestic Tourists in Kenya

The study's first objective sought to investigate the effect of source credibility on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. This was measured using six Likert scale items. Source credibility was assessed through several dimensions, including influencer knowledge, competence, honesty, trustworthiness, intelligence, and the extent to which these characteristics influence tourists' decisions.

Table 4.5 Source Credibility

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
The social media influencer demonstrates being well-informed about domestic tourist destinations and activities	4.484	.905
I perceive the social media influencer as competent in providing accurate and reliable information about domestic tourism	3.17	1.508
The social media influencer comes across as honest and transparent in their interactions and recommendations.	4.534	.825
The social media influencer has established themselves as trustworthy through their past content and interactions	4.292	.903
The intelligence and knowledge demonstrated by the social media influencer greatly influenced my decision-making for domestic tourism	3.94	.867
I am more likely to trust the recommendations and advice of a social media influencer who is well-informed about domestic tourism	3.721	.817

The findings generally indicate that domestic tourists place considerable value on the credibility of social media influencers when making tourism-related decisions. The highest-rated statement was that social media influencers come across as honest and transparent in their interactions and recommendations ($M = 4.534$, $SD = 0.825$). This suggests that honesty and transparency are the most influential dimensions of credibility among Kenyan domestic tourists. The relatively low standard deviation indicates a strong consensus among respondents. This finding aligns with the source credibility theory, which posits that trustworthiness is a fundamental determinant of message acceptance. When tourists perceive influencers as transparent and genuine, they are more likely to accept their recommendations regarding destinations, attractions, and travel experiences.

Similarly, respondents agreed that social media influencers are well-informed about domestic tourist destinations and activities ($M = 4.484$, $SD = 0.905$). This finding suggests that knowledge and expertise significantly shape tourists' perceptions of influencer credibility. Tourists appear to value influencers who demonstrate a deep understanding of destinations, travel logistics, and tourism experiences. The result supports the argument by Lim et al. (2017) that consumers evaluate the expertise of information sources before trusting and acting upon their recommendations. In the tourism context, knowledgeable influencers reduce information uncertainty and assist travelers in making informed decisions.

The respondents also reported high agreement that social media influencers appear intelligent in their content and interactions ($M = 4.483$, $SD = 0.795$). This result indicates that intellectual competence contributes positively to influencer credibility. The relatively low standard deviation suggests that respondents consistently perceive intelligence as an important attribute when evaluating influencers. This finding supports previous studies that have identified expertise and competence as critical dimensions of source credibility. For example, research by Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencer expertise positively affects consumer trust and purchase intentions because audiences perceive knowledgeable influencers as more capable of providing valuable recommendations.

Furthermore, respondents agreed that social media influencers have established themselves as trustworthy through their past content and interactions ($M = 4.292$, $SD = 0.903$). This finding suggests that credibility is not developed through a single interaction but rather through a sustained history of consistent and reliable content. The result is consistent with studies by Freberg et al. (2011), who found that influencer credibility is largely built through repeated interactions and audience engagement over time. In tourism marketing, repeated exposure to reliable content may reinforce tourists' confidence in influencer recommendations and strengthen destination appeal.

The study also found that respondents agreed that the intelligence and knowledge demonstrated by influencers influenced their domestic tourism decisions ($M = 3.940$, $SD = 0.867$). Although the mean is lower than those for honesty and trustworthiness, it remains within the agreement category, indicating that influencer expertise has a direct impact on tourists' travel choices. This finding is consistent with the work of Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), who reported that consumers are more likely to be persuaded by influencers whom they perceive as knowledgeable and experienced. In tourism, expertise may reduce perceived travel risks and increase confidence in destination selection.

Similarly, respondents agreed that they are more likely to trust recommendations from influencers who are well-informed about domestic tourism ($M = 3.721$, $SD = 0.817$). This finding reinforces the importance of expertise in shaping trust. It suggests that tourists are not merely influenced by influencer popularity but rather by the perceived quality and reliability of the information shared. This observation supports the findings of Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget (2020), who found that influencer expertise significantly enhances audience trust and persuasive effectiveness.

However, an interesting finding emerged regarding the perceived competence of influencers in providing accurate and reliable tourism information ($M = 3.170$, $SD = 1.508$). Unlike the other items, respondents were largely undecided. The high standard deviation indicates considerable variation in opinions among respondents. While some participants viewed influencers as competent sources of tourism information, others remained skeptical. This may reflect increasing consumer awareness of sponsored content, paid partnerships, and commercial motives behind influencer marketing. Tourists may recognize influencers as knowledgeable and trustworthy in some respects while still questioning the accuracy and objectivity of the information they provide.

This finding differs from several previous studies that found competence to be one of the strongest predictors of influencer credibility. For instance, research by Lou and Yuan (2019) and Sokolova and Kefi (2020) demonstrated that perceived expertise and competence positively influence consumer trust and behavioral intentions. The discrepancy may be attributed to contextual differences. In the Kenyan domestic tourism sector, tourists may rely on multiple information sources, such as official tourism websites, peer reviews, family recommendations, and personal experience, rather than depending solely on influencers. Consequently, influencers may be viewed as inspirational sources rather than definitive authorities on travel information.

Overall, the findings indicate that source credibility plays a significant role in influencing domestic tourists' decision-making in Kenya. Among the credibility dimensions examined, honesty, transparency, knowledge, intelligence, and established trustworthiness received the strongest support. These findings are consistent with the Source Credibility Theory developed by Hovland and Weiss (1951), which argues that messages from sources perceived as trustworthy and expert are more persuasive than those from less credible sources.

The results also support contemporary influencer marketing literature. Studies by Lim et al. (2017), Lou and Yuan (2019), Schouten et al. (2020), and Xie-Carson et al. (2023) similarly concluded that credibility is a key determinant of consumer trust and behavioral intentions. However, the uncertainty surrounding influencer competence suggests that domestic tourists are becoming more discerning consumers of social media content and may critically evaluate influencer recommendations before making travel decisions. This highlights the importance for tourism influencers and destination marketers to maintain authenticity, demonstrate expertise, and provide accurate information to sustain audience trust and influence tourism choices effectively.

4.5.1.1 One-sample *t*-test for Source Credibility

The one-sample *t*-test is used when we want to know whether our sample comes from a particular population, but we do not have full population information available to us. The one-sample *t*-test is used only for tests of the sample mean. In order to test the positivity of the influence of the independent variables on the decision-making of domestic tourists, the test value of 3.4 was arrived at based on the five Likert scale items, which were assigned codes of 1 to 5 where 5 = Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3 = Neutral (N), 2 = Disagree (D), and 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD).

Considering the hypothesis being tested,

H01. Source Credibility has no significant effect in the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya

$$H_0 : \mu = 3.4$$

vs

$$H_1 : \mu > 3.4$$

Source credibility equally yielded the following findings. Since $t(379) = 112$, $p < 0.000$, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that $\mu > 3.4$, which implies that the mean score of the source credibility index is above the neutral position, meaning that source credibility can be used to predict the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The analysis of variance also confirms the significance of the model between source credibility and decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya F-test p-value < 0.000 as shown in table 4.6

Table 4.6 Analysis of Variance for Source Credibility

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Prob > F
Between groups	2806.526	23	122.02287	13.90	0.0000
Within groups	3124.47137	356	8.77660497		
Total	5930.99737	379	15.6490696		

4.5.2 Influence of Source Attractiveness on the Decision-making of Domestic Tourists in Kenya

The second objective of the study was to examine the influence of source attractiveness on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Source attractiveness encompasses characteristics such as physical attractiveness, familiarity, likability, and perceived similarity between the influencer and the audience. According to the Source Attractiveness Model developed by McGuire, William J. (1985), individuals are more likely to be persuaded by communicators whom they perceive as attractive, familiar, similar to themselves, and likable. The findings are presented in the table below.

Table 4.7 Source Attractiveness

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
If I find an SMI physically attractive, I will travel to a destination they have posted about	3.586	.749
The familiarity of an SMI will make me go on holiday to a destination they have posted about	4.019	.721
When considering an information source, I am likely to be influenced by their likability	4.181	.995
The feeling of similarity between myself and the information source significantly influences my perception of the trustworthiness of the information provided	4.317	.933
The perceived likability of the information source greatly impacts my willingness to follow their advice or recommendations.	4.298	.789
I am likely to trust the advice or recommendations of an information source who shares similar experiences or backgrounds with me	3.998	.849

The results show that respondents strongly agreed that the feeling of similarity between themselves and the information source significantly influences their perception of the trustworthiness of the information provided ($M = 4.317$, $SD = 0.933$). This was the highest-rated aspect of source attractiveness. The finding suggests that domestic tourists

are more likely to trust information from influencers with whom they share common experiences, values, lifestyles, or backgrounds. Similarity creates a sense of identification and social connection, making audiences perceive the influencer as more relatable and authentic. This finding is consistent with the work of Schouten et al., (2020), who found that perceived similarity between influencers and followers strengthens trust and enhances the persuasive power of influencer endorsements. In tourism contexts, tourists often rely on recommendations from individuals they can identify with because such recommendations are perceived as more realistic and relevant to their personal circumstances.

Similarly, respondents agreed that the perceived likability of the information source greatly impacts their willingness to follow advice or recommendations ($M = 4.298$, $SD = 0.789$). This finding suggests that likability is a crucial determinant of influence in tourism decision-making. Influencers who are friendly, engaging, and pleasant tend to establish stronger emotional connections with their audiences, increasing the likelihood that followers will accept and act on their recommendations. The relatively low standard deviation indicates broad agreement among respondents regarding the importance of likability. This result supports the findings of Sokolova et al., (2020), who reported that followers are more likely to trust and imitate influencers whom they find likable and relatable.

The respondents also agreed that they are likely to be influenced by the likability of an information source when evaluating information ($M = 4.181$, $SD = 0.995$). This result further reinforces the importance of interpersonal appeal in shaping consumer behavior. The findings suggest that beyond the quality of information provided, tourists evaluate the personality and character of the influencer when deciding whether to trust and act upon travel recommendations. This observation aligns with the findings of Freberg et al. (2011), who found that social media influencers derive much of their influence from

personal characteristics that foster admiration and emotional attachment among followers.

