The Influence of Instagram Advertising on Destination Visit Intention

Rejoice Jealous Tobias-Mamina *

*Department of Life and Consumer Sciences, School of Agriculture and Life Sciences,
University of South Africa, Roodepoort, South Africa, E-mail, tobiarj@unisa.ac.za,
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0965-8170*

Elizabeth Kempen

*Department of Life and Consumer Sciences, School of Agriculture and Life Sciences,
University of South Africa, Roodepoort, South Africa, Email, kempeel@unisa.ac.za*

Rudo Chinomona

*Marketing Division, School of Business Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand,
Johannesburg, South Africa, Email, rudoc@hotmail.com*

Megan Sly

*Marketing Division, School of Business Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg, South Africa, Email, 1105713@students.wits.za*

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

The current study examines the effect of social media-based (Instagram) influencer advertising, on advertising cognition, attitude towards a brand, brand beliefs, as well as intention to visit a tourist destination, on a sample of consumers in Gauteng Province of South Africa. The study sought to understand the mechanism by which influencer advertising affects consumer decision making. It proposed a unified social media influencer attitude-model. To test the model, a survey questionnaire was administered among 404 Instagram users who have visited a destination of choice Instagram page. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was undertaken to assess the dimensionality and validity of the measurement scale. The study used a path modelling technique to test the proposed hypotheses. The results of structural equation modelling (AMOS 25) indicated that the relationship between exposure to influencer advertising and brand belief was robust. However, exposure to influencer advertising showed a moderate positive effect on both advertising cognition and attitude towards the destination. Consequently, attitude towards the advertising (Ad), brand beliefs and brand attitude had a significant and positive effect on destination visit intention. While traditional models of advertising efficacy theorised that advertisements transform consumer attitudes mainly by modifying their brand beliefs, this study however found that consumers' advertisement cognition, brand-linked beliefs, attitude towards the brand and their intention to visit a tourist destination of choice are influenced by their assessment of the of advertisement information.

Keywords: Dual-Mediation Hypothesis, Attitudes; Brand Beliefs, Advertising exposure, Instagram

Introduction

The travel and tourism sector has become one of the most important sectors for both developed and developing countries. Tourism has impacted significantly on contemporary lifestyles and the economic improvement of countries. Due to the prevalence of competition within tourism, service providers are facing challenges in their effort to acquire and retain customers (Han & Hwang (2018).Thus, destination-marketing strategies are receiving greater attention from policy makers, researchers and marketers alike. Contemporary travelers engage the information sources at their disposal and integrate these into destination selection decision making. Although several approaches to information searching have been reported in literature, few researches have reported on the effect of the different information search services, particularly social media, on consumer decision making. Understanding the effect of social media exposure on destination choice may assist practitioners to improve their marketing efforts and reach potential visitors or customers.

In the 21st century, Instagram, a social media platform, has become a significant source of acquiring tourism information. Social media advertising, particularly influencer marketing, has gathered much interest with numerous businesses seeking to create interactions with their consumers. Influencer marketing refers to the marketing technique that uses online personalities whose aim is to grow brand awareness and profile consumer attitudes through tweets, posts, blogs or any other form of communication on social media, such as Instagram (Yodel, 2017). Thus, Instagram is a form of online communication where users simply capture and share their experiences by taking and posting photographs or videos and modifying those using filters. With Instagram posts, existing customers disseminate information and share their destination visit experiences while potential travelers search for and respond to the experiences. Traditionally, influencers were celebrities used in advertising to endorse products. A summary of celebrity endorsement benefits include capturing consumer attention, increasing brand recognition, enhancing credibility of the brand, increasing advertising recall, and assisting in attaining synergies between the advertised product brand and the personal brand of the celebrity (Yen & Teng, 2015). In contrast to the conventional celebrities, influencers create value through connectedness and authentic experience (Jerslev, 2016).

Research to date has identified a few variables associated with social media use and consumer purchase behaviour. However, it is critical to understand how virtual advertisements influence consumers' decision making. This paper sought to respond to this call by analysing 404 Instagram users' consumption experience. The use of micro-influencers as a marketing tool has grown exponentially as technology evolution has provided consumers with platforms to share consumption experience. While studies, such as by Femenia-Serra and Gretzel (2020), have attempted to integrate social identity perspectives such as social media influencer-consumer congruence and social media influencer-destination congruence to explain consumers' intention to visit a destination, micro-influencer advertising exposure-behaviour linkages mediated by cognitive constructs remains under researched. Researchers such as Magno and Cassia (2018), Ong and Ito (2019), among others, consider psychological factors, such as source credibility and self-congruity, as explanations for destination image and consumer travel intention.

Based on the survey of literature and the identified gaps, this paper aims to examine how different predictors related to social media advertising impact on the respondents' decision-making. This study makes a critical contribution to both academia and marketing practice. From a theoretical perspective, this study advances a framework of different factors relevant to the consumer's intention to visit a destination. This enables researchers to gain comprehensive insights into social media marketing use in a developing country context. From an empirical viewpoint, this study contributes by analysing a framework on a sample of social

media users in South Africa. Most social media and online marketing research has been conducted in developed country contexts, although empirical literature suggest that differences are context specific and these render generalisability of research findings difficult. Therefore, this study makes a distinctive contribution to existing social media marketing literature and digital communication practice in a developing country context. The research output can assist marketers to discover ways of appealing to different customers to maximise the benefits of online marketing.

The structure of this study is as follows: The next part shows a literature review, followed by methodology section that includes the data collection process. The subsequent section discusses the statistical data analysis results. Lastly, the results are reported, implication of findings, concluding summary, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are underlined.

Theoretical foundation and hypotheses

The growing importance of social media, in general, in the hospitality and tourism context has not escaped the attention of researchers. Prospective travelers consult social media sites when seeking information to assist their travel-related decisions and to shape perceptions and attitudes towards destinations (Arsal, Backman & Baldwin, 2008).Thus, a major concern of marketers using Instagram platform will be how to persuade and which potential users may perceive this media type and the behavioral results in terms of these perceptions. In view of this, the Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) offers an essential theoretical framework when seeking to understand the antecedents that influence travelers' intention to visit a destination. The ELM is a preferred model because ELM is more parsimonious and easily adaptable to accommodate attitudinal change, which is assumed to be the process by which externally generated persuasion occurs (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) originates from social psychology, suggesting that attitudes change on two distinct routes: central and peripheral routes (Pettt et al., 1986). ELM illustrates that the persuasion of individuals differ according to the degree to which they are able to participate in the elaboration of the persuasive issue. In the central route, individuals think more objectively about issue related content in an information message before forming a specific behaviour (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006). On the contrary, in the peripheral route to attitude change, a person may rely on cues related to the intended behaviour such as prior users, prior related personal experience or source credibility. In the current research context, people in high likelihood of having positive intention to visit a destination are more likely to be persuaded by destination –related advertisement through the central route, therefore they reflect more critically about the destination-related messages as presented in the advertisement. People in a low likelihood would refer to peripheral cues, such as the credibility of the information source. ELM offers a useful perspective on understanding the influence of Instagram advertisements on tourist's intention to visit a destination. In order to test the relationships between variables, a conceptual model was developed, premised on the reviewed marketing literature. The conceptual model has four predictors namely: exposure to influencer advertising; advertising cognition; advertising evoked brand beliefs and attitude towards the destination and one outcome variable namely: intention to visit a destination (see figure1).

Ad exposure and visit intention

Previous research in tourism provides empirical support for the role of affect on destination decision making (Ghosh & Sarkar 2016). Ghosh and Sarkar (2016) confirmed that positive emotions elicited by visualizing a travel destination influence visit intention. Van der Veen and Song (2014) found that positive attitudinal evaluations of a destination featured in a celebrity-

276

endorsed advertising increase visit intention. Therefore, it is conceivable to expect that positive affect toward a media-featured destination will be stimulated with the endorsement of an Instagram influencer. Research shows that advertising-evoked nostalgic thoughts influence consumer preferences for sentimental products (e.g. Kim, Kim & King, 2019). Based on the stimulating effect of media content, online advertising stimulus (Instagram influencer advertising) has the potential to evoke affective responses which subsequently influence consumer intention to either visit or not visit the advertised destination.
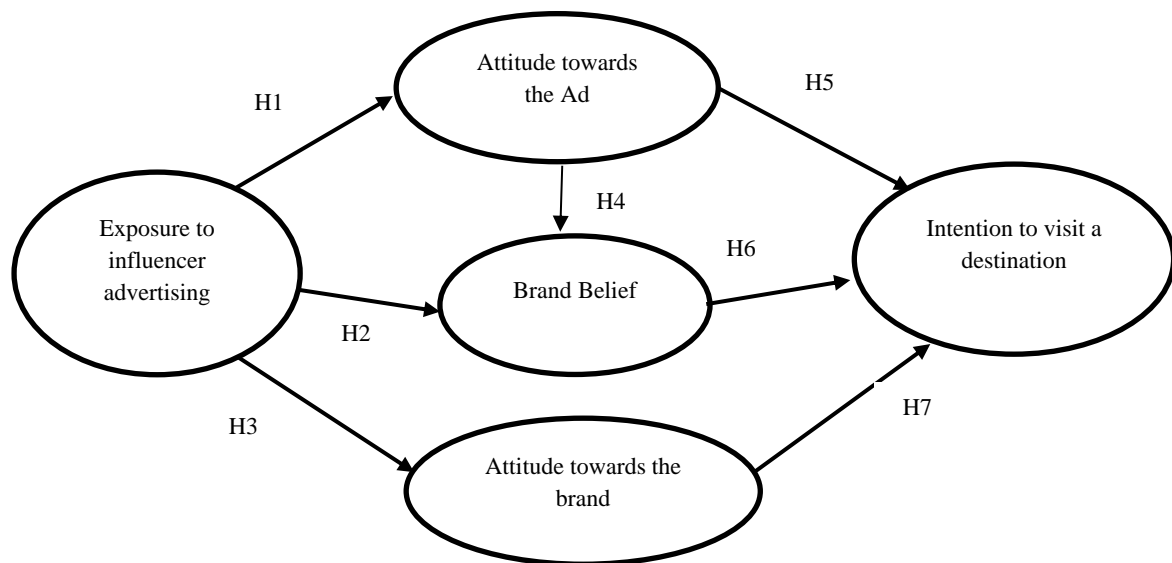