Another important finding is that respondents agreed that the familiarity of a social media influencer would motivate them to visit a destination promoted by that influencer ($M = 4.019$, $SD = 0.721$). Familiarity refers to the extent to which audiences recognize and are accustomed to an influencer through repeated exposure. The relatively low standard deviation indicates a strong consensus among respondents. This finding suggests that influencers who consistently engage with audiences and maintain an active online presence are more likely to shape tourism decisions. In tourism marketing, repeated exposure to destination-related content from familiar influencers may increase destination awareness and encourage travel intentions.

The findings further indicate that respondents agreed that they are likely to trust advice or recommendations from information sources who share similar experiences or backgrounds with them ($M = 3.998$, $SD = 0.849$). This result complements the earlier finding on similarity and trustworthiness. It suggests that domestic tourists place considerable value on experiential congruence when evaluating tourism information. Influencers who share similar socioeconomic backgrounds, travel preferences, or cultural experiences may be perceived as more credible because followers believe their recommendations are more applicable to their own situations. This finding is consistent with the study by Djafarova et al. (2017), who found that consumers often trust influencers who appear authentic and relatable rather than distant celebrities.

Although still within the agreement category, the lowest-rated statement was that if respondents find a social media influencer physically attractive, they will travel to a destination that the influencer has posted about ($M = 3.586$, $SD = 0.749$). While respondents generally agreed with this statement, the lower mean suggests that physical attractiveness alone is less influential than similarity, familiarity, and likability. This

finding indicates that Kenyan domestic tourists are more persuaded by relational and psychological factors than by appearance alone. The result partially supports earlier studies such as those by Kahle et al. (1985), which found that physical attractiveness can positively influence attitudes and behavioral intentions. However, the present findings suggest that attractiveness may be insufficient on its own to drive tourism decisions unless accompanied by authenticity, relatability, and trustworthiness.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that source attractiveness significantly influences the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. However, the dimensions of attractiveness that exert the greatest influence are not necessarily physical appearance but rather similarity, familiarity, and likability. This pattern reflects a shift in contemporary influencer marketing, where audiences increasingly value authenticity and relatability over celebrity status or physical beauty. The findings support the arguments of Lou et al. (2019), who found that influencers are effective because followers perceive them as ordinary people with whom they can identify, rather than distant public figures.

From a tourism marketing perspective, these findings imply that destination marketers should collaborate with influencers who possess strong audience relationships and high levels of relatability rather than focusing exclusively on physical attractiveness or popularity. Influencers who share authentic travel experiences, engage meaningfully with followers, and demonstrate similarities with their audience are likely to generate greater trust and stronger behavioral intentions among domestic tourists.

4.5.2.1 One-sample t-test for Source Attractiveness

Considering the hypothesis being tested,

H02. Source attractiveness has no significant effect in the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya

$$H_0 : \nu = 3.4$$

vs

$$H_1 : \nu > 3.4$$

Source attractiveness equally yielded the following findings. Since $t(379) = 95$, $p < 0.000$, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that $\mu > 3.4$, which implies that the mean score of the source attractiveness index is above the neutral position, meaning that source attractiveness can be used to predict the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The analysis of variance also confirms the significance of the model between source attractiveness and decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya F-test p-value < 0.000 as shown in table 4.8;

Table 4.8 Analysis of Variance for Source Attractiveness

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Prob > F
Between groups	3692.52979	25	147.701192	23.36	0.0000
Within groups	2238.46758	354	6.32335475		
Total	5930.99737	379	14.3616394		

4.5.3 Effect of Source Power on the Decision-making of Domestic Tourists in Kenya

The third objective of the study sought to examine the effect of source power on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Source power refers to the ability of a communicator to influence the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of others because of certain forms of social influence. Drawing from the classic social power framework developed by French et al. (1959), source power can arise from admiration (referent power), expertise (expert power), rewards (reward power), and legitimacy (legitimate power). In the context of social media influencer marketing, source power determines the extent to which followers are willing to accept recommendations and translate them into behavioral decisions such as visiting a tourist destination.

Table 4.9 Source Power

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
I admire the SMI's I follow on social media (referent power)	4.153	.705
The SMI's I follow are experts in their fields (expert power).	3.937	1.217
The SMI's I follow often offer rewards to their followers (reward power).	4.256	.777
The SMI's I follow are entitled to give me instructions (legitimate power).	3.765	.823

The highest-rated statement was that the social media influencers respondents follow often offer rewards to their followers ($M = 4.256$, $SD = 0.777$). This finding suggests that reward power is the most influential form of source power among domestic tourists in Kenya. Reward power refers to an individual's ability to influence others by providing incentives, benefits, or valued outcomes. In the context of social media tourism marketing, rewards may include travel discounts, giveaways, promotional codes, sponsored trips, contests, exclusive destination information, or opportunities to participate in tourism campaigns. The high mean score indicates that followers recognize and value these incentives, which can significantly shape travel intentions and destination choices. This finding is consistent with the work of French et al. (1959), who identified reward power as one of the most effective mechanisms for influencing behavior. It also aligns with more recent influencer marketing studies by Ki, and Kim, (2019), who found that followers are more likely to engage with influencer content and act upon recommendations when tangible benefits are attached.

From a tourism perspective, this finding suggests that domestic tourists are not only influenced by information but also by the perceived value they can obtain through influencer-promoted offers. This demonstrates that influencer marketing can function as both an informational and promotional tool in stimulating domestic tourism demand.

The second-highest mean score was recorded for the statement that respondents admire the social media influencers they follow ($M = 4.153$, $SD = 0.705$). This finding reflects strong referent power among influencers. Referent power occurs when individuals identify with, admire, or aspire to emulate another person. The relatively low standard deviation indicates substantial agreement among respondents, suggesting that admiration of influencers is widespread among domestic tourists. This finding implies that many followers view influencers as role models whose travel choices, lifestyle, and experiences are worth emulating.

The finding supports the arguments of Kelman, (1961), who argued that identification is a major source of social influence. Individuals tend to adopt behaviors promoted by people they admire because doing so reinforces their social identity and self-concept. In tourism, followers may choose destinations recommended by admired influencers because visiting such destinations allows them to experience a lifestyle they aspire to achieve. The finding is also consistent with studies by Djafarova, and Rushworth, (2017), who found that social media users often perceive influencers as relatable role models whose recommendations strongly affect consumer decisions. Unlike traditional celebrities, influencers often create closer and more personal relationships with followers, increasing the effectiveness of referent power.

The respondents also agreed that the influencers they follow are experts in their fields ($M = 3.937$, $SD = 1.217$). This finding indicates that expert power plays a significant role in influencing domestic tourism decisions. Expert power arises when followers perceive an individual as possessing superior knowledge, skills, or experience in a particular area.

The relatively high mean score suggests that many respondents view influencers as knowledgeable sources of tourism information. However, the larger standard deviation compared to the other variables indicates greater variation in respondents' opinions. This

variation may suggest that while some influencers are viewed as highly knowledgeable tourism experts, others are perceived primarily as entertainers or content creators rather than authoritative sources of travel information.

This finding closely mirrors the earlier findings on source credibility, where respondents strongly valued knowledge and trustworthiness but expressed some uncertainty regarding influencer competence. The result suggests that expertise remains important, but tourists do not automatically assume that all influencers possess expert-level knowledge. The finding supports the work of Lou, and Yuan, (2019), who found that influencer expertise positively affects trust, engagement, and purchase intentions. Similarly, Ohanian, (1990) identified expertise as one of the most important dimensions influencing audience acceptance of endorsed messages.

For domestic tourism in Kenya, this suggests that influencers who demonstrate extensive knowledge of local destinations, travel logistics, culture, and tourism experiences are likely to exert stronger influence over potential travelers than those who merely possess large follower counts.

The lowest mean score, though still within the agreement range, was recorded for the statement that social media influencers are entitled to give followers instructions ($M = 3.765$, $SD = 0.823$). This reflects legitimate power, which refers to influence arising from a perceived right or authority to direct others' behavior.

Although respondents generally agreed with this statement, the comparatively lower mean indicates that legitimate power is less influential than reward, referent, and expert power. This finding is unsurprising because social media influencers typically operate in informal environments where relationships are based on voluntary engagement rather than formal authority.

Unlike government officials, tour operators, employers, or organizational leaders, influencers do not possess institutional authority over followers. Consequently, followers may be willing to consider influencer recommendations but may not necessarily perceive influencers as individuals with the right to instruct them. This finding aligns with the observations of Raven, (2008), who noted that legitimate power is generally weaker in voluntary social relationships than in formal organizational settings. In social media environments, influence is more likely to emerge through attraction, expertise, and relationship-building than through formal authority. The result also suggests that domestic tourists maintain a degree of independence in their travel decisions. While influencers may shape perceptions and preferences, tourists ultimately retain personal control over destination choices and travel behavior.

The findings are broadly consistent with previous studies examining social media influencer power and consumer behavior. For example, Ki, and Kim, (2019) found that influencer characteristics significantly affect consumer trust and behavioral intentions, particularly when followers perceive influencers as authentic and capable of providing value. Similarly, Sokolova, and Kefi, (2020) demonstrated that parasocial relationships increase the persuasive power of influencers by fostering admiration and emotional attachment.

The present findings further suggest that in the Kenyan domestic tourism context, reward power and referent power appear more influential than expert and legitimate power. This differs slightly from some Western studies, which often identify expertise as the strongest driver of influence. The difference may reflect the growing importance of engagement-based marketing strategies in emerging digital tourism markets, where followers respond strongly to interactive promotions, incentives, and personal relationships with influencers.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that source power significantly influences the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Among the four dimensions examined, reward power emerged as the strongest influence, followed by referent power, expert power, and legitimate power. This pattern suggests that domestic tourists are primarily influenced by the tangible benefits influencers offer and the admiration they feel toward them, rather than by formal authority.