Fig 1: Research conceptual model
Source: Authors

Attitude towards the advertisement

Implicit in most attitudinal studies within the field of advertising communication is the notion that the attitude of a person is an important determinant of the intentions and actual response of that person. Attitude towards advertising is described as a person's general predisposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an advertisement (Kaushal & Kumar, 2016). The attitude construct has been tested in various contexts, and studies have shown that the attitude of an individual towards an advertising significantly influences the behavioural disposition of that individual (Kaushal, & Kumar, 2016). For instance, a study conducted by Lim et al., (2017) showed that attitude towards an online site directly affect attitude towards the brand, and attitude towards the brand exerts direct influence on purchase intention. Similarly, consumers who view e-mail advertisement as useful were found to be more likely to visit the physical store (Martin et al., 2003). Thus, if an audience is exposed to a positive brand advertisement that generates favourable perceptions because of the exposure, then the attitude the individual develops towards the advertised brand will also be favourable, hence it is hypothesised that:

H1: Exposure to Instagram influencer advertising has a significant and positive effect on attitude towards the advertisement.

Ad evoked brand beliefs

Consumers develop brand beliefs based on the brand knowledge gathered during interactions with a specific brand (Micu, Sciandra & Micu, 2019). With this knowledge, customers create judgements and opinions about different brands, which ultimately lead to the internal formation of the customer's perceived brand benefits. The 'Elaboration Likelihood Model' (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) postulates that brand purchase intention is a function of brand attitude. Perceived brand benefits therefore drive brand beliefs that allow customers to assign personal value and meaning to various brands (Micu et al., 2019). Extant literature has established that individuals who are involved with advertised messages are more likely to consider the contents of the advertisement (Edwards & Lee, 2002). Brand beliefs (brand/ attribute associations) contribute substantially to an individual's overall evaluation of the advertised brand (Foroudi, 2019). Furthermore, research in the context of advertising effectiveness has also shown that brand attitude is an antecedent affecting the purchase intention (Pradhan, Duraipandian & Sethi, 2016). Individuals develop favourable attitudes towards objects they believe have positive characteristics and unfavourable attitudes towards those with negative characteristics. In addition to advertised content consideration, individuals are also likely to formulate attitudes towards the brand, based on their affective response to the influencer post/advertisement. From the above discussion, it can be hypothesised that:

H2: Exposure to influencer advertising has a positive influence on brand beliefs.
H3: Brand beliefs have a significant and positive effect on brand attitudes.

Brand attitude

Increasing consumers' exposure to influencer advertising enhances the image of the destination/destination. What the post comments about the destination significantly affects destination brand attitude. Therefore, influencer content is a critical determinant of the visitor's perception of the destination, mainly individuals who intend to visit for the first time. Internal stimuli such as the advertisement and external factors, such as destination brand image, play a critical role in creating brand awareness, thus stimulating destination visit intentions (Choi, Tkachenko & Sil, 2011). As consumers process material presented in an advertisement, they use the endorser to make inferences about the brand, transferring affect from the endorser to the brand. Several researchers support the attitude towards Ad-intention behaviour linkage (Craton & Lantos, 2011). Based on the ELM, when consumer's involvement degree is high, persuasion occurs through the central route while low involvement occurs through the peripheral route (Morris, Woo & Singh, 2005). The consumer's decision to visit a destination brand is dependent on the individual's knowledge about the product and his ability to make objective evaluations. For a low involvement consumer, the decision is based on associative cues with the brand, such as information provided in the advertisement. Based on the above discussion, it can be hypothesised that:

H4: Exposure to influencer advertising has a positive and significant effect on brand attitudes.
H5: Attitude towards the advertising has a positive and significant effect on intention to visit a destination brand.
H6: Brand beliefs have a positive and significant effect on intention to visit a destination brand.
H7: Brand attitude has a positive and significant effect on intention to visit a destination brand.

Study method

Research approach

A quantitative research design, using the survey method, was used in the empirical section of the study. In quantitative research, data are computed to apply statistical techniques in order to gain meaningful insights into the relationship (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins & Kuppelwieser, 2014). The survey method was selected as it facilitates the collection of data from a large sample, requires minimum investment to develop and administer, is inclusive in the number of variables that can be studied, and is appropriate for making generalisations (Zikmund, D'Alessandro, Winzar, Lowe & Babin, 2017).

Sample and data collection

Theoretically, the population of this study consists of the Instagram users who are over 18 years old and who have an Instagram account and have visited a destination Instagram page within the last twelve months. Because such a list of the Instagram users does not exist, it is not possible to arrange our sampling frame. Therefore, respondents were selected using a convenience-sampling method at public facilities (university campus, local mall, three of the busiest streets of the city). Before data collection, we trained four undergraduate student research assistants by explaining the purpose and content of the survey. Research assistants approached the participants and first asked if they were 18 years old or older and if they have an Instagram account that they have accessed in the past twelve months. Only those who were above 18 years and had Instagram experience were asked to participate the survey. To eliminate differences in response patterns due to different reference points, all respondents were prompted to answer the questionnaire with reference to influencer advertisement on a tourist destination. In this regard, the respondents identified a social media influencer advertisement on holiday accommodation. Respondents name a destination brand and think about that brand as they complete the entire questionnaire, guided by the research assistants. Of the 450 questionnaires, 46 respondents with incomplete questionnaires were omitted from further data analysis. The 404 valid questionnaires were collected between February and May 2019, via face-to-face interactions from the Instagram users who volunteered to participate in our research in Gauteng, South Africa.

Questionnaire design and measures

The questionnaire for this study consists of two main sections. The first section of the questionnaire contains questions about respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, such as, age, gender, education level. In this section, respondents indicate Instagram usage, such as, Instagram visits, average daily time spent on Instagram, favourite Instagram posts or sites, and the most frequently visited post or site. The second section contains questions directed to the scale items (indicators), selected to measure each construct based on existing measures (Table1). Measurement items were adapted from the Dual-Mediation Hypothesis Model and behavioural intention literature. The items for measuring attitude toward the advertisement and attitude towards the destination brand were adapted from Kamble (2014), Ajzen (1991) and Miniard et al. (1990). Measurement items measuring Advertising evoked brand belief were adapted from Karson and Fisher (2005). The items measuring exposure to influencer advertising were adapted from Morgan (1982). Finally, measures for visit intention were adapted from Han et al. (2010). In the survey instrument, each construct measure is designed to be reflective and all items are assessed by using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 1: Variable references

Variable	Adapted from
Exposure to Instagram Influencer Ad/Post	*Morgan (1982)*
Attitude towards the Advertising/Post	*Ajzen and Fischbein (1980),* (Bruner and Kumar 2000) *Reliability (α=0.876)*
Attitude towards the destination brand	Miniard et al. (1990), Ajzen (1991) Reliability (α =0.826); scale mean 3.8; σ = 2.547
Advertising evoked brand belief	Karson & Fisher (2005); Reliability scale (α=0.826) Scale mean 3.820; σ =2.509.
Intention to visit	Han et al. (2010)

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Table 2 presents a description of the participants. The survey respondents were predominantly female (60.5%). The median age group of the respondents was less than 39 years (79 per cent). In terms of age level, the most significant number of respondents were 30-39 age level with 42 per cent of the total responses. Almost 38 percent (38%) of the respondents had either undergraduate or postgraduate degrees and the remaining 62 per cent (62%) had high school education. Almost 67 per cent of the respondents are either formally employed or self-employed, while 34 per cent are unemployed. About 67 per cent (67%) of the respondents reported visiting Instagram posts once per month, 8 per cent (8%) visit every day and 26 per cent (26%) visit on a weekly basis and the majority of respondents (87 per cent) have been using the internet for more than four years.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the sample (n=404)

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Educational Level	Frequency	Percent
Male	151	37.4	High School	251	62
Female	253	62.6	Undergraduate	143	35
			Postgraduate	10	3
Age	**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Frequency Instagram visit within 12months**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
18-29	151	37.3	Every day	31	8
30-39	191	42	Once per week	103	26
40-49	30	7.5	Once per month	270	67
50-59	22	5.4	Once per 12 months	-	-
≥60	10	2.4	**Internet experience(in years)**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Employment Status	**Frequency**	**Percent**	<1	4	10
Employed	269	66.6	1-3	49	12
Unemployed	135	33.4	4-6	91	23
			7-9	114	28
			≥10	146	36

Data analysis

The study analyses the research hypotheses using Structural Equation Modeling in AMOS, which is a co-variance based second-generation structural equation modelling technique (Hair et al., 2014). The estimation procedure for SEM-AMOS is a maximum likelihood estimation (Vinzi et al., 2010).