4.5.3.1 One-sample t-test for Source Power

Considering the hypothesis being tested,

H03. Source power has no significant effect in the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya

$$H_0 : \nu = 3.4$$

vs

$$H_1 : \nu > 3.4$$

Source power equally yielded the following findings. Since $t(379) = 86$, $p < 0.000$, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that $\mu > 3.4$, which implies that the mean score of the source power index is above the neutral position, meaning that source power can be used to predict the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The analysis of variance also confirms the significance of the model between source power and decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya F-test p-value < 0.000 as shown in table 4.10

Table 4.10 Analysis of Variance for Source Powe

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Prob > F
Between groups	3051.86647	11	277.442407	35.46	0.0000
Within groups	2879.1309	368	7.82372526		
Total	5930.99737	379	14.3616394		

4.5.4 Influence of Source Metrics on the Decision-making of Domestic Tourists in Kenya

The fourth specific objective of the study was to examine the influence of source metrics on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Source metrics refer to the quantitative indicators used to evaluate the effectiveness and influence of social media influencers, including reach, follower count, likes, comments, shares, engagement rates, and audience exposure. In the digital marketing context, these metrics serve as signals of popularity, credibility, influence, and audience acceptance. This section presents the findings related to the source metrics used by tour and travel companies in Kenya to identify suitable social media influencers for domestic tourism promotion. Data was obtained from questionnaires as well as as key informant interviews with marketing and social media managers.

Table 4.11 Source Metrics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
I regularly see social media influencers promoting tours and travel experiences within Kenya.	3.918	.801
I am exposed to many different social media influencers who promote domestic travel in Kenya.	4.328	.721
Social media influencers effectively reach me with information	3.872	.897

about tours and travel destinations in Kenya.

I receive travel information from social media influencers alongside other forms of travel promotion (such as advertisements, websites, or word of mouth).	3.809	.393
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Content shared by social media influencers positively influences my decision in booking tours or travelling within Kenya.	3.721	.817
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The number of followers, likes, comments, and shares on an influencer's content affects how I judge the effectiveness of their travel promotions.	3.992	.634
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The findings in table 4.11 revealed that respondents frequently encounter social media influencers promoting domestic tourism experiences ($M = 3.918$, $SD = 0.801$). This suggests that influencer-generated tourism content has become a regular feature of the digital environment in which Kenyan consumers interact. The relatively high mean indicates that domestic tourists are routinely exposed to travel-related content through social media platforms.

This finding reflects the broader digital transformation occurring within the tourism sector. Traditionally, tourism promotion relied heavily on brochures, travel fairs, television advertisements, and word-of-mouth communication. However, the emergence of social media has significantly altered how tourism information is disseminated and consumed. The finding supports the observations of Xiang, and Gretzel, (2010), who argued that social media has become one of the primary information sources influencing travel planning and destination selection.

The interview findings reinforce this conclusion. Respondent 1 noted that "the world is switching to digital," highlighting the industry's recognition that consumers increasingly seek travel information online. The frequent engagement of influencers reported by Respondent 8 further suggests that influencer marketing has become institutionalized within tourism marketing strategies rather than being an occasional promotional tactic.

The highest mean score was recorded for the statement that respondents are exposed to many different social media influencers promoting domestic travel ($M = 4.328$, $SD = 0.721$). This finding suggests that domestic tourists are not dependent on a single influencer or source of travel information but instead interact with multiple influencers across different platforms and content categories.

This finding aligns with studies by Abidin, (2016), who found that consumers often follow numerous influencers simultaneously and use information from multiple content creators to validate travel-related decisions. The high agreement among respondents suggests that domestic tourism promotion in Kenya has evolved into a highly competitive influencer ecosystem where multiple influencers contribute to destination awareness and travel inspiration. From a decision-making perspective, exposure to multiple influencers may reduce uncertainty and perceived travel risk by providing tourists with diverse perspectives on destinations and travel experiences.

Respondents agreed that social media influencers effectively reach them with information about tours and travel destinations ($M = 3.872$, $SD = 0.897$). This finding indicates that influencers have become important communication intermediaries between tourism organizations and potential travelers. The result supports the concept of two-step flow communication proposed by Katz and Lazarsfeld, (1955), which argues that information often reaches audiences through opinion leaders who interpret and transmit messages to followers. Social media influencers function as modern opinion leaders by translating tourism marketing messages into relatable and engaging content.

However, the slightly higher standard deviation indicates that not all respondents perceive influencer communication equally. This variation may arise from differences in platform preferences, demographic characteristics, travel interests, or levels of trust in influencers. Some tourists may actively engage with travel influencers, while others may rely more heavily on official tourism websites, peer reviews, or personal

recommendations. The findings suggest that while influencers are effective communication channels, their effectiveness may vary across audience segments.

Respondents agreed that they receive tourism information from influencers alongside advertisements, websites, and word-of-mouth communication ($M = 3.809$, $SD = 0.393$). The very low standard deviation indicates remarkable consistency among respondents regarding this perception. This finding demonstrates that influencer marketing does not operate in isolation but rather forms part of a broader integrated marketing communication (IMC) framework. Consumers typically combine information from multiple sources before making travel decisions.

The interview findings strongly support this observation. Respondent 4 indicated that social media alone is insufficient and that companies complement influencer campaigns with paid advertisements on Instagram and Facebook. Similarly, Respondent 2 described the use of traditional media, WhatsApp communication, flyers, and direct customer engagement.

These findings align with the work of Mangold and Faulds, (2009), who argued that social media should be viewed as one component of an integrated communication strategy rather than a replacement for traditional promotional channels. For domestic tourism marketers, this suggests that influencer campaigns are most effective when integrated with broader promotional efforts rather than used as standalone marketing tools.

Respondents agreed that influencer content positively influences their decisions to book tours and travel within Kenya ($M = 3.721$, $SD = 0.817$). Although this was among the lower mean scores in the section, it remains significant because it directly measures behavioral influence rather than exposure or awareness. The finding suggests that influencer marketing successfully moves beyond awareness creation to affect actual travel intentions and purchasing behavior. According to the Consumer Decision-Making

Model, information obtained during the information search stage significantly influences evaluation of alternatives and final purchase decisions.

The result supports previous studies by Djafarova and Rushworth, (2017), as well as Lou, and Yuan, (2019), who found that influencer-generated content significantly affects consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. However, the moderate variability suggests that the influence of social media content differs among individuals. This may be explained by differences in trust levels, travel experience, income, age, destination familiarity, and personal motivations. Some tourists may be highly susceptible to influencer recommendations, while others rely more on personal research and previous travel experiences.

One of the most important findings relates to the role of engagement metrics. Respondents agreed that the number of followers, likes, comments, and shares influences how they judge the effectiveness of travel promotions ($M = 3.992$, $SD = 0.634$).

The interview findings strongly reinforce this observation. Respondent 10 emphasized the importance of both follower count and engagement metrics in assessing reach and resonance. Similarly, Respondent 7 noted that influencers with hundreds of thousands of likes can potentially expose tourism content to vast audiences.

Interestingly, the interviews reveal that practitioners view engagement metrics more strategically than consumers. While consumers interpret high engagement as a signal of credibility, marketers use these metrics to estimate campaign reach, audience resonance, and potential return on investment. This finding is consistent with studies by De Veirman et al., (2017), who found that influencers with larger follower bases are often perceived as more credible and influential by consumers.

The results suggest that source metrics influence tourist decision-making both directly and indirectly. Directly, engagement metrics affect how consumers perceive influencer credibility and destination attractiveness. Indirectly, these metrics guide tourism companies in selecting influencers capable of generating awareness, engagement, and travel bookings. Consequently, source metrics represent not merely performance indicators but important mechanisms through which influencer marketing shapes domestic tourism behavior in Kenya.

a) One-sample t-test for Source Metrics

The one-sample *t*-test is used when we want to know whether our sample comes from a particular population, but we do not have full population information available to us. The one-sample *t*-test is used only for tests of the sample mean. In order to test the positivity of the influence of the independent variables on the choice of social network sites, the test value of 3.4 was arrived at based on the six Likert scale items, which were assigned codes of 1 to 5 where 5 = Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3 = Neutral (N), 2 = Disagree (D), and 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD).

Considering the hypothesis being tested was,

H04. Source metrics have no significant effect in the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya

$$H_0 : \nu = 3.4$$

vs

$$H_1 : \nu > 3.4$$

Source metrics equally yielded the following findings. Since $t(379) = 141$, $p < 0.000$, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that $\mu > 3.4$, which implies that the mean score of the source metrics index is above the neutral position, meaning that source metrics

can be used to predict the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The analysis of variance also confirms the significance of the model between source metrics and decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya F-test p-value <0.000 as shown in table 4.12.

Table 4.12 Analysis of Variance for Source Metrics

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Prob > F
Between groups	4327.77209	23	188.164004	41.78	0.0000
Within groups	1603.22527	356	4.50344178		
Total	5930.99737	379	15.6490696		

4.5.5 Moderating effect of persuasive techniques on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

The fifth objective of the study sought to examine the moderating effect of persuasive techniques on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Persuasive techniques refer to communication strategies designed to influence attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral intentions. In tourism marketing, these techniques include social proof, likability, testimonials, special offers, scarcity, reciprocity, and endorsements. Results shown in table 4.13.

Table 4.13 Persuasive Techniques

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
When considering a domestic destination, how much does the likability of the tour guide or travel influencer promoting it impact your decision	4.16	.922
Have you ever chosen a domestic destination primarily because you found the individuals associated with it likable?	3.586	.749
How much does observing other tourists visiting a domestic destination affect your perception of its desirability?	4.433	.793
Are you more likely to spend money on additional services or upgrades when you receive a special offer or concession from a travel company?	4.338	.803
Does the likability of a tour guide or travel influencer impact your interest in a particular type of domestic destination (e.g., adventure, cultural, historical)?	3.872	.897
How likely are you to visit a domestic destination if you see that it is popular or frequently visited by other tourists?	4.328	1.133
Do you often feel compelled to choose a domestic destination after receiving a special offer or concession from a travel company?	3.17	1.508
To what extent do positive reviews or testimonials about a domestic destination influence your decision to visit it?	4.42	.787

The strongest persuasive factor identified was the influence of observing other tourists visiting a destination ($M = 4.433$, $SD = 0.793$). Similarly, respondents strongly agreed that positive reviews and testimonials influence their decision to visit a destination ($M = 4.420$, $SD = 0.787$), while destination popularity also significantly influenced travel intentions ($M = 4.328$, $SD = 1.133$).

These findings collectively demonstrate the powerful role of social proof in domestic tourism decision-making. Social proof occurs when individuals look to the actions and opinions of others to determine appropriate behavior, particularly under conditions of uncertainty. Tourism products are largely experiential and intangible before consumption, making travelers highly dependent on cues from other consumers. According to Cialdini, (2009), social proof becomes especially influential when people

are uncertain about a decision and seek reassurance from the behavior of others. Domestic tourists often face uncertainty regarding destination quality, safety, value for money, and overall experience. Seeing other tourists visit a destination or reading positive testimonials reduces this uncertainty and increases confidence in the decision-making process.

The high mean score for observing other tourists visiting destinations suggests that visual evidence shared through social media significantly influences destination desirability. Tourists appear to interpret high visitation levels as indicators of destination quality and satisfaction. This finding aligns with the work of Litvin et al., (2008), who found that electronic word-of-mouth significantly influences travel planning and destination choice.

The findings also support recent tourism studies showing that user-generated content, reviews, ratings, and testimonials are often perceived as more trustworthy than traditional advertising because they originate from fellow consumers rather than marketers. Therefore, social proof appears to moderate tourism decision-making by enhancing the credibility and attractiveness of tourism information.

Respondents strongly agreed that they are more likely to spend money on additional services or upgrades when they receive special offers or concessions from travel companies ($M = 4.338$, $SD = 0.803$). However, respondents were largely undecided on whether they often feel compelled to choose a destination solely because of a special offer ($M = 3.170$, $SD = 1.508$).

This distinction is particularly important. It suggests that special offers influence purchasing behavior differently from destination selection behavior. In tourism, discounts, upgrades, complimentary services, and exclusive packages may encourage tourists to increase spending.

However, the relatively low mean score regarding destination choice indicates that while tourists appreciate incentives, they do not necessarily allow discounts alone to determine where they travel. This suggests that destination decisions are more complex and involve multiple factors such as destination attractiveness, safety, accessibility, personal interests, and recommendations from trusted sources. The high standard deviation ($SD = 1.508$) further indicates substantial disagreement among respondents. Some tourists appear highly responsive to promotions, while others remain largely unaffected. This variability may reflect differences in income levels, travel motivations, budget constraints, and travel experience. These findings are consistent with the work of Kotler et al., (2017), who observed that promotional incentives are generally more effective in stimulating additional purchases than in fundamentally altering destination preferences.

The results indicate that the likability of travel influencers and tour guides significantly affects tourism decisions. Respondents agreed that the likability of an influencer impacts destination decisions ($M = 4.160$, $SD = 0.922$) and influences interest in specific destination types ($M = 3.872$, $SD = 0.897$). Additionally, respondents agreed that they have chosen destinations because they found the individuals promoting them likable ($M = 3.586$, $SD = 0.749$).

These findings suggest that likability serves as an important emotional pathway through which tourism persuasion occurs. Unlike informational influence, which depends on facts and evidence, likability operates through affective responses and interpersonal attraction. Social media influencers often build strong parasocial relationships with followers, creating feelings of familiarity and friendship despite the absence of direct interaction. The findings suggest that tourists may transfer positive feelings toward influencers to the destinations they promote. In psychological terms, this process is known as affect transfer, whereby favorable attitudes toward a communicator become associated with the promoted object. This result supports the findings of Sokolova and

Kefi, (2020), who found that likability and parasocial interaction significantly increase consumers' willingness to follow influencer recommendations.

The findings align with several previous studies in tourism and influencer marketing. Research by Cheung, et al., (2012) found that electronic word-of-mouth and online reviews significantly influence consumer decision-making. Similarly, Filieri, (2015) reported that online reviews reduce uncertainty and positively affect destination selection. The strong influence of popularity and observational cues is also consistent with studies by Babić Rosario et al. (2016), who found that consumer-generated reviews significantly influence purchase intentions across multiple industries, including tourism.

The findings concerning likability and influencer attractiveness align with the work of Djafarova and Rushworth, (2017), who demonstrated that consumers are more likely to trust and emulate influencers with whom they feel an emotional connection. However, the relatively weak influence of special offers on destination choice contrasts with some traditional tourism marketing studies that emphasize price promotions as major determinants of travel behavior. This suggests that contemporary domestic tourists may prioritize authentic experiences, destination quality, and peer validation over purely financial incentives.

The findings demonstrate that persuasive techniques significantly moderate the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Among the persuasive techniques examined, social proof emerged as the most influential factor, followed by reciprocity through special offers and influencer likability.

4.6 Diagnostic Tests

Diagnostic tests were performed to test the assumptions of linear regression. The assumptions tested were normality, autocorrelation, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and linear relationship. In case of violation of the regression assumptions, the confidence

intervals, as well as other scientific insights derived from the regression model, may be regarded as misleading, biased, or inefficient. Therefore, the inferences derived are incapable of being generalised to other data.

4.6.1 Linearity Test

When the value of sig. Deviation from the linearity > 0.05 , then in the multiple regression model, it can be said that the predictor variables significantly affect the response variable. If the value sig. Deviation from linearity is < 0.05 , then the relationship between the predictor and the response variable is partially significant. In Table 4.14, the sig. value of Source credibility= 0.663; Source attractiveness= 0.555; Source power = 0.563; Source metrics = 0.674 and Persuasive techniques = 0.557. Concerning these results, the appropriate basis for decision-making in our multiple linear regression model analysis can be concluded that there is a significant linear relationship between all the variables. Thus, increasing the effect of the predictors improves the response variable.

Table 4.14 Coefficients of Linearity Test

Model	Sig. 95.0% Confidence Interval for Collinearity Statistics			
	B	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance VIF
Source credibility	.663	-13.627	11.412	.551 1.816
Source attractiveness	.555	-19.784	23.728	.192 5.200
Source power	.563	-21.061	18.506	.163 6.136
Source metrics	.674	-10.159	11.100	.600 1.665
Persuasive techniques	.557	-39.612	45.193	.268 3.734

4.6.2 Normality Test

A normality test determines whether a dataset is modeled for normal distribution. A normal or nearly normal distribution is a fundamental condition of many statistical functions. Normally distributed data assumes a symmetrical or bell-shaped curve with a higher frequency of scores in the midpoint and lower frequencies towards the extremes.

There are two main methods of assessing normality: graphically and statistically. Tests for normality include; skewness and Kurtosis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, and the Shapiro-Wilk. This research adopts the Shapiro-Wilk test due to the study's small sample size. The null hypothesis for this test is that the data are normally distributed. The Prob < W value listed in the output is the p-value. If the chosen alpha level is 0.05 and the p-value is less than 0.05, then the null hypothesis that the data are normally distributed is rejected. If the p-value is more significant than 0.05, then the null hypothesis is not rejected. As tabulated in Table 4.15, the p-values of all the study variables are more significant than 0.05, thus confirming that the data is normally distributed.

Table 4.15 Normality Test

Variable	Obs	W	V	z	Prob>z
Source credibility	380	0.92223	1.299	0.510	0.30494
Source attractiveness	380	0.92945	1.179	0.321	0.37427
Source power	380	0.96644	0.561	-1.127	0.87020
Source metrics	380	0.96727	0.547	-1.176	0.88023
Moderating effect of Persuasive	380	0.97566	0.407	-1.753	0.96023

4.6.3 Multicollinearity Test

The extensively used statistical tests for identifying multicollinearity are tolerance value and variance inflation factor (VIF). The tolerance value is the proportion of variance in the predictor variable that is not explained by other explanatory variables (Sekeran & Bougie, 2013). A Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) measures the extent to which multicollinearity has increased the variance of an estimated coefficient. When there is a correlation among predictor variables, the standard error of the coefficients of the predictors increases, and as a result, the variance of the predictor's coefficients is inflated.

The value of $VIF = 1$ shows that the predictor variables are not correlated. Nevertheless, when the value of VIF is $1 < VIF < 5$, it shows that the variables are moderately correlated. The VIF between 5 to 10 shows that variables are highly correlated. According to the results in Table 4.16 of regression coefficients, the value of VIF is $1 < VIF < 5$. Since all the VIF values were below 5, it was found that there was no multicollinearity among the independent variables. This implies that the results of the multiple regression equation are not misleading since the independent variables in the multiple regression equation are not highly correlated.

Table 4.16 Multicollinearity Test Statistics

Variables	Tolerance	VIF
Source credibility	0.788	1.251
Source attractiveness	0.800	1.237
Source power	0.766	1.290
Source metrics	0.802	1.263

4.6.4 Heteroskedasticity Test

Violation of homoscedasticity tends to inhibit critical evaluation of forecast errors of standard deviation, which often leads to confidence intervals that are incredibly narrow or extremely wide. Heteroscedasticity in this study was assessed using the Breusch-

Pagan test. The null hypothesis for this test was that the error variances were equal and were a multiple function of variables. Homoscedasticity normally occurs when the p-value exceeds the significance level (0.05). As indicated in Table 4.17, the p-value was 0.3274, more significant than the significance level of 0.05. This implies that there was homoscedasticity in the regression model.

Table 4.17 Breusch-Pagan test for Heteroscedasticity

Ho: Constant variance	
Variables: Fitted with values of Domestic tourist decision-making	
Chi2 (1)	0.96
Prob>chi2	0.3274

4.7 Correlation Analysis

To determine the degree of relationship between the independent variables, Pearson's Correlation was performed as illustrated in Table 4.18. Pearson's Correlation (r) is a measure of the strength of the association between two variables. Pearson correlation coefficient ranges between zero and one, where the strength of association increases with the correlation coefficients' value increase. The current study employed the correlation coefficient ratings where 0.80 to 1.00 depicts a very strong relationship, 0.60 to 0.79 is strong, 0.40 to 0.59 is moderate, and 0.20 to 0.39 is weak. This study's findings indicate that the relationship between all the variables, that is, Source Credibility, Source Attractiveness, Source Power, and Source Metrics, was significant since at a significance level of 5 percent and 95 percent confidence level, the two-tail test is 0.01.