Measurement model assessment

The measurement model defines the relationship between observed variables and their latent (unobserved) variables. In accordance with the two-step procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), prior to testing the hypotheses, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was executed to examine reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the multi-item construct measures using AMOS 25. Reliability is generally checked using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (α) value (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). For convergent

validity, the researcher tested whether items loaded on their respective (*a priori*) constructs, with loadings greater than 0.5. Discriminant validity was tested using the average variance extracted (AVE) value, ensuring that a construct measure is empirically unique and represents the phenomenon of interest that other measures in the structural model do not capture (Hair et al., 2014) and that there is no significant inter-research variable cross-loadings (Chin,1998). The CFA results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Accuracy analysis statistics

Research construct	Item	Item SD	Cronbach's α value	CR value	AVE value	Factor loadings
Attitude towards the Ad/Post	AA1	3.56	0.876	0,88	0,64	.814
	AA2	4.05				.777
	AA3	3.28				.818
	AA4	3.56				.795
Attitude towards the advertised Brand	BA1	3.86	0.826	0.78	0.54	.680
	BA2	3.69				.736
	BA3	3.61				.790
	BA4	4.12				.740
Brand Belief	BB1	3.76	0.826	0,83	0,55	.739
	BB2	4.00				.780
	BB3	3.53				.680
	BB4	3.99				.762
Visit Intention	VI1	4.52	0.908	0,83	0,54	.664
	VI2	4.16				.809
	VI3	4.65				.674
	VI4	4.17				.789
Exposure to Instagram Influencer Advert	EIA1	4.03	0.759	0,85	0,59	.780
	EIA2	4.15				.722
	EIA3	4.31				.801
	EIA4	4.29				.768

Notes: AA = attitude towards the advert, AB = attitude towards the brand, BB = brand beliefs and VI = intention to visit the destination; EIA = Exposure to influencer advert

As can be seen (Table 3), all items have loadings greater than 0.6 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating that they explain at least 60 per cent of what they expected to measure (convergent validity). The lowest AVE value is 0.54 which exceeds the recommended 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) – an indication of the existence of discriminant validity. However, to guarantee sufficient discriminant validity between the research constructs, the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion and cross-loading criterion is used. According to the Fornell and Larcker criterion, the square root of the AVE of each construct should be higher than the construct's highest correlation with any other construct in the model.

Table 4 shows the results of the 'Fornell and Larcker criterion' assessment. The rationale behind this method is the notion that a construct shares more variance with its associated indicators than with any other constructs (Hair et al., 2014). Overall, the square roots of the AVE for the constructs: e.g. Attitude towards the advert (0.80), Attitude towards the brand (0.734), brand beliefs (0.74), Intention to visit a destination (destination) brand (0.734), Exposure to influencer advertisement (0.768), are all higher than the correlations of the constructs with other latent variables in the path model. Based on the CR value and Cronbach's α value, the measurement instrument reliability was assessed, indicating lowest values as 0.780 and 0.759 respectively, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Overall, these results confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model used in this study (Table 4).

Table 4: Inter-construct correlation matrix

	EIA	VI	AA	AB	BB
EIA	**(0.768)**				
VI	.650**	**(0.734)**			
AA	.226**	.338**	**(0.8)**		
AB	.185**	.416**	.681**	**(0.734)**	
BB	.073	.170*	.529**	.597**	**(0.74)**

Note: AA = attitude towards the advert, AB = attitude towards the brand, BB = brand beliefs and V = intention to visit the destination; EIA = Exposure to influencer advert

The goal of measurement model assessment is to confirm unidimensionality, reliability and validity of the construct measures. The results provide support for the overall quality of the instrument and imply that the measurement model is sufficient for hypothesis testing.

Structural model assessment and hypothesis testing

In this study, hypotheses were tested using the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) method. SEM is a statistical procedure for estimating the relationship between the constructs in a proposed model (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). However, prior to testing the relationship, it is necessary to perform model fit analysis in order to verify whether the collected data fit the proposed model (Hair et al., 2014). The following acceptable CFA model fit indices were used to ascertain how well the factor structure accounts for the correlations between variables in the data set (Hair et al, 2014). Generally, acceptable model fit are indicated by Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) ≧ 0.80; Adjusted Goodness-of Fit Index (AGFI) ≧ 0.80; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values ≦ 0.08; Incremental Index of Fit (IFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) values ≧ 0.90; and Chi-square degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) value <3(Hair et al., 2014) . Upon testing the structural model, it was observed that all model fit statistics were within acceptable thresholds according to Hair et al.(2014), that is, $\chi2 / (df) = 2.986$, CFI =0.96, TLI = 0.93, IFI = 0.99, NFI=0.98 and RMSEA = 0.07, GFI = 0.91. The hypothesis testing results are reported in Table 5.

The path coefficient for the proposed hypothesis H1 (0.415), H2 (0.531), H3 (0.831), H4 (0.590), H5 (0.582) and H6 (0.674) are at 99% confidence interval respectively. Therefore, results provide support for all six proposed hypotheses.

Table 5: Structural modelling results

Proposed relationships		Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	Decision
EIA ⟶ AA		H1	0.415**	Supported and significant
EIA ⟶ BB		H2	0.531***	Supported and significant
EIA ⟶ AB		H3	0.831***	Supported and significant
AA ⟶ VI		H4	0.590***	Supported and significant
BB ⟶ VI		H5	0.582***	Supported and significant
AB ⟶ VI		H6	0.674***	Supported and significant

Structural model fit: $\chi2 / (df)$ = 2.986; Comparative Fit Index = 0.93; Tucker and Lewis Index = 0.93; Incremental Index of Fit = 0.99 and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation = 0.07. EIA, exposure to Influencer Ad; AA, Attitude towards the Ad/post; AB, Attitude towards Advertised Brand; BB, Ad evoked Brand beliefs; VI, Intention to visit; *** Significance, p=0.001; **p=0.005

Discussion

Influenced by the recent influx of influencer advertising and the lack of empirical evidence concerning the effect of these posts on consumer behaviour, this study sought to understand how Instagram influencer posts influence consumer behaviour, particularly the consumer propensity to visit a destination. The current study aims at better understanding how perceptions in the context of influencer marketing induces customers' purchase intention. Therefore, the study focused on the interaction between the destination (product), how the influencer endorses it and the consumer perceptions and consumer decision-making. The study identified two configurations of perception, resulting in consumer purchase intention. The

consumer has to have a positive attitude towards the advertisement, a positive attitude towards the brand relevant for generating visit intention among consumers (Lo & Qu, 2015). Consistent with hypothesis H1, the results of the study reveal that exposure to Influencer advertising has a positive effect on the attitude towards the advertisement. However this is contrary to the findings by Wirtz, Sparks and Zimbres (2018) who found a small and negative effect of advertising appeal on attitude towards the brand.

In addition to hypothesis H2, the study discloses that exposure to Influencer Advertising evokes brand beliefs. Still in line with hypothesis H3, the study found a significant correlation between exposure to Influencer Advertisements and attitude towards the advertised brand. These results corroborate previous findings in the context of athlete endorser, e-cigarette advertising, and these studies found strong relationship between exposure to advertising and attitude towards the brand (Phua, Jin & Hahm, 2018; Wojdynski & Evans 2016). Furthermore, consistent with H4, the study reveals a positive relationship between attitude towards the Influencer ad/post and intention to visit the advertised destination brand. However this finding is contrary to the findings by Kaewpramkusol, Senior, Nanthamongkolchai and Chenhall (2019), whose study could not establish the relationship between exposure to brand advertising and attitude towards the advertised brand and consequently the intention to purchase the brand. Hypothesis H5 found a positive and significant relationship between Ads evoked brand beliefs and intention to visit a destination. These findings corroborate with prior research findings in the context of athletics endorser which also found a positive and significant relationship between brand beliefs and the behavioral intention (Amos, Holmes & Strutton, 2008). Finally, in resonance with Hypothesis H6, the study advances that higher attitude towards the advertised brand leads to increases propensity to visit the advertised destination. This is corroborated by Yüksel, Bilim and Yüksel (2014) who found that inferences drawn from the advertising of a destination may result in higher propensity to purchase a service. Similarly the same inferences may be drawn form an advertisement of a destination resulting in high propensity to visit the destination.

Interesting to note from the results of this study is the fact that among the model variables, Exposure to Influencer Ad/post has a stronger effect on attitude towards advertised brand (β=0.831) than both brand beliefs (β=0.531) and attitude towards the Ad (β=0.415). This supports the assertion that well-liked advertisements may lead to more favourable brand attitudes than detested advertisements. The results of this study provide a number of insights into the effects of Ad exposure. As shown in Table 5, the study results suggest a substantial and significant relationship between Advertising exposure and a number of downstream consequences; (attitude towards the Ad; β=0.415; brand beliefs, β=0.53; brand attitude, β=0.831, visit intention, β=0.674).The fact that relationships involving advertising attitudes were strong (β=0.415, 0.590, respectively) suggests its importance in explaining advertising effects. An important general finding of this study is its support for the dual mediation model proposed by Lutz et al. (1983). This model posits a direct effect of ad cognition on Ad attitude and has been supported by a number of studies (e.g. Lee & Cho, 2019). Other studies on Ad attitude (Wirtz et al., 2018) suggest that Ad exposure may not have a significant effect on brand attitudes. On the contrary, results of this study suggest that Ad exposure significantly affects brand attitudes. These results are consistent with Zanna and Rempel's attitude model in suggesting that brand attitudes can be based on a variety of sources (e.eg. brand affect, ad cognition, ad effect) (Zanna & Rempel, 1988). Other studies demonstrate that cognitive responses to persuasive messages are related to both affective and evaluative dimensions of pre-communication attitude (Andersson et al., 2020; Sicilia & Ruiz, 2010). This study supports Sicilia and Ruiz (2010) in suggesting that both affective and cognitive influences play a role in determining brand attitudes. By implication, this finding indicates that image creation and

destination differentiation strategies can have a strong influence on consumer decision making via brand beliefs and attitudes. Perhaps this could be because consumers are likely to visit a destination they trust would provide a good experience (Chiou & Droge, 2006).

Implications and conclusion

The present study has both academic and practical implications. On the academic front, the study contributes to an emergent research area of Influencer marketing. Accordingly, the study is expected to further enlarge the horizons associated with the understanding of recent developments in the field of marketing management in Southern Africa. The business world is increasingly competitive and attracting customers is an enormous challenge for marketers. Many marketing researchers, as well as practitioners, emphasise the critical role of brand communication in order to influence consumer perception, brand beliefs and enhance consumer propensity to visit a destination. In particular, communication and marketing managers in South Africa are therefore encouraged to adopt strategies that enhance brand communication since this is likely to evoke positive brand beliefs, which consequently influence consumer propensity to visit a destination.