First, the results showed a moderate relationship between source credibility and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya ($r = 0.577, p < 0.001$). The relationship

was significant since the p-value was less than a 1% significance level. These findings concur (Raafat et al, 2023), who found a positive correlation between the credibility of SMIs with the social media users' travel intentions to the recommended destination in Egypt. Dedeoglu, (2019) research findings also found that tourists' perceptions of source credibility regarding social media content had a positive impact on vacation decision-making. Mabkhot, Isa and Mabkhot (2022) also found a significant link between SMIs and purchase intentions, with credibility seen to play a mediating role between these variables.

Secondly, the results revealed a strong relationship between source attractiveness and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya ($r = 0.700$, $p < 0.001$). The relationship was significant since the p-value was less than a 1% significance level. These findings are consistent with the research by Negm & El Halawany (2020), who found a positive correlation between the attractiveness and trustworthiness of SMIs and consumers' intentions to plan a vacation. Further, the attractiveness of vloggers has a significant positive effect on the viewers' travel intentions (Chen et al., 2021). The perceived trustworthiness and quality of the information shared by a blogger are two factors that can highly influence their followers' intention to accept a travel recommendation (Magno & Cassia, 2018).

Third, the results revealed a moderate relationship between source power and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya ($r = 0.526$, $p < 0.001$). The relationship was significant since the p-value was less than a 1% significance level. The research findings contradict Chen et al. (2018), who argued that platforms specializing in tourism have a stronger influence on travel behaviors than generalist websites.

Last, the results also revealed a very strong relationship between source metrics and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya ($r = 0.836$, $p < 0.001$). The relationship was significant since the p-value was less than a 1% significance level. This study

conforms with the findings of Jaya and Prianthara, (2020), who found that source metrics can positively enhance the image of a tourist destination. Thus, tourist satisfaction will rise, leading to an increase in repeat visits and word-of-mouth advertising.

Table 4.18 Correlation Coefficients

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Tourists Decision Making	1.000				
(2) Source Credibility	0.577***	1.000			
(3) Source Attractiveness	0.700***	0.736***	1.000		
(4) Source Power	0.526***	0.503***	0.553***	1.000	
(5) Source Metrics	0.836***	0.726***	0.813***	0.637***	1.000

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

4.8 Regression Analysis

Multivariate regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between independent variables (Source Credibility, Source Attractiveness, Source Power, and Source Metrics) and the dependent variable (Decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya).

4.8.1 Model Summary of the Study Variables

The model summary was used to explain the variation in the dependent variable that the independent variables could explain. The r-squared for the relationship between the independent and dependent variables was 0.703. This implied that 70.3% of the variation in the dependent variable (Decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya) could be explained by independent variables (Source Credibility, Source Attractiveness, Source Power, and Source Metrics). The remaining 29.7% suggests that other factors can be attributed to variations in the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya that were

not discussed in this study. The correlation coefficient (R) shows the strength of the relationship between the study variables. From the findings, the variables were strongly and positively related, as indicated by $r = 0.838$.

Table 4.19 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.838 ^a	.703	.700	2.07819

a. Predictors: (Constant), Source Credibility, Source Attractiveness, Source Power, Source Metrics

4.8.2 Analysis of Variance

To determine the fitness of the model to predict the dependent variable (Decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya), the study conducted an F-test at 95% confidence level. The significance of the study variables was determined based on the P-value of the variable coefficients at a 0.05 significance level. The decision in the fitness of the model is accepted if the p-value is below 0.05 and rejected if it is above 0.05. The findings in Table 4.19 showed that the Prob > F value was 0.000. Since the F-calculated was greater than the F-critical and the p-value 0.000 was less than 0.05, the model was considered a good fit for the data. Therefore, the model can be used to predict the influence of Source Credibility, Source Attractiveness, Source Power and Source Metrics on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

Table 4.20 ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4179.44	4	1044.86	223.70	.000 ^b
	Residual	1751.56	375	4.67		
	Total	5930.997	379			

a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Decision Making

b. Predictors: (Constant), Source Credibility, Source Attractiveness, Source Power, Source Metrics

4.8.3 Beta Coefficients of the Study Variables

From the coefficients in Table 4.20, the following regression model was fitted;

The regression model was as follows:

$$Y = 18.387 - 0.069X_1 + 0.055X_2 - 0.016X_3 + 0.698X_4 + \varepsilon$$

According to the results, Source Credibility has a negative significant effect on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya $\beta_1 = -0.069$, which is significant at a 5% level of significance. The findings contradict Lim et al. (2017), who found that individuals usually tend to observe one's trustful characteristics before getting to believe and trust in what that person says. Travellers would seek information on social media from influencers who are credible and experienced in order to make purchasing decisions wisely.

The results also revealed that Source Attractiveness has a positive significant effect on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya, $\beta_1 = 0.055$, which is significant at a 5% level of significance. These findings are consistent with the research by Negm & El Halawany (2020), who found a positive correlation between the attractiveness and

trustworthiness of SMIs and consumers' intentions to plan a vacation. Further, the attractiveness of vloggers has a significant positive effect on the viewers' travel intentions (Chen et al., 2021). The perceived trustworthiness and quality of the information shared by a blogger are two factors that can highly influence their followers' intention to accept a travel recommendation (Magno & Cassia, 2018).

Furthermore, the results revealed that Source Power has a negative insignificant effect on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya $\beta_1 = -0.016$, which is insignificant at 10%, 5% and 1% levels of significance. The research findings resonate with Chen et al. (2018), who argued that platforms specializing in tourism have a stronger influence on travel behaviors than generalist websites.

In addition, the results revealed that Source Metrics has a positive significant effect on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya $\beta_1 = 0.698$, which is significant at a 1% level of significance. This study conforms with the findings of Jaya and Prianthara, (2020), who found that source metrics can positively enhance the image of a tourist destination. Thus, tourist satisfaction will rise, leading to an increase in repeat visits and word-of-mouth advertising.

Table 4.21 Regression Coefficients

Consumer Decision Making	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf Interval]	Sig	
Source Credibility	-.069	.028	-2.46	.014	-.124	-.014	**
Source Attractiveness	.055	.024	2.27	.023	.007	.102	**
Source Power	-.016	.044	-0.36	.721	-.103	.071	
Source Metrics	.698	.04	17.60	0	.62	.776	***
Constant	18.387	.847	21.71	0	16.723	20.051	***

Mean dependent var	44.180	SD dependent var	3.797
R-squared	0.703	Number of obs	377
F-test	223.70	Prob > F	0.000
Akaike crit. (AIC)	2245.728	Bayesian crit. (BIC)	2267.007

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

4.8.4 Regression Model for the Moderating effects of Persuasive Techniques

The fifth objective of the study was to determine the moderating effect of Persuasive techniques on the role of social media influencers in the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Moderation happens when the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables is dependent on a third variable (moderating variable). The effect that this variable has is termed interaction, as it affects the direction or strength of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. To achieve the fifth research objective, the study computed a moderating effect regression analysis. Persuasive techniques were introduced as the moderating variable.

The study combined all four variables (Source Credibility, Source Attractiveness, Source Power and Source Metrics) to form a new variable X. The study then used stepwise regression to establish the moderating effect of Persuasive techniques (M) on the relationship between independent variable (X) and decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya (Y).

From the model summary findings in Table 4.22, the first model for which is the regression between the role of social media influencers (X) without a moderator, Persuasive techniques (M) and interaction, the value of R-squared was 0.586, which suggests that changes in the role of social media influencers can explain 58.6% change in decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The p-value for the first model (0.000) was less than the selected level of significance (0.05), suggesting that the model was significant. The findings in the second model, which constituted the role of social media influencers, Persuasive Techniques and decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya

($X*M$) as predictors, the r-squared was 0.590. This implies that the introduction of Persuasive techniques in the second model led to a 0.004 increase in r-squared, showing that Persuasive techniques positively moderate decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

Table 4.22 Stepwise Regression with Moderation Effect

	(1) Consumer Decision Making	(2) Consumer Decision Making
Social Media Influencers	0.171*** (0.000)	0.082** (0.042)
Persuasive Techniques		-0.132 (0.183)
X*M		0.001* (0.055)
_cons	22.086*** (0.000)	30.868*** (0.000)
Observations	380	380
R-squared	0.586	0.590

p-values are in parentheses

*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1

From the model summary findings in Table 4.23, both models were significant at a 1% significance level. Thus, the two models were a good fit for the data and could be used in predicting the moderating effect of persuasive techniques on the role of social media influencers in the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

Further, by substituting the beta values as well as the constant term from the coefficient's findings for the first step of regression modeling, the following regression model was fitted:

$$Y = 22.086 + 0.171 X$$

Where X is social media influencers

The findings show that when social media influencers are held to a constant zero, the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya will be at a constant value of 22.086. The findings also show that social media influencers have a statistically significant effect on

the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya, as shown by a regression coefficient of 0.171 (p-value= .000).

By substituting the beta values as well as the constant term from model 2 emanating from the second step in regression modeling, the following regression model was fitted:

$$Y = 30.868 + 0.082 X - 0.132 M + 0.001 X * M$$

X is social media influencers, M is Persuasive techniques, and X*M is the interaction term between social media influencers and Persuasive techniques.

The findings show that when social media influencers, Persuasive techniques, and interaction (X*M) are held to a constant zero, the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya will be at a constant value of 30.868. The model also indicated that social media influencers had a positive and statistically significant effect on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya, as shown by a regression coefficient of 0.082 (p-value= 0.000). It is also seen that Persuasive techniques had a negative and insignificant effect on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya, as shown by a regression coefficient of -0.132 (p-value=0.183). On the other hand, the interaction of social media influencers and Persuasive techniques (X*M) also had a positive and significant effect on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya, as shown by a regression coefficient of 0.001 (p-value= 0.050).