The current study is an attempt to investigate these relationships in an African context. Mostly, the findings of this empirical study are expected to provide implications for both practitioners and academics. Thus, on the academic side, this research makes a significant contribution to a better understanding of the nexus between media exposure, brand beliefs, attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand and consumer decision-making in South Africa. Overall, the current study findings provide tentative support to the proposition that Influencer marketing, brand beliefs, attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand should be recognised as significant antecedents for consumer intention to visit a destination or destination in South Africa. This study provides practical insights for companies as exposure to influencer posts has a strong causal relationship with purchase intention. The aim of influencer marketing is the spread of the endorsement of a product through a sizable network (De Veirman et al., 2017). Thus, this study submits that marketers can benefit from the implications of these findings. Marketers can adopt Influencer advertising as a differentiation strategy in an overcrowded advertising context.

Overall, drawing from the research findings, one can put forward that theoretically, communication managers and marketing managers in the tourism industry tend to attract customers/visitors trust only when the customers perceive the destination brand to have a good image via brand communication. Thus, brand communication that does not build a good destination image will not earn the consumers' brand trust.

imitations and suggestion for future research

Notwithstanding the usefulness of the study, the research has its limitations. Firstly, the study can be validated by increasing the sample size and including participants from other geographic areas. This study was restricted to South Africa; for comparison, this research can be replicated in other emerging countries. However, destination-branding activities should focus on maintaining and enhancing visitor loyalty to ensure long-term destination success. Therefore, relationship management techniques and practices designed to reinforce visitor loyalty within the context of destination branding could be practically explored in future studies.

References

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, *50*(2), 179-211.

Amos, C., Holmes, G. & Strutton, D. (2008). Exploring the relationship between celebrity endorser effects and advertising effectiveness: A quantitative synthesis of effect size. *International journal of advertising*, *27*(2), 209-234.

Anderson, J. C. & Gerbing, D. W. (1988). Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, *103*(3), 411.

Andersson, U., Cuervo-Cazurra, A. & Nielsen, B. B. (2020). Explaining interaction effects within and across levels of analysis. In *Research Methods in International Business* (pp. 331-349). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Arsal, I., Backman, S. & Baldwin, E. (2008). Influence of an online travel community on travel decisions. In *Information and communication technologies in tourism 2008* (pp. 82-93). Springer, Vienna.

Bagozzi, R. P. & Yi, Y. (2012). Specification, evaluation, and interpretation of structural equation models. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *40*(1), 8-34.

Bhattacherjee, A. & Sanford, C. (2006). Influence processes for information technology acceptance: An elaboration likelihood model. *MIS quarterly*, 805-825.

Chiou, J.S. & Droge, C. (2006). Service quality, trust, specific asset investment, and expertise: Direct and indirect effects in a satisfaction-loyalty framework. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *34*(4), 613-627.

Choi, J. G., Tkachenko, T. & Sil, S. (2011). On the destination image of Korea by Russian tourists. *Tourism Management*, *32*(1), 193-194.

Craton, L. G. & Lantos, G. P. (2011). Attitude toward the advertising music: An overlooked potential pitfall in commercials. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 28(6), 396–411.

De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V. & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, *36*(5), 798-828.

Edwards, S.M., Li, H. & Lee, J.H. (2002). Forced exposure and psychological reactance: Antecedents and consequences of the perceived intrusiveness of pop-up ads. *Journal of Advertising*, *31*(3), 83-95.

Femenia-Serra, F. & Gretzel, U. (2020). Influencer marketing for tourism destinations: lessons from a mature destination. In *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2020* (pp. 65-78). Cham: Springer.

Fornell, C. & Larcker, D.F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of marketing research*, *18*(1), 39-50.

Foroudi, P. (2019). Influence of brand signature, brand awareness, brand attitude, brand reputation on destination industry's brand performance. *International journal of hospitality management*, *76*, 271-285.

Ghosh, T. & Sarkar, A. (2016). "To feel a place of heaven": Examining the role of sensory reference cues and capacity for imagination in destination marketing. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, *33*(1), 25-37.

Phua, J., Jin, S. V. & Hahm, J. M. (2018). Celebrity-endorsed e-cigarette brand Instagram advertisements: Effects on young adults' attitudes towards e-cigarettes and smoking intentions. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *23*(4), 550-560.

Hair, J.F., Sarstedt, M., Hopkins, L. & Kuppelwieser, V.G. (2014). Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM): an emerging tool in business research, European Business Review, 26 (2),106-121.

Han, H. & Hwang, J. (2018). Growing competition in the healthcare tourism market and customer retention in medical clinics: New and experienced travellers. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 21(6), 680-702.

Jerslev, A. (2016). Media times| in the time of the microcelebrity: Celebrification and the YouTuber zoella. *International Journal of Communication*, *10*, 19.

Kaewpramkusol, R., Senior, K., Nanthamongkolchai, S. & Chenhall, R. (2019). Brand advertising and brand sharing of alcoholic and non-alcoholic products, and the effects on young Thai people's attitudes towards alcohol use: A qualitative focus group study. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, *38*(3), 284-293.

Karson, E.J. & Fisher, R.J. (2005). Reexamining and extending the dual mediation hypothesis in an on-line advertising context. *Psychology & Marketing*, *22*(4), 333-351.

Kaushal, S. K. & Kumar, R. (2016). Influence of attitude towards advertisement on purchase intention: exploring the mediating role of attitude towards brand using SEM approach. *IUP Journal of Marketing Management*, *15*(4).

Kim, S., Kim, S. & King, B. (2019). Nostalgia film tourism and its potential for destination development. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, *36*(2), 236-252.

Lee, H. & Cho, C. H. (2019). An empirical investigation on the antecedents of consumers' cognitions of and attitudes towards digital signage advertising. *International Journal of Advertising*, *38*(1), 97-115.

Lim, X. J., Radzol, A. M., Cheah, J. & Wong, M. W. (2017). The impact of social media influencers on purchase intention and the mediation effect of customer attitude. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, *7*(2), 19-36.

Lo, A. & Qu, H. (2015). A theoretical model of the impact of a bundle of determinants on tourists' visiting and shopping intentions: A case of mainland Chinese tourists. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *22*, 231-243.

Magno, F. & Cassia, F. (2018). The impact of social media influencers in tourism. *Anatolia*, *29*(2), 288-290.

Martin, B. A., Van Durme, J., Raulas, M. & Merisavo, M. (2003). Email Advertising: Exploratory. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *43*(3), 293-300.

Micu, C.C., Sciandra, M.R. & Micu, A. (2019). Understanding social media: The effect of belief type and product type on consumers' social media use. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *27*(1), 55-66.

Miniard, P.W., Bhatla, S. & Rose, R.L. (1990). On the formation and relationship of ad and brand attitudes: An experimental and causal analysis. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *27*(3), 290-303.

Morris, J. D., Woo, C. & Singh, A. J. (2005). Elaboration likelihood model: A missing intrinsic emotional implication. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing*, *14*(1), 79-98.

Nunnally, J.C. & Bernstein, I.H. (1994). Validity. *Psychometric theory*, *3*, 99-132.

Ong, Y.X. & Ito, N. (2019). "I want to go there too!" Evaluating social media influencer marketing effectiveness: a case study of Hokkaido's DMO. In *Information and communication technologies in tourism 2019* (pp. 132-144). Cham: Springer.

Pascal, V.J., Sprott, D.E. & Muehling, D.D. (2002). The influence of evoked nostalgia on consumers' responses to advertising: An exploratory study. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, *24*(1), 39-47.

Petty, R.E. & Cacioppo, J.T. (1986). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. In *Communication and persuasion* (pp. 1-24). New York: Springer.

Pradhan, D., Duraipandian, I. & Sethi, D. (2016). Celebrity endorsement: How celebrity–brand–user personality congruence affects brand attitude and purchase intention. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *22*(5), 456-473.

Sicilia, M. & Ruiz, S. (2010). The effect of web-based information availability on consumers' processing and attitudes. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *24*(1), 31-41.

Van der Veen, R. & Song, H. (2014). Impact of the perceived image of celebrity endorsers on tourists' intentions to visit. *Journal of Travel Research*, *53*(2), 211-224.

Vinzi, V.E., Chin, W.W., Henseler, J. & Wang, H. (2010). *Handbook of partial least squares* (Vol. 201, No. 0). Berlin: Springer.

Wirtz, J. G., Sparks, J. V. & Zimbres, T. M. (2018). The effect of exposure to sexual appeals in advertisements on memory, attitude, and purchase intention: A meta-analytic review. *International Journal of Advertising*, *37*(2), 168-198.

Wojdynski, B. W. & Evans, N. J. (2016). Going native: Effects of disclosure position and language on the recognition and evaluation of online native advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, *45*(2), 157-168.

Yen, C. H. & Teng, H. Y. (2015). Celebrity involvement, perceived value, and behavioral intentions in popular media-induced tourism. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, *39*(2), 225-244.

Yodel, G. (2017). What Is Influencer Marketing? *Huffington Post, July 6*.

Yüksel, A., Bilim, Y. & Yüksel, F. (2014). Customers' assessment of destination advertisements with incomplete information interactions among inferences, attitudes, and purchase intentions. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, *15*(3), 269-293.

Zanna, M. P., & Rempel, J. K. 1988. Attitudes: A new look at an old concept. In D. Bar-Tal & A. W. Kruglanski (Eds.), The social psychology of knowledge: 315-334. New York: Cambridge University Press

Zikmund, W. G., D'Alessandro, S., Winzar, H., Lowe, B. & Babin, B. (2017). *Marketing Research: Asia-Pacific Edition*. Cengage AU.