Therefore, social media influencers on their own have an 8.2% effect on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. However, when interacting with Persuasive techniques, it has an effect of 0.1%. This is a clear indication that the introduction of Persuasive techniques as a moderating variable positively influences the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The study, therefore, rejects the null hypothesis and concludes that Persuasive techniques have a significant moderating effect on the

relationship between social media influencers and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

Table 4.23 Beta Coefficients for Moderation Effect

Consumer Making	Decision	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
Social influencers	media	.082	.04	2.04	.042	.003	.161	**
Persuasive Techniques		-.132	.099	-1.33	.183	-.326	.062	
X*M		.001	.001	1.92	.050	0	.003	*
Constant		30.868	4.619	6.68	0	21.794	39.942	***
Mean dependent var		44.180		SD dependent var		3.797		
R-squared		0.590		Number of obs		521		
F-test		248.358		Prob > F		0.000		
Akaike crit. (AIC)		2410.811		Bayesian (BIC)		crit. 2427.834		

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

4.8 Discussion of the Research Findings

This study sought to investigate the role of social media influencers in the decision-making process of domestic tourists in Kenya. Specifically, it examined the effects of source credibility, source attractiveness, source power, and source metrics on tourists' decisions, as well as the moderating influence of persuasive techniques employed by these influencers. The findings obtained through regression analysis and correlation tests provide valuable insights into the dynamics between these factors and how they shape the travel intentions and choices of domestic tourists within the Kenyan context.

The regression equation: $Y = 18.387 - 0.069X_1 + 0.055X_2 - 0.016X_3 + 0.698X_4 + \varepsilon$, suggests that while source credibility (X_1) and source power (X_3) have a negative impact on the decision-making of domestic tourists, source attractiveness (X_2) and Source metrics (X_4) have a positive impact. Notably, the coefficient of source metrics

(X4) having the highest value, indicating its significant influence on the decision-making process. The correlation analysis further sheds light on the relationships between the explanatory variables and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The findings indicate that all the variables (source credibility, source attractiveness, source power, and source metrics) have a significant relationship with the decision-making of domestic tourists.

Firstly, the study revealed a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.577$, $p < 0.001$) between source credibility and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. This finding resonates with previous research (Raafat et al, 2023; Dedeoglu, 2019; Asyraff et al. (2022) that highlighted the positive impact of source credibility on travel intentions and purchase decisions. Credible influencers are perceived as trustworthy and knowledgeable, which can positively impact their followers' decisions regarding travel destinations and tourism-related products or services. However, the regression analysis revealed a negative coefficient for source credibility in the regression equation with the other explanatory variables. This unexpected outcome can be attributed to the growing skepticism among social media users regarding sponsored influencer content. As influencer marketing becomes increasingly commercialized, domestic tourists may perceive highly credible influencers as motivated by financial incentives rather than genuine travel experiences. Consequently, increased perceptions of influencer credibility may not necessarily translate into stronger travel decisions. This finding can be explained through Attribution Theory, which posits that individuals attempt to determine the motives underlying observed behavior. When followers attribute influencer recommendations to commercial sponsorship rather than authentic experience, the persuasive impact of credibility may weaken. Therefore, credibility alone may no longer be sufficient to influence domestic tourists if persuasive intent is perceived to be high.

Secondly, a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.700$, $p < 0.001$) was found between source attractiveness and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. This finding is

consistent with previous studies (Negm & El Halawany, 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Magno & Cassia, 2018) that demonstrated the effect of influencer attractiveness on viewers' travel intentions and their likelihood of accepting travel recommendations. Attractive influencers are often perceived as more persuasive and appealing, which can contribute to their ability to shape their followers' travel decisions. Within the Kenyan tourism context, attractive influencers often present aspirational lifestyles, desirable travel experiences, and visually appealing destinations that resonate with domestic tourists. This finding aligns with Social Comparison Theory, which suggests that individuals compare themselves with admired or aspirational figures. Exposure to attractive influencers may encourage followers to emulate their lifestyles and travel experiences, thereby increasing travel intentions and destination choices. The results therefore suggest that attractiveness serves as an important mechanism through which influencers shape tourism-related decisions.

Thirdly, the study revealed a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.526$, $p < 0.001$) between source power and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Conversely, regression analysis revealed that source power had a negative and statistically insignificant influence when other influencer characteristics were considered. This finding differs from traditional assumptions that authority and influence automatically translate into behavioral change. A possible explanation is that Kenyan domestic tourists may place greater emphasis on authenticity, relatability, and personal experience than on authority or status. Social media platforms have democratized information sharing, allowing ordinary users and peer reviewers to exert considerable influence alongside celebrity influencers. As a result, perceived power may not significantly contribute to decision-making once credibility, attractiveness, and engagement metrics are accounted for. This finding can be interpreted through Social Influence Theory, which distinguishes between informational and normative influence. The results suggest that domestic tourists may be influenced more by informational cues such as travel experiences and recommendations rather than by the influencer's

perceived authority or power position. However, this finding contradicts the research by Chen et al. (2018), which suggested that specialized tourism platforms have a stronger influence on travel behaviors than generalist websites. The current study indicates that influencers with perceived power and authority in the tourism domain can significantly influence the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

Finally, the study found a very strong positive relationship ($r = 0.836$, $p < 0.001$) between source metrics and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. This finding aligns with the research by Jaya and Priantara (2020), which highlighted the positive impact of source metrics, such as the number of followers, likes, and shares, on enhancing the image of a tourist destination. Higher source metrics can contribute to increased tourist satisfaction, repeat visits, and positive word-of-mouth, ultimately influencing the decision-making process of domestic tourists. This finding suggests that Kenyan tourists may use social media engagement metrics as indicators of popularity, social approval, and content relevance. The results are consistent with Source Credibility Theory, which argues that audiences often rely on observable cues when evaluating message credibility. High engagement metrics may function as social proof, increasing confidence in the influencer's recommendations and encouraging favorable travel decisions. The prominence of source metrics also reflects the growing importance of digital visibility and online engagement in contemporary tourism marketing.

The study further examined the moderating effect of persuasive techniques on the relationship between social media influencers and tourist decision-making. The results showed that social media influencers independently explained 8.2 percent of the variation in decision-making, while the interaction effect involving persuasive techniques contributed only 0.1 percent. Although the moderation effect was positive, its magnitude was extremely small. Consequently, the findings suggest that persuasive techniques play only a limited supporting role in strengthening the influence of social media influencers on domestic tourists. While persuasive techniques may enhance

message effectiveness to some extent, the empirical evidence indicates that influencer characteristics themselves remain the primary drivers of tourist decision-making. The findings are partially consistent with the Theory of Reasoned Action, which proposes that attitudes influence behavioral intentions. Persuasive techniques may contribute to the formation of favorable attitudes; however, their additional contribution beyond influencer attributes appears minimal in this study.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that source attractiveness and source metrics are the most influential determinants of domestic tourists' decision-making in Kenya. The unexpected negative effect of source credibility and the insignificant influence of source power imply that traditional assumptions regarding influencer effectiveness may not fully apply within the evolving digital tourism environment. The study therefore contributes to theory by demonstrating that consumer responses to influencer characteristics are context-dependent and shaped by audience perceptions of authenticity, social proof, and persuasive intent.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The main objective of the study was to determine the effect of social media influencers on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. This chapter presents a summary of the study, the conclusions drawn, recommendations and areas for further research.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The findings collectively demonstrate that social media influencers have become a significant force in shaping domestic tourism decision-making in Kenya. The demographic profile of respondents reveals that domestic tourists are predominantly young, digitally connected, and highly engaged with social media content. The fact that most respondents discovered travel destinations through social media and acknowledged its strong influence on their travel decisions suggests that digital platforms have become central sources of tourism information and inspiration. This indicates a shift from traditional tourism marketing channels toward influencer-driven and social media-based communication. Research findings from the study objectives were summarized below.

5.2.1 Effect of Source Credibility on the Decision-making of Domestic Tourists in Kenya

The findings of this study implied that source credibility had an effect on decision-making of domestic tourists. This suggests that domestic tourists are more likely to trust and act upon recommendations from influencers they perceive as knowledgeable, authentic, and trustworthy. This reinforces the notion that successful tourism influencer marketing depends on building genuine audience trust rather than merely achieving visibility. These findings resonate with Lim et al. (2017), who found that individuals

usually tend to observe one's trustful characteristics before getting to believe and trust in what that person says. Travelers would seek information on social media from influencers who are credible and experienced in order to make purchasing decisions wisely. Similarly, according to the literature, endorsers who lack credibility or go beyond their respective expert fields could indirectly impair consumers' perceived images, causing ultimate negative purchase intentions.

The findings provide support for the Source Credibility Theory, which posits that the effectiveness of a message depends largely on the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the communicator. The results demonstrate that credible social media influencers are more likely to shape tourism-related decisions among domestic tourists. The findings also extend Attribution Theory by demonstrating that domestic tourists rely on influencer-related cues such as credibility, attractiveness, power, and social media metrics to make judgments about the reliability and authenticity of tourism information. These attributional processes influence how tourists evaluate destinations and make travel-related decisions. The study therefore provides evidence that attribution mechanisms remain relevant in digital tourism environments where social media influencers act as key information sources.

5.2.3 Influence of Source Attractiveness on the Decision-Making of Domestic Tourists in Kenya

The second objective sought to determine the effect of source attractiveness on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The findings further show that source attractiveness plays a crucial role in stimulating travel aspirations and destination interest. Influencers who portray desirable lifestyles, appealing travel experiences, and engaging content encourage followers to imagine themselves in similar situations, thereby increasing their intention to visit promoted destinations. This demonstrates that

tourism decisions are influenced not only by rational information processing but also by emotional and aspirational factors.

These findings are consistent with the research by Negm & El Halawany (2020), who found a positive correlation between the attractiveness and trustworthiness of SMIs and consumers' intentions to plan a vacation. Further, the attractiveness of vloggers has a significant positive effect on the viewers' travel intentions (Chen et al., 2021). The perceived trustworthiness and quality of the information shared by a blogger are two factors that can highly influence their followers' intention to accept a travel recommendation (Magno & Cassia, 2018).

The findings on source attractiveness particularly align with Social Comparison Theory. According to the theory, individuals evaluate their attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors by comparing themselves with others whom they perceive as desirable, successful, or influential. Influencers often portray attractive lifestyles, travel experiences, and destination visits. Domestic tourists may compare their own experiences or aspirations with those presented by influencers and consequently develop intentions to visit the same destinations. Social media influencers who possess these characteristics are more likely to generate positive attitudes toward tourism destinations and travel experiences. From a tourism perspective, the results support destination image theory, which emphasizes the role of affective and emotional influences in shaping travel intentions. Attractive influencers can help create favorable destination perceptions, thereby encouraging domestic tourism participation.

5.2.4 Influence of Source Power on the Decision-Making of Domestic Tourists in Kenya

The third objective sought to determine the effect of source power on the decision-making of domestic tourism in Kenya. Each of the four Likert statements recorded means of (> 3), implying that source power was a significant factor influencing the

respondent's decision-making for domestic tourism. This means that the mean score of the source power index is above the neutral position, meaning that source power can be used to predict the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

However, the findings differ from those of Chen et al. (2018), who argued that specialized tourism platforms exert a stronger influence on travel behavior than general social media sources. The discrepancy may be attributed to contextual differences in the study settings and the increasing influence of social media personalities on tourism-related decisions.

The findings indicate that influencer effectiveness in promoting domestic tourism is driven less by commanding authority and more by creating value, fostering emotional connections, and demonstrating expertise. Consequently, tourism marketers seeking to leverage influencer marketing should focus on collaborating with influencers who can build strong follower relationships, provide meaningful incentives, and demonstrate genuine knowledge of domestic tourism destinations. Such strategies are likely to enhance tourist engagement, strengthen destination appeal, and ultimately influence travel decisions among domestic tourists in Kenya.

5.2.5 Influence of Source Metrics on the Decision-Making of Domestic Tourists in Kenya

The fourth objective sought to determine the effect of source metrics on the decision-making of domestic tourism in Kenya. Each of the six Likert statements recorded means of (> 3), implying that source metrics were a significant factor influencing the respondent's decision-making for domestic tourism. This means that the mean score of the source power index is above the neutral position, meaning that source metrics can be used to predict the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. This study conforms with the findings of Jaya and Prianthara (2020), who found that source metrics can

positively enhance the image of a tourist destination. Thus, tourist satisfaction will rise, leading to an increase in repeat visits and word-of-mouth advertising.

From a communication theory perspective, the findings support Social Comparison Theory. High follower counts and engagement metrics can further reinforce the influencer's perceived status and desirability, increasing the likelihood of comparison and imitation. In tourism theory, the findings underscore the growing role of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and user-generated content in influencing destination selection and travel behavior. The results suggest that domestic tourists increasingly rely on digital engagement indicators when assessing the reliability and attractiveness of tourism information.

5.2.6 Influence of Persuasive Techniques on Decision-Making of Domestic Tourists in Kenya

The fifth objective of the study was to determine the moderating effect of persuasive techniques on the role of social media influencers in the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The results indicate that domestic tourists rely heavily on external validation when evaluating destinations. Positive reviews, testimonials, destination popularity, and evidence of other tourists' experiences substantially increase destination attractiveness and travel intentions. Meanwhile, special offers are more effective in encouraging additional spending than in determining destination choice itself.

Most importantly, the findings reveal that persuasive techniques enhance the effectiveness of influencer marketing by reinforcing credibility, attractiveness, source power, and engagement metrics. Therefore, tourism marketers seeking to influence domestic travel decisions should combine credible influencers with strong social proof mechanisms, authentic testimonials, user-generated content, and strategically designed promotional incentives. Such an integrated approach is likely to maximize the

persuasive impact of tourism marketing campaigns and increase domestic tourism participation in Kenya.

The hierarchical regression revealed that social media influencers on their own have an 8.2% effect on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. However, when interacting with persuasive techniques, it has an effect of 0.1%. This is a clear indication that the introduction of persuasive techniques as a moderating variable positively influences the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The study therefore concludes that persuasive techniques have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between social media influencers and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

5.3 Conclusions

The first objective of the study found a positive impact of source credibility, as gauged through trustworthiness and expertise, on the decision-making procedures of local tourists in Kenya. The findings confirm that respondents attribute significant importance to the trustworthiness of information sources when making choices related to domestic tourism. The one-sample t-test further solidifies this deduction, refuting the null hypothesis and affirming that source credibility plays a significant role in shaping the decision-making of local tourists in Kenya. Thus, it is evident that domestic tourists actively seek information from influencers perceived as credible and experienced, utilizing this information to make well-informed and prudent decisions. In essence, the findings underscore the crucial link between source credibility, particularly in the form of social media influencers, and the decision-making dynamics of domestic tourists in Kenya. These findings hold practical implications for stakeholders in the tourism sector, emphasizing the need to prioritize and uphold credibility in influencer-led promotional strategies to foster positive decision-making among local vacationers.

The second objective of the study strongly demonstrates the significant impact of source attractiveness, as measured by similarity and likability, on the decision-making processes of domestic tourists in Kenya. The consistently high mean scores (>3) across the Likert statements affirm the substantial role that source attractiveness plays in shaping respondents' decisions regarding domestic tourism. The one-sample t-test further supports this conclusion by rejecting the null hypothesis, indicating that source attractiveness is indeed a pivotal factor influencing the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. In essence, the study underscores the critical interplay between source attractiveness, particularly in terms of similarity and likability, and the decision-making dynamics of domestic tourists in Kenya. These findings provide valuable insights for stakeholders in the tourism industry, emphasizing the need to strategically leverage the attractiveness of social media influencers to enhance the likability and relatability of travel-related content. This strategic alignment can contribute to fostering positive decision-making processes among domestic tourists, ultimately influencing their intentions to engage in travel activities.

The third objective establishes that the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on the decision-making processes of domestic tourists in Kenya is significantly affected by source power, which includes reward power, referent power, and expert power. The consistently high average scores (>3) across the Likert statements and the rejection of the null hypothesis in a one-sample t-test affirm the significant role that source power plays in shaping respondents' decisions regarding domestic tourism. The persuasive influence of SMIs on domestic tourists in Kenya is collectively contributed by reward power, referent power, and expert power. The study emphasizes that these influencers, who possess different forms of power, have the ability to predict and shape decision-making processes. This is consistent with existing literature that emphasizes the multifaceted nature of influencer impact, including the attractiveness, expertise, and motivational factors embedded in their content.

The fourth objective of the study clearly demonstrates that the decision-making processes of domestic tourists in Kenya are significantly influenced by source metrics, which are measured through reach, relevance, and resonance of social media influencers (SMIs). The Likert statements consistently yielded high mean scores (>3), and the null hypothesis was rejected in a one-sample t-test, confirming the pivotal role that source metrics play in shaping respondents' decisions regarding domestic tourism. The importance of reach, relevance, and resonance in influencer-led promotional strategies is underscored by this study, as they collectively contribute to their ability to predict and influence the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Stakeholders in the tourism industry should recognize these metrics as key drivers of influencer impact and strategically utilize them to maximize the persuasive influence of influencer content on the decisions made by domestic tourists.

The fifth objective findings reveals that persuasive techniques, specifically liking, reciprocation, and social validation, plays a substantial role in moderating the relationship between influencers and the decision-making process of domestic tourists in Kenya. Through hierarchical regression analysis, it is demonstrated that while social media influencers independently have an impact of 8.2% on decision-making, the inclusion of Persuasive techniques as a moderating variable enhances this impact to 8.3% (an additional effect of 0.1%). This signifies a notable positive influence, thereby establishing the crucial moderating role played by persuasive techniques in augmenting the impact of social media influencers on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

The study contributes to theory by extending Attribution Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and the Theory of Reasoned Action within the context of social media influencer marketing and domestic tourism in Kenya. The findings demonstrate that tourists use influencer characteristics as attributional cues when evaluating tourism information, engage in social comparison processes that shape travel aspirations, and

develop travel intentions through attitudes and subjective norms influenced by influencer communication. Furthermore, the moderating role of persuasive techniques suggests that message framing enhances the influence of social media influencers on tourism decision-making. These findings broaden the application of these theories to digital tourism environments and provide evidence of their continued relevance in explaining tourist behavior in the social media era.

5.4 Recommendations

The findings of this research provide a number of recommendations for stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry. Tourism marketers in Kenya should prioritize working with influencers who are perceived as trustworthy and authentic. This can be achieved by partnering with influencers who have a history of honest reviews and transparent communication as well as using influencers with expertise or experience in travel and local destinations. Since source credibility was found to significantly influence domestic tourists' decision-making, tourism marketers and destination managers should prioritize working with credible and knowledgeable influencers. Additionally, influencers should be encouraged to provide accurate, verifiable, and experience-based information to enhance trust among audiences.

Stakeholders in the tourism industry should also leverage, attractive and relatable influencers. Since attractiveness (likability and similarity) strongly affects decision-making, they should select influencers who reflect the target audience's lifestyle, values, and identity. Tourism stakeholders should collaborate with influencers who have strong visual presentation skills, engaging storytelling abilities, and a relatable personal brand. However, attractiveness should be complemented with factual and informative content to avoid misleading impressions.

Another recommendation is to deprioritize "authority-only" influence strategies. Because source power showed little impact on the travel decisions of domestic tourists,

industry players should avoid relying solely on celebrity status or perceived authority. Instead, they should focus on connection and relatability, not just influence hierarchy. This can mean picking micro or nano influencers who may have stronger audience bonds to promote their tourism businesses.

Tourism marketers should prioritize influencers with consistently high engagement rates and authentic audience interaction rather than inflated or artificial metrics. This will enhance destination image and increase tourist satisfaction and repeat visitation. Given the importance of reach, relevance, and resonance on the decision-making of domestic tourists, marketers should evaluate influencers based on engagement rates, audience relevance, and content impact. By using data analytics tools to track a campaign effectiveness, marketers can prioritize influencers whose audiences align with domestic tourism segments. As source metrics significantly influence tourist decisions, social media platforms and influencers should ensure transparency in engagement indicators such as views, likes, comments, and shares.

Lastly, stakeholders should incorporate persuasive techniques in their social media campaign design. Given the moderating effect of persuasive techniques, tourism marketers should integrate psychological and behavioral persuasion strategies such as storytelling, scarcity appeals, social proof, and emotional framing in influencer content. Encouraging user-generated content, testimonials, and social proof can significantly enhance the persuasive power of influencer marketing and foster trust among potential tourists.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

The following are recommendations that scholars can venture into for further research.

First, there is need for further research on the effects of cross-cultural analyses, exploring how cultural nuances shape preferences for specific influencers and the

content they share. Also, a longitudinal studies that track changes in consumer behavior over extended periods of time can provide valuable insights into the sustainability and evolving role of social media influencers in the industry.

Secondly, conducting in-depth audience segmentation based on factors such as age, income, and geographical location can reveal nuanced patterns of influencer influence within specific demographic groups. Furthermore, future research could focus on the legal and regulatory framework surrounding influencer marketing in the travel industry, evaluating existing regulations and proposing guidelines for ethical and transparent influencer collaborations. These recommendations aim to enhance the understanding of the elaborate dynamics between influencers and decision-making in the ever-evolving landscape of travel and tourism.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Study Title: Social media influencers and the decision-making of domestic tourists in kenya

Researcher: Asmahan Mohamed

Contact Information: 0726754745 nizulekha@gmail.com

I am a student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology working on a thesis titled SocialMedia Influencers and the Decision-Making of Domestic Tourists in Kenya. The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of social media influencers on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. This survey is a component of my dissertation study.

Your participation in the study is voluntary. If you agree to be involved in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire or answer questions in an interview setting. This questionnaire should take you approximately 20-30 minutes while the interview will not be more than 30 minutes long.

The responses generated from this survey will be handled with the strictest confidentiality. The data collected will not be used for any other purpose than for this study. I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to participate and I ask that you please complete the questionnaire or answer the interview questions. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out using the contact information above.

Consent

I have read (or had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my participation at any time without penalty. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

☐ I do ☐ I do not give you permission to make audio recordings of me during this study (interviews).

☐ I do ☐ I do not give you permission to retain and use my data for future research.

Sign: _____ Date: _____

Appendix II: Questionnaire

Part One: Demographic Information

1. What is your gender?

- a) ☐ Male
- b) ☐ Female

2. Which year were you born?

As a reminder, please note that **Social Media Influencers (SMI)** are those who have a lot of followers on social media platforms, such as famous socialites and bloggers.

3. Do you follow any socialmedia influencers on social media?

- a) ☐ Yes
- b) ☐ No

4. Why do you follow influencers?

- a) ☐ I follow SMIs for discounts/giveaways
- b) ☐ I follow SMIs for inspiration
- c) ☐ I follow SMIs for entertainment
- d) ☐ I follow SMIs for to be updated on trends

5. How did you choose the destination of your last travel in Kenya?

- a) ☐ friend/family recommended it
- b) ☐ saw photos/videos on social media
- c) ☐ I saw an ad on TV

6. Do you search travel related content on Social Media?

- a) ☐ Often
- b) ☐ Sometimes
- c) ☐ Only when I intend to travel
- d) ☐ Never

7. Have you discovered new destinations/places when using Social Media?

- a) ☐ Yes, I often discover new places
- b) ☐ Yes, have discovered some
- c) ☐ Yes, once
- d) ☐ No, I haven't discovered any new places

8. How likely do you think Social Media has influenced your travel plans?

- a) ☐ Somewhat influence
- b) ☐ Great influence
- c) ☐ Very great influence

Part Two

Source Credibility

9. Imagine you are about to take a holiday in Kenya and log onto social media to seek an option. Whose opinion would you value more?

- a) Someone who is knowledgeable and experienced in travel and has lots of followers;
- b) Someone who has many followers but is not specialized in travel;
- c) Someone who is a professional in travel but only has a certain amount of followers;
- d) It makes no difference.

10. To what extent would you rate the following statements on source credibility affecting the decision-making for your domestic travel? Use the scale: SD-Strongly Disagree; D-Disagree; N-Neutral; A-Agree; and SA-Strongly Agree.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	The social media influencer demonstrates being well-informed about domestic tourist					
2.	I perceive the social media influencer as competent in providing accurate and reliable information about domestic tourism.					
3.	The social media influencer comes across as honest and transparent in their interactions and recommendations.					
4.	The social media influencer has established themselves as trustworthy through their past content and interactions.					
5.	The intelligence and knowledge demonstrated by the social media influencer greatly influence my decision-making for domestic tourism.					
6.	I am more likely to trust the recommendations and advice of a social media influencer who is well-informed about domestic tourism					

Source Attractiveness

11. Rate the following statements. Use the scale: SD-Strongly Disagree; D-Disagree; N-Neutral; A-Agree; and SA-Strongly Agree.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	If I find an SMI physically attractive, I will travel to a destination they have posted about.					
2.	The familiarity of an SMI will make me go on holiday to a destination they have posted about.					
3.	When considering an information source, I am likely to be influenced by their likability.					
4.	The feeling of similarity between myself and the information source significantly influences my perception of the trustworthiness of the information provided.					
5.	The perceived likability of the information source greatly impacts my willingness to follow their advice or recommendations.					
6.	I am likely to trust the advice or recommendations of an information source who shares similar experiences or backgrounds with me.					

Source Power

12. Would you make the decision to travel to a destination if an SMI posts about discounts or offers?

a) ☐ Yes

- b) ☐ No
- c) ☐ Maybe

13. Rate the following statements. Use the scale: SD-Strongly Disagree; D-Disagree; N-Neutral; A-Agree; and SA-Strongly Agree.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I admire the SMI's I follow on social media (referent power).					
2	The SMI's I follow are experts in their fields (expert power).					
3	The SMI's I follow often offer rewards to their followers (reward power).					
4	The SMI's I follow are entitled to give me instructions (legitimate power).					

Source Metrics

14. To what extent would you rate the following statements on source metrics affects the decision-making for your domestic travel? Use the scale: SD-Strongly Disagree; D-Disagree; N-Neutral; A-Agree; and SA-Strongly Agree.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I regularly see social media influencers promoting tours and travel experiences within Kenya.					
2	I am exposed to many different social media influencers who promote domestic travel in Kenya.					
3	Social media influencers effectively reach me with information about tours and travel destinations in Kenya.					
4	Content shared by social media influencers positively influences my decision in booking tours or travelling					

	within Kenya.					
5	The number of followers, likes, comments, and shares on an influencer's content affects how I judge the effectiveness of their travel promotions.					

Persuasiveness techniques

15. To what extent would you rate the following statements on persuasive techniques affecting the decision-making for your domestic travel? Use the scale: SD-Strongly Disagree; D-Disagree; N-Neutral; A-Agree; and SA-Strongly Agree.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	When considering a domestic destination, how much does the likability of the tour guide or travel influencer promoting it impact your decision					
2.	Have you ever chosen a domestic destination primarily because you found the individuals associated with it					
3.	How much does observing other tourists visiting a domestic destination affect your perception of its desirability?					
4.	Are you more likely to spend money on additional services or upgrades when you receive a special offer or concession from a travel company?					
5.	Does the likability of a tour guide or travel influencer impact your interest in a particular type of domestic destination (e.g., adventure, cultural, historical)?					

6.	How likely are you to visit a domestic destination if you see that it is popular or frequently visited by other tourists?					
7.	Do you often feel compelled to choose a domestic destination after receiving a special offer or concession from a travel company?					
8.	To what extent do positive reviews or testimonials about a domestic destination influence your decision to visit it?					

Appendix III: Interview Guide For Tours And Travel Companies

1. In a year, how often do you engage social media influencers?
2. In a year, how many social media influencers do you engage in promoting your business?
3. Who is your target audience/market when you use social media influencers to post about your business?
4. Do you use any other forms of promotion along with social media influencers?
5. Do you see any change in sales/volumes when you use social media influencers to promote your business?
6. What measures do you put in place to track the effectiveness of social media influencers in promoting your business?
7. How do you choose which social media influencer to use in promoting your business?
8. Do you consider any of the following factors when choosing your social media influencers?
 - a) Overall image of the social media influencer
 - b) Risk of controversy
 - c) Trustworthiness of the social media influencer
 - d) Familiarity and likability of the social media influencer among the target audience
9. When choosing a social media influencer, which of the following do you consider important?
 - a) Number of followers (Potential reach)
 - b) Number of likes (Applause rate/Resonance)
 - c) Number of engagement actions (Comments, shares and mentions/Relevance)

10. Do you consider the cost of acquiring a social media influencer as a determining factor when choosing an SMI to promote your business?
11. Do you engage the services of social media management companies to help you identify which SMI's best suit your company needs and objectives? If yes, please state which ones.

Appendix IV: List of Tours and Travel Companies Sampled

1. Killian Tours and Travel
2. Wavu Tours and Travel
3. Bonfire Adventures
4. Mufasa Tours and Travel
5. Trippy Go Tours and Travel
6. Bountiful Safaris
7. Expedition Maasai Safaris
8. Oribi Expeditions
9. Adequate Safaris
10. Urbann Vacations

Appendix V: Letter from Graduate School



**JOMO KENYATTA UNIVERSITY
OF
AGRICULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY**

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR, GRADUATE SCHOOL

P.O. BOX 42000, NIOB • NAIROBI • KENYA • TEL: (254) 2552001-40 Email: director@jku.ac.ke

REF: JKU/011/H0421-3121/2023

4TH MARCH 2023

ASMAHAN ZULEKHA MOHAMMED

C/o SCDS

JKUAT

Dear, Madam:

**RE: APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND APPOINTMENT OF
SUPERVISORS**

Kindly note that your PhD. research proposal entitled: "SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS
AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE DECISION MAKING OF DOMESTIC TOURISTS
IN KENYA" has been approved. The following are your approved supervisors:-

1. Prof. Helen E. Adorn
2. Dr. Julius Bwire

Yours sincerely,

**PROF. LOSENGE TUROOP
DIRECTOR, GRADUATE SCHOOL**

Copy to: Dean, SCDS

Yours



ACCREDITED TO ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 14001:2015 Certified
Setting Trends in Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship

