The contribution of influencers to hotel consumers' decision-making.

Bachelor Thesis for Obtaining the Degree

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Submitted to Yuliya Kolomoyets

Ka Wai Cartier Mok

1811037

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Affidavit

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

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Abstract

The objective of the study is to understand the contribution of influencers to hotel consumers' decision making. Extant literature suggests that the effectiveness of the influencers' messages hinges upon multiple criteria, like trustworthiness, image congruence, and reliability. However, the factors that define those criteria are not sufficiently explored. Hence this thesis aims at exploring which characteristics contribute to the perceived reliability of the message posted by the influencer and moreover, which of these characteristics are the most important contributors to the decisions made by the hotel guests. This thesis can discover the amusing relationship between influencers and consumers while exploring the charisma of influencers. Therefore, it can provide more information for marketers to open up their promotions and marketing. The aim of the study will be achieved by employing a quantitative approach. The data will be collected by means of an online survey and further analyzed with the statistical software.

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List of Abbreviations

DW — Daniel Wellington

eWOM — Electronic word-of-mouth

F&B — Food and Beverage

GDP — Global domestic product

KOL — Key Opinion Leader

WOM — Word-of-mouth

1 Introduction

The last decade has seen a significant rise in social media use and the development of up-to-day technology. Influencers (Opinion Leaders) are currently universal since influencers have gained much attention in social media and public opinion (Zhao & Kong 2017: 47). In 1955, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) proposed a 'two-step flow of communication,' implying that people are not influenced by the mass media directly, somewhat influenced by influencers who edits and spread messages. For instance, influencers' power will depend on their personalities to present their opinions on products or services. An influencer is a person who has professional knowledge in a field, for instance, beauty, fashion, cooking, and travel (Khoury & Farah 2018: 460) and uses the knowledge to influence others' behavior, attitude, and belief and let people adopt their suggestions (Huhn et al. 2018: 61). Influencers impact people's purchase decisions also improve brand awareness (Casaló et al. 2018: 6). According to the Influencer Marketing Hub (2020), most organizations have benefited from influencers. The estimated return on investment into an influential marketing campaign is USD 5.20 for every dollar spent. During the rising trend of customer's purchase decisions influenced and inspired by influencers (Wei & Lu 2013), more researchers have widely studied influencers to determine influencers' impact on consumer decisions (Huhn et al. 2018: 58).

In the internet age, influencers are the primary resource of electronic word-of-mouth (Shi & Wojnicki 2014). Also, Teng (et al. 2014b) states that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a significant way to influence the receiver's acceptance and intention. Therefore, influencers use eWOM to become reliable sources on social media, making sure they can persuade their

audiences (Meng, Wei & Zhu 2011). The content's persuasiveness is related to four aspects: argument quality, source credibility, source attractiveness, and source perception (Teng et al. 2014b). Huhn (2018) states that there is a significant effect between a message's persuasiveness and acceptance. Furthermore, persuasiveness is built by reliability. The reliability of the influencers' messages is related to their professional knowledge, quality of interaction, trustworthiness, and congruence of the message content or influencer's image with consumers' personality and values (Hong et al. 2017: 4; Heinonen 2011; Teng et al. 2014b). Kim and Gupta (2012) also found that emotion and the system of values also affect reliability. According to Marketing Interactive (2018), 83% of YouTube users made purchase decisions based on influencers' suggestions since they interact and build-up a relationship. In the United States, 50% of Gen Z and 48% of millennials purchased products or services recommended by influencers, mainly for their perceived professional knowledge and sincerity (Morning Consult n.d.).

Since the beginning of social platforms, the large volume of online travel information has caused consumers to brain fog and difficulty making decisions (Gretzel & Sigala 2017). Therefore, tourism and hospitality marketers are looking for help with influencers as they have higher persuasion and reputation on social media (Huhn et al. 2018: 68). Influencers utilize their power, reliability, and experience shares to influence travelers' decision making like destination and hotel. Though most believe hotel sponsorship made influencers negatively on behavior intent, the sponsorship transparency does followers appreciate influencers and positively affect purchase intention (De Jans et al. 2020; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019). Influencers are also more open, honest, and trustworthy in online networks since they always interact with

audiences and real-time shares (Huhn et al. 2018: 68). Compared to traditional celebrities, influencers have higher credibility and persuasion in social media reliability builds on interpersonal interaction by a long-term relationship (Tang et al. 2014).

This study's objective is to understand the contribution of influencers to hotel consumers' decision making. Even though the extant literature states that the reliability of influencers' content refers to several criteria, few research studies have directly defined the criteria. The findings of this thesis contribute to the existing literature in two ways. First, exploring which characteristics contribute to the perceived reliability of influencers' messages. Second, identify which characteristics have more influence on hotel consumers' decision making. Thence, this thesis can provide in-depth insights into the relationship between influencers and followers while exploring influencers. The underlying research questions of this thesis are:

RQ1.   What factors contribute to the perceived reliability of the message posted by the hotel influencer?

RQ2.   How does perceived message reliability relates to the intention to stay in the hotel?

This thesis will use eWOM as the framework and make a hypothesis to highlight the importance of influencers' reliability and how they persuade consumers' decision making.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Why Influencers Works?

Since social media developed rapidly, influencers, also known as Opinion Leaders, are essential in the social network (Zhao & Kong 2017). An influencer is a person who has some appealing qualities and charisma, such as their look, body, or talent, knowledge, and charisma that he or she employs to persuade others (Weber 1968). Influencers as those who have a higher number of followers as well as influence their followers to act (Jarski 2016). Keller and Fay (2009) also stated that influencers as daily consumers are often likely than ordinary people to discover knowledge and share messages, suggestions, and beliefs with other online users. Actively express their knowledge of products and services, and as advice and insights for others (Keller and Fay 2009). In eastern, influencers also named 'Key Opinion Leader' (KOL), which is the derivative of the internet and social media, 'Key' implying the person who is the expert in fields they represent, such as beauty, sport, cooking, travel, and fashion (Zhao & Kong 2017). KOL's terms are most likely used in Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, Philippine, and China (Digital Crew. n.d.). Since the conceptualization of the terms "influencer," "opinion leader," and "key opinion leader" are rather similar; in this study, the terms are used interchangeably.

According to the 'Two-Step Communication' model, the opinion leader is more influential than others in the social environment (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955) as well as influencers are the most influential group in social media and considered as significant communicators from the mass media (Chakravarthy & Prasad 2011). In the digital age, an influencer is a dynamic person on the

social network, and they love to share their ideas, recommendations, opinions, and behaviors (Steensma 2015: 3213). Also, they share their daily life on social networks to reach much attention and understanding from online users and followers. For example, an influencer shares their lifestyle, daily activities, diet, and outfits (Meng et al. 2011: 142; Teng et al. 2014b; Huhn et al. 2018). Therefore, the public quickly approved influencers' positive image, turned into a source of information, and started treating them as role models (Fraser & Brown 2002; Istania et al. 2019). At the time, online influencers have more new appearances, richer products and services knowledge, and a broader social community than traditional influencers or traditional opinion leaders (Meng & Wei 2014). Meng and Wei (2014) mentioned that the user model construction had played effectively as influencers' professional knowledge and interactivity influence consumer behavior.

Furthermore, influencers can be divided into two types, polymorphic and monomorphic. Polymorphic influencers are expert in a few fields, while monomorphic only possess expertise in one significant field (Chakravarthy & Prasad 2011). Besides the area's knowledge, the previous research showed that influencers have five attributes that will lead people to like and esteem them. For instance, make sage decisions, understand the community's situation and needs, prove their success at work, help the community actively, and have a common background with the community-led (Chakravarthy & Prasad 2011). In addition to this, influencers' attitude will also influence others' beliefs, opinions, decisions, and actions (Petty & Krosnick 1995; Zhao & Kong 2017). An attitude is an appraisal with positive and negative features acting as anchors, based on knowledge, sense, and beliefs (Huhn et al. 2018).

The valence of attitude towards an influencer defines whether the influence is positive or negative. (Petty & Krosnick 1995).

Proliferation of the new media provides an ideal path for influencers to spread their messages and interact with followers, for example, social networks, blogs, forums, and other forms of online platforms (Huhn et al. 2018). Sun and other researchers (2006) stated that interaction and communication between the influencer and their followers could easily effect followers' behavior and intention of the latter. Moreover, influencers bring the content of specific brands, products, and services through social platforms that are not only designed to attract followers and a sense of identity (Istania et al. 2019) while to reaches people's attention to those products and services (Casaló et al. 2018: 6). Influencers are known as gaining control of brands since they spread not only fresh messages to brands and followers but also gain new audiences for a brand and frame brand awareness (Barker, 2016). Chevalier & Mayzlin (2006) noted that influencers who participated in products or services would substantially affect product sales volume when online influencers have even more product awareness, which followers are often taking their recommendations rather than traditional influencers (Meng and Wei 2014).

Most marketing research proves that influencers play a significant role in purchasing decisions, explaining the rise of influencer marketing (Kotler & Keller 2012). Influencer marketing is a strategy that employs key opinion leaders or influencers to promote consumers' brand awareness and purchase intention (Brown & Hayes 2008; Scott 2015). Therefore, this strategy is the action of influencers to promote a product or services personally as well as utilize a personal field of expertise and knowledge, which followers might more likely accept and trust that information. Marketing research stated that 56% of

U.S. people who have made purchase decisions after seeing a post from their favorite influencers or opinion leaders, and influencer marketing is generated 11 times more than traditional advertising (Morning Consult n.d.; Desk 2018). Consequently, marketers are actively employing or inviting influencers to get into their brand to enhance espousal, awareness, market share, attend to new audiences and consumers, and increase traffic (Gretzel & Sigala 2017). Given 615 million internet users applied AdBlock apps, software to block every advertisement significantly affects advertisements and businesses to show their products or services on social platforms (PageFair 2017). One of the advantages of influencers for companies and businesses is that internet users cannot block influencers' posts, even though influencers' messages have a promotional and sponsors element (The Publicfast Influencer n.d.). Additionally, influencers can naturally permeate their messages on quality content that wins followers' attention and certainly understand how to perform products and services to followers than traditional advertisements and celebrities (The Publicfast Influencer n.d.). Therefore, influencers are successes for the market and remarkably.

In practice, influencers will be invited by marketers to participate in their products and services, for example, companies send freebies to influencers, invite to join brand's event or fashion shows, and send limited or personalized products to influencers (Gretzel & Sigala 2017; Barker 2016). All of these actions are satisfying influencers, and meantime, marketers hope that influencers post or share their products or services on influencers' own social media accounts and attract audiences (Gretzel & Sigala 2017; Barker 2016). Besides, some marketers and companies will provide "promotion discount codes" for influencers (Barker 2016). Marketers will develop a discount code

for each influencer uniquely that aims to target influencers' followers and is highly effective for marketers to understand whether influencers are valuable for a company (Barker 2016). Influencers provide a discount code in their photo or video description, primarily to engage their followers and potential consumers to purchase the product and help the company get more consumers to convert (Barker 2016). For instance, the watch company Daniel Wellington did not utilize traditional advertising but invest in influencer marketing (mediakix 2019). As Daniel Wellington cooperates with thousands of influencers to post photos on Instagram, influencers need to provide the watch's 15% off discount code in their caption (mediakix 2019). Depend on this campaign, influencers helped DW revenue booted to $220 million that increased revenue by 214% between 2014 and 2015. In one year, Daniel Wellington's Instagram followers enhanced from 850K to 2.1M (mediakix 2019).

THE MARKET SIZE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING IN THE WORLD 2016-2019
(IN BILLION U.S. DOLLARS)
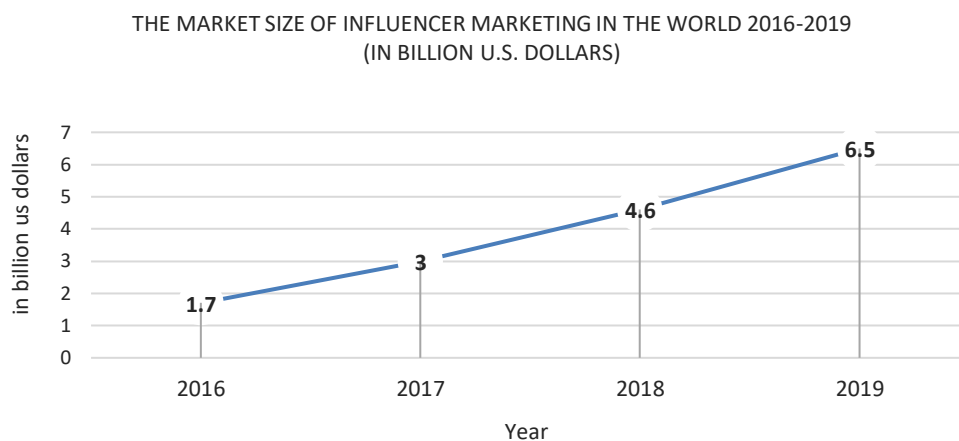
Figure 1 The Market Size of Influencer Marketing in the World 2016-2019 (in billion U.S. dollars) (Guttmann 2020a)

Influencers provide numerous audiences, potential consumers, profit, and brand awareness to their collaborators (mediakix 2020). Although influencers

did not have any sponsors or collaborations, influencers' behaviors and shares always effect followers' intentions (BeInfluence 2020). In general, influencer marketing is valuable for a business to move to the next level when making influencers' fair use (mediakix 2020). Figure 1 gives a general picture of the global marketing size of influencer marketing from 2016 to 2019, which grew 3.8 times in the reviewed period, from 4.6 billion U.S. dollars to 6.5 billion U.S. dollars in one year (Guttmann 2020a). Influencer marketing's global market size has risen significantly, and influencers have a vital role in the market. In 2018, there are over 500,000 influencers active just on Instagram, implying there is a high demand for influencers (Droesch 2019). Researchers also estimated that the influencer market value would continue to increase from 137 million U.S. dollars in 2018 to 370 million U.S. dollars in 2027, as people are powerfully effected by influencers (Guttmann 2020b).

2.2 Influencers and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

In the digital era, social networking allows users to establish their profile and share their emotions, views, and state with those who also use social media (Teng et al. 2016). For instance, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube these social media platforms empower its users to get in touch with others globally in which no geographic limitations (Teng et al. 2016). As online sharing and electronic commerce have increasingly developed, consumers often search for other consumers' and influencers' experiences, reviews, and perceptions about products and services before making purchase decisions (Teng et al. 2016). Consumers' decisions and behaviors are naturally affected by influencers and other consumers who share reviews and experiences on social platforms (Teng et al. 2016).

Therefore, influencers make fair use of three main ways to influences people: becoming a social media influencer, use electronic word-of-mouth, and giving recommendations on purchase and use (Van Der Merwe & Van Heerden 2009; Istania et al. 2019). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is one of the primary ways for influencers to influence people on social networks. At the same time, influencers are the primary source of eWOM (Shi & Wojnicki 2014). In traditional marketing, word-of-mouth (WOM) uses face-to-face methods to transmit first-hand or second-hand messages and experiences (Bone 1995; Keller & Berry 2003). WOM has been shown to have a significant effect on customer decision and post-purchase product perceptions (Bone 1995; Keller & Berry 2003). However, social networks' development has enabled consumers to exchange and share their consumption-related opinions on the internet, thereby establishing two-way conversation as electronic word-of-mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Barreto, 2014).

eWOM means any positive or negative statement outputted by practical, previous, and hidden customers through social media becomes a reference (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Compared to offline conversations as WOM, online conversations let influencers reach audiences widely and quickly, as well as reduce the restriction of spread (Lyons & Henderson 2005). The comparison of WOM and eWOM is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Comparison of WOM and eWOM (Huete-Alcocer 2017)

	Word-of-mouth	**Electronic-word-of-mouth**
Reliability	Receivers definitely know who provides information, which positive on messages' reliability.	Receivers and information providers can be anonymous, which may influence messages' reliability.
Privacy	Conversations could be private, face-to-face, and real-time.	Posted information is not private. All messages will be recorded, also read by others anytime and anywhere.
Transmission speed	Slow. When sharing messages, receivers have to be on the scene.	High-speed. Information can come through the Internet to spread to others immediately.
Accessibility	Not easily accessible	Readily accessible

Given that eWOM is a prevalent consumer custom, it exhibits a higher effect on consumers' intention and purchase decision (Wang and Hsu 2008). Doh and Hwang (2009) studied that almost 98% of customers often relied on eWOM before making purchase decisions. For example, 74% of tourists depend on online reviews to decide their own travel plans (Teng et al. 2016). Mostly, eWOM in the hospitality and tourism industry plays a critical role because its industry includes intangible products that consumers are hard to assess before consumption (Litvin et al. 2008). The previous research stated that eWOM is often using on the online tourism platform, having extensive and outstanding information from various types, hotels, influencers, consumers (Mack et al. 2008). For instance, customers exchange information with customers, posting

content on social media and forums (Mack et al. 2008). Compared to other consumption like buying clothes, beauty products, and jewelry, those are able to return and tangible. However, travel is intangible, no withdrawal option, expensive and spend time. Thus, eWOM is useful and meaningful for travelers to get information and advice from others since some travel agencies are untrustworthy (Mack et al. 2008).

Furthermore, the reliability of eWOM is based on who has the rich professional knowledge and trustworthiness as consumers will judge reviewer profiles to determine whether sources reliable (Bansal & Voyer 2000; Mitchell & Dacin 1996; Nowak & McGloin 2014). Related to various variables like the reputation of reviewers, the usefulness of previous reviews, related images, and text, when reviewers are endorsed, eWOM messages efficiently influence people's intentions (Nowak & McGloin 2014; Cheung et al. 2008). For example, when consumers choose complex products and need expert info, they are more likely to take the recommendation from eWOM messages posted by influencers since influencers have professional knowledge (John et al. 2014). Besides, influencers with a bigger size of followers mean influencers are approved, which may develop an active effect on their reputation and credibility (Lin et al. 2019). Higher credibility of influencers' eWOM messages means higher power to influence followers' purchase intention (Lin et al. 2019). Previous research also shows that eWOM has higher credibility, empathy, and connection with customers than WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Therefore, consumers thought eWOM was one of the most important origins of information to make purchase decisions, and eWOM is more credible than advertising(Wang and Hsu 2008; Nowak & McGloin 2014).

Influencers utilize eWOM to share real-experiences of products and services and provide reviews and suggestions to influence followers' behaviors (Wang and Hsu 2008; Teng et al. 2016). Influencers' eWOM messages have become reliable and essential within the marketing channel since introducing products within experiences and personal context, knowledge, and expertise (Zhou et al. 2019: 199). For example, Lush Cosmetics did an outstanding job with influencers since influencers are the primary sources of eWOM (Galera 2020). Lush invited beauty vlogger Jaclyn Forbes to visit their factory so that Jaclyn Forbes could share her experience and Lush's products to followers (Galera 2020). Therefore, Jaclyn Forbes's reputation and reliability enhanced the eWOM of Lush, like bringing Lush's products in front of consumers (Galera 2020). The combination of eWOM and influencers help Lush constructed a billion-dollar cosmetics brand (Galera 2020).

Figure 2 gives a picture of what influencers' element influences U.S. Generation Z and Millennials to take the product and service they recommended. As the graph shows, when influencers have a well-inform and knowledge of the product, brand, or industry they introduce, it is broadest possible to make Gen Z and Millennials take those products or services. Besides, 50% and 48% of people are affected by influencers' real enthusiasm and believed that influencers have the same value and type (Morning Consult n.d.). Therefore, it proved that when influencers share real experiences and provide professional knowledge could become eWOM and influence others' purchase intention instead of sponsored information or funny posts.
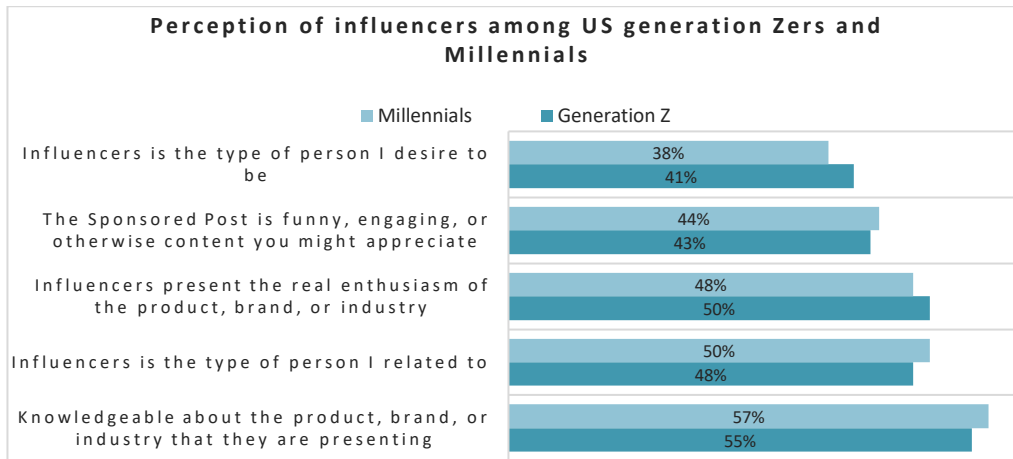
Figure 2 How Influencers influence US Gen Z and Millennials to take the product/ service they recommend. (Morning Consult n.d.)

In other words, most people believe information is reliable based on influencers' expertise, knowledge of products or services, trust, and previous experience in evaluating products (Teng et al. 2014b; Zhou et al. 2019: 199). Besides, influencers always share their real-life experiences to increase the sense of familiarity and trust with followers that significantly can extend influencers' eWOM out of current followers to followers' family or friends (TFL 2018). Cheung (et al. 2009) also stated that youngsters now are most likely to search eWOM and online reviews before purchasing and consuming the products or services, neither rely on advertising nor magazine (Sa'ait et al. 2016). Therefore, influencers undertake the part of providing products and services' reviews, implying that eWOM and influencers are closely linked and inseparable.

2.3 Influencers and Decision Making

Before the purchase decision, consumers through several stages since the purchase decision never happens by chance and is the complicated process as Figure 3 – Consumer Behavior Model (Kotler & Keller 2015). Figure 3 shows that consumer behavior is stimulated by marketing and other stimuli, such as economic, cultural, technological, and political (Kotler & Keller 2015). Marketing and other stimulants generate consumers' awareness, in which psychological merges with characteristics of consumers generated decision-making processes and purchase decisions (Kotler & Keller 2015).
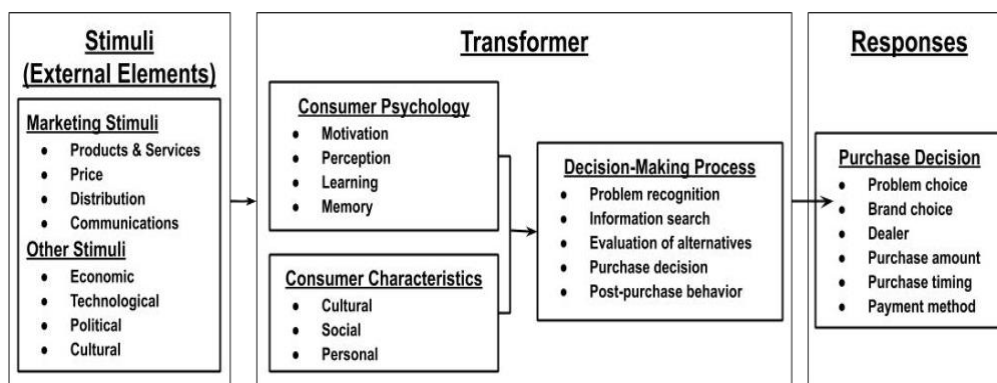
Figure 3 Consumer Behavior Model (Kotler & Keller 2015)

There are five roles involved like organizer, influencers, decider, purchaser, and user(s) in the decision-making process (Verma & Kapoor 2003). The explanation of the five roles is presented in Table 2. Besides, customer decision-making can be illustrated as the five-stage process (Table 3), including problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior (Engel et al. 1978, cited in Osei & Abenyin 2016). However, consumers might involve five steps or skip some of the decision-making processes, and the five roles mentioned above will

correspond to the five-stage process (Table 3) (Kotler & Keller 2015; Engel et al. 1978, cited in Osei & Abenyin 2016). Therefore, marketers must comprehend the decision-making process to present and catch consumers' attention correctly and interact effectually to targeted consumers and complete sales (Lim et al. 2017).

Table 2 The five roles within the decision-making process (Verma & Kapoor 2003)

The five roles within the decision-making process

1. **Organizer**
   - The person who begins suggests or expresses ideas of purchasing the need for a particular product or service.

2. **Influencers**
   - A person who forms and influences others thinks of the process and how is the final decision.

3. **Decider**
   - The person who makes a final decision based on gathered information decides to purchase which products or services. Responsibility for deciding where to buy, when to buy, which brand, and how to pay.

4. **Purchaser**
   - The person who implements the purchase process.

5. **User (s)**
   - The person who consumes, beneficiaries, or uses the product or service may not be the purchaser.

Table 3 Five-Stage Decision-Making Model & Five roles (Kotler & Keller 2015; Akar et al. 2015; Engel et al. 1978, cited in Osei & Abenyin 2016)

Five-Stage Decision-Making Process	Roles
1. Problem Recognition	**Organizer**

Recognizes the need by internal and external stimuli
   o Internal: Hunger, Purpose
   o External: Advertisement, Social Media	

2. Information Search	**Influencers**

• Two levels of information search:
  Actively seek and passively collect the information
• Information sources:
  o **Personal**: e.g., Friends, Family
  o **Commercial**: e.g., Advertisement, Website, Displays
  o **Public**: e.g., Social Media, Influencers, Mass Media
  o **Experiential**: e.g., Influencers, User
• Personal or experiential source and public source (Independent organization) generally regarded as potent information	

3. Evaluation of Alternatives	**Influencers**
• Consumers try to satisfy needs → Searching for particular benefits → Products bundled by attributes and benefits • Evaluation alternatives are referred to rational and conscious basis of consumers • Consumers' evaluation alternatives are often influenced by marketer content and social media, visual, and online review.	

4. <u>Purchase Decision</u>	**Deciders & Purchaser**

Although evaluations are formed, two factors might intercede the purchase intention and decision.

1. Attuited of others (e.g., attitude toward consumers' alternative, brand awareness)
2. Unexpected situation (e.g., influencers endorsement, discount)

5. <u>Post-purchase Evaluation</u>	**User (s)**

After purchase, consumers' satisfaction levels sway future participation.

- o **Satisfied**: Purchase again, Positive review
- o **Dissatisfied**: Return or desert the brand or products, Complain, Negative review

During the five-stage decision-making model (Table 3), the second stage: information search, and the third stage: evaluating alternatives related to "influencers" of five roles to shape and influence others' thoughts and behaviors (Verma & Kapoor 2003). Therefore, influencers or key opinion leaders become an "influencer" in the decision-making process. At present, eWOM and influencers are significant sources in the stage of information search. By collecting information, consumers gather facts about products and services that might increase their decision involvement and become their choice (Engel et al. 1978 in Osei & Abenyin 2016). Studies have shown that 98% of online consumers search for influencers' reviews before purchase (Channel Advisor 2011; Doh and Hwang 2009). For instance, influencers as an essential source for consumers, particularly youngsters becoming more and more conscious of what products or services they take and spend (Sa'ait et al. 2016). Gupta and Harris (2010) also stated that eWOM reviews and influencers'

recommendations have a positive relationship with consumer decision-making and chiefly useful for consumers who have a lower motivation to exploration much information.

Moreover, purchase decision (intention) is the partiality of a consumer to purchase products or services, which is the fourth stage after information search and evaluation. As mentioned above, purchase decisions and intentions will be affected by others' attuited and unexpected situations, such as consumer's knowledge, product package, perceived value, and influencers endorsement. Consumers' knowledge has a positive relationship with their response, which plays a vital role in purchasing decisions (Jayachandran et al. 2004). Besides, products' and services' design and packaging are the fundamental characteristics of products since consumers are most likely to choose a beautiful and styling product and company (Fung et al. 2004). Perceived value is one element that influences purchase intention, which means the relationship between products and consumers (Snoj et al. 2004). Perceived value is also related to tangible and intangible and internal and external (Snoj et al. 2004). For example, a higher perceived value causing a higher purchase intention (Chang & Wildt 1994). Therefore, when the influencers or companies could present entertaining and creatives' photos, videos, messages, and advertising, which might catch consumers' gaze, as well as enhance consumers' perceived value and purchase intention. Lastly, Silvera and Austad (2004) stated that influencer or celebrity endorsement is practical on purchase intention, but the critical point is that products and services should be rational.

In order to become a successful company, and marketers need to comprehend the consumer behavior model and decision-making process to exploit

strategies to catch consumers' attention correctly and interact with them to facilitate consumption (Lim et al. 2017). Although marketers are active in presenting information and become external stimuli to cause consumers to get products or services in mind and become choices, the essential element is who acts as an intermediary to spread messages (Kotler & Keller 2012). Considering that influencers and decision-making have mutual relations, influencers' personal opinion, ability, and position considerably influence consumers' decision-making (Sudha & Sheena 2017). They also maintain a lively online conversation to cause followers to try the products and services and construct a beneficial perception of followers' purchase decisions (Lee & Youn 2009). According to influencers' characters, high visibility, influence, attractiveness, interpersonal relationship, as well as massive spread messages quickly (Kotler & Keller 2015; Lim et al. 2017; Istania et al. 2019). Several studies show that high reputation and visibility influencers significantly influence product sales since they publish online comments on social or shopping platforms, such as influencers of Amazon (Chevalier & Mayzlin 2006).

Besides, influencers' opinions today become a tendency, and followers perceive influencers as 'needs' rather than 'wants,' in which followers duplicate influencers' style and view as an expert of a particular field (Sudha & Sheena 2017). When followers trust influencers, that will establish a positive inclination to consume, also increase their purchase behavior and repurchase chances (Meng & Wei 2015). A statistic report stated that 87% of investigated consumers' purchases were followed and inspired by influencers' post, and 80% of consumers will check links or images to make a purchase, as well as half and above consumers will spend up to $629 on a single purchase, and 42% expend less than $100, while they were influenced by influencers (Rakuten

Marketing 2019). These are why marketers employ influencers in influencer marketing and eWOM advertising to stimulate consumers' purchase intention (Kotler & Keller 2015; Huhn et al. 2018). Given that influencers can influence consumers' decision making and cause higher visibility of products and services, partner companies might gain positive consequences by hiring influencers.

A feature of this study is to focus on hotel customers' decision-making. In addition to influencers will influence hotel consumers' decision-making, hotels themselves also impact consumers' decisions. Generally, hotel characteristics and amenities are important factors to influence consumers' selection since consumers aim to maximize total utility, such as spending a dollar reaching the large marginal utility per expense (Alvino et al. 2018). Therefore, tourists will consider the hotel's intangible and tangible elements when choosing a hotel (Chow et al. 1994). Intangible included: security, service quality, and dependability, customer-friendly, and reputation, yet these attributes are hard to assess before patronage (Chow et al. 1994). Thence, tangible elements are significant to help customers make a hotel purchase decision (Chow et al. 1994). Tangible elements are related to price, location, the look of facilities, amenities, and word of mouth communication (Chow et al. 1994). The previous statistic studied that which amenities significantly essential for U.S. tourists when choosing a hotel for leisure. During the survey, 92% of comfortable beds, 91% of cleanliness, followed by 89% location and price (Statista 2019). In order to retain and attract hotel consumers, hotels should have an optimal package with intangible and tangible elements since experience and performance also influence consumers' future decisions. If consumers did not consume before, consumers might be based on influencers' experiences and eWOM to decide

whether a hotel is well or not since intangible only can be determined by others' experiences.

2.4 The persuasiveness of Influencers' Content

The principal purpose of marketing communication is to persuade customers who are bait to consume the products, services, or support the ideas promoted (Kenechukwu et al. 2013; Alan & Kruti, 2009). Hence, it is essential to understand how persuasion works and what constitutes a persuasive message. As mentioned in the introduction, persuasive messages are related to four aspects: argument quality, source reliability, attractiveness, and perception (Teng et al. 2014b). According to the communication persuasion theory, persuasion of the eWOM is facilitated by talents of influencers, particularly the professional level and expert knowledge; value and image congruence between influencers and followers; and the characteristics of followers, such as belief, taste, and education level (Chu & Kim 2011).

The persuasiveness of influencers' content is defined by who receives an online message and whether a source of a message is reliable, which implies the excellent relationship determines the persuasiveness of messages (Teng et al. 2014a). A perfect relationship is based on interaction, such as communication, informing, listening, and answering (Finne & Grönroos 2009: 186). Several studies show that a more robust connection develops many influences on customer purchase decisions and has a higher persuasion than a frail bond (Momtaz et al. 2011: 47-48). Furthermore, influencers or opinion leaders with professional knowledge are more persuasive and more able to drive followers' purchase intention than those with a low degree of knowledge (Lim et al. 2017). Thus, influencers with higher professional knowledge are supposed to

be more persuasive than other online users or traditional celebrities with lower perceptual knowledge (Wang & Scheinbaum 2017). On top of that, rapport relation is the element that affects influencers' trustworthiness, level of expertise, and reliability, particularly teen generations (Lim et al. 2017).

Apart from influencers' professional knowledge and the relationship between influencers and followers, language is essential to enhance content's persuasiveness. Virtanen and Halmari (2005) stated that compelling speech is a procedure to influence others' opinions or beliefs. The content of posts or vlogs usually has limited space to express many products or services' information. Influencers need to use a narrow margin to establish content to persuade their followers (Virtanen & Halmari 2005). Therefore, influencers need to comprehend followers' values, hobbies, and background to adjust the style to persuade their followers and raise contents' persuasiveness (ibid). According to Kenechukwu (et al. 2013) and Janoschka (2004), persuasive language is related to psychological needs. There are several compelling language strategies to persuade followers to purchase and employ a designated lifestyle, such as driving someone's emotions and using different rhetorical or phrases. Utilizing various methods and languages interact and persuade their followers, such as orders, warning of content to stimulate their followers, asking questions, and sincerely ensuring the quality of products or services (Janoschka 2004; Carr et al. 2012). These building persuasion tools are essential for influencers' content, and persuasiveness is specially built up by trust and knowledge (Kenechukwu 2013).

2.4.1 Reliability of The Message Posted By Influencers

Reliability is the element that will influence consumers' or followers' believable. Generally, influencers or opinion leaders who have higher professional knowledge and trustworthiness are thought of as powerful persuade with their followers (Lim et al. 2017). The messages' reliability also implies a degree of credibility, dignity, personality, and genuineness owned by the influencer, which is felt by followers (Wang & Scheinbaum 2017). As well as message reliability influences receivers' reliance and suspicion during a response to persuasive content (Briñol et al. 2015).

Professional knowledge principally stands for the reliability of influencers' message, and better reliability is frequently exposed to induce more persuasiveness than fewer reliability sources (Nafees et al. 2020; Bansal & Voyer 2000). Professional knowledge means the level of perceptual understanding, technical abilities, a knowledge that influencers have (Wang & Scheinbaum 2017). Therefore, influencers' professional knowledge seems like a certificate of sources or messages that significantly affect the degree of persuasion and messages' reliability, such as persuade followers to make a purchase decision (Wang & Scheinbaum 2017; Till & Shimp 1998). Meng and Wei (2014) stated that consumers often have depended on professional knowledge to reduce the perceived risk and refer to the experts' recommendations during the buying evaluation phase, especially since the sources are reliable (Bansal & Voyer 2000). Besides, influencers acquaint with products or services, which followers are likely to accept advice from those who have higher knowledge and reliability (Meng and Wei 2014). Metzger (et al. 2003) pointed out that compared with influencers' posts, followers usually

ignore traditional advertisements since influencers are considered as professional and more trustworthy.

Apart from professional knowledge, reliability is also related to trust like integrity, probity, and believability of influencers. Followers will identify influencers' reliability through their daily sharing and actions instead of informed by influencers (Erdogan 1999). Besides, using emotion to present messages successfully increases trust than messages only require followers to reflect on (Gadalla et al. 2019). When followers consider that source is reliable, they would suppose the message is hugely believable, leading to a change in opinions and behaviors and facilitating purchase intention (Wang et al. 2017). Therefore, to exert their influence, influencers must earn followers' trust and lend followers to think that messages are reliable (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998; Levin & Cross 2004). An existing investigation determined the element of influencers' trust, including benevolence and strong ties (Levin & Cross 2004; Seidman 2014). Benevolence means a willingness on the follower to consider influencers' recommendations, and influencers did not provide any information that harmful or misleading their followers (Levin & Cross 2004). Second, strong ties implying influencers' principles that suitable for followers, such as sameness opinions and compassion (Levin & Cross 2004). Possessing these trust elements leads followers more likely to follow influencers' advice and believe in influencers' reliability (Levin & Cross 2004).

Technology has developed extensive social data in the digital era and now has not only personal ideas but also interaction (Schlosser 2005). Therefore, interaction becomes more prominent. Communication and interaction help influencers increase relationships with followers and become trusted (Cacioppo et al. 1986) as reliability developed better when interpersonal

interaction is close and long-time (Teng et al. 2014b; Tang et al. 2014). The favorable relationship with influencers and followers can enhance the reliability of messages posted by influencers, as well as increase social influence. For instance, influencers interact with followers positively influence brand awareness and cause people to gradually like a product (J. E. Lee & Watkins 2016). When followers and influencers develop a relationship, they will establish a kind of appreciation for influencers, implying influencers' messages are reliable and persuasive (J. E. Lee & Watkins 2016).

Besides, influencers should depend on their professional knowledge and experiences to provide timely reviews and suggestions of products or services. Meanwhile, the real-time posts and promptly answering any questions are great methods to prove influencers are reliable, such as live-chat on YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook (Heinonen 2011). Influencers should also provide consistent messages and descriptions to support message quality and effectiveness (Lee, Kim, & Moon 2000: 309). Those are important to increase reliability, in which followers will be most likely to obtain satisfaction and confidence (Lee, Kim, & Moon 2000: 309). Also, develop a close and kind relationship between influencers and followers, particularly teenagers who are active on social media, which has a positive effect on followers considered influencers' information reliable (Lim et al. 2017).

Do you trust influencers to give you good advice about brands or products they are promoting?
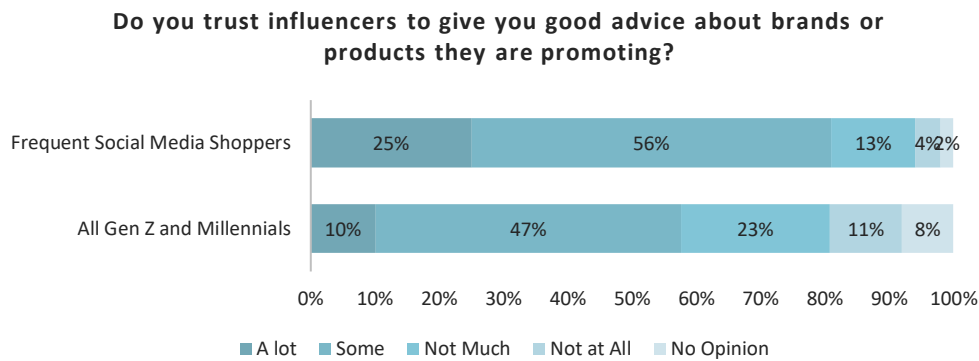
Figure 4 Do you trust influencers to give you good advice about brands or products they are promoting? (Morning Consult n.d.)

Figure 4 gives a picture of whether followers trust influencers' advice about brands or products they are promoting. The graph shows only a few people have no opinion of trust in influencers. 25% of the frequent social media shoppers are definitely trusting in influencers' product promotions, while 47% and 56% of people have some trust in influencers (Morning Consult n.d.). On Twitter, there are 49% of users have relied on influencers since having interaction (Katieaka 2016). It proved that influencers increase reliability over the brands and customers, become persuasive as consumers have more trust in those who are talking on social media than traditional advertisements (Huhn et al. 2018).

2.5 Influencers in Tourism and Hospitality

According to the world travel and tourism council (n.d.), travel and tourism occupied 10.3% of global GDP (Global domestic product) directly, indirectly, and induced impact in 2019. Moreover, it contributed almost 9 trillion U.S. dollars to the world's GDP (World Travel & Tourism Council n.d.). The concept of tourism is defined as "A social, cultural and economic phenomenon that

entails people's movement to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business or professional purposes" (UNWTO n.d.). Tourism is people's activities for different purposes such as business, vacation, relaxation, and fun, called visitors or tourists (Skripak 2016). As a thriving tourism destination correlated with several industries and departments, for example, government, residents, and public and private sectors (Skripak 2016). Under tourism, it decomposed to vast industry set, for instance, lodging, food and beverage (F&B), recreation, convention and event management, clubs, and travel and tourism(Skripak 2016; Rivera & Upchurch 2008). These six sectors are part of the hospitality industry, the hospitality industry providing products and services to tourists and non-tourists, aims to give in recreation and satisfaction (Skripak 2016; Rivera & Upchurch 2008). Table 4 shows the extent of the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry is defined as the nature of tourism, related to food, beverage, and lodging consumption away from the ordinary home base (Page 2011). The largest part of the industry is a combination of lodging and food and beverage, and the hospitality industry helps people feel welcome and relaxing. In other words, hospitality is an essential part of tourism, to draw visitors and become a decision element in picking out a destination and a friendly unit (Ionel, 2016; Page 2011). Besides, the tourism industry is frequently viewed as the world's primary industry and positively affects the economy and provide the impetus of products and services (Skripak 2016).

Table 4 Extent of the Hospitality Industry (Anderson & Westcott 2020; Skripak 2016)

Industry groups	Types
Accommodations and Lodging	• Resorts • Hotels • Motels • Hostels • Time-Sharing/ Home Away
Food and Beverage	• Restaurants • Catering • Bars & Cafés/ Tea and Coffee Shop • Nightclubs
Recreation and Entertainment	• Theme Park • Adventure and Outdoor Recreation
Convention and Event Management	• Meetings • Expositions/ Exhibitions • International/ Social and Special Events
Clubs	• Private Clubs • Country/City Clubs
Travel and Tourism	• Travel Agents/ Online Travel Agencies • Tour Operators • Casinos • Cruises • Airlines • Car Rental

Now travel becomes a trend, and everyone can share their travel experiences on social media readily. Social media turn into a tool to promote tourism and hospitality and play an essential role in exploring travel information (Alic et al.

2017). However, online travel information is currently overburdened, which requires new destination promotion strategies to fit social media affordance (Gretzel & Sigala 2017). During the global competition, tourism marketers are starting to employ influencers to benefit tourism since influencers in the tourism industry frame an essential eWOM in the travel context and as a favorable media for the market (Deloitte Access Economics 2019; Alic et al. 2017; Gretzel & Sigala 2017). Travelers also look forward to influencers as essential sources on their coming travel (Deloitte Access Economics 2019; Alic et al. 2017). As mentioned before, influencers are friendly online celebrities who have massive followers and effectively influence others (Gretzel & Sigala 2017). Simultaneously, social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat allow uploading photos and videos immediately, so influencers' real-time travel sharing causes buzz to interest and stimulates their followers (Ahmed & Nafi 2019; Gretzel & Sigala 2017; Alic et al. 2017). For example, Kiersten Rich is one of the top hotel influencers. She has visited more than 50 countries and showcasing travel tips, experience, and hotel information for 544,000 followers on Instagram and gain at least 10,000 likes of each travel post (KiKi n.d.; IZEA 2018). Additionally, different destination management organizations have proven that influencers effectively promote tourism and hospitality (Gretzel & Sigala 2017). For instance, the Japan National Travel Organization, Hong Kong Tourism Board, and the Korea Tourism Organization cooperated with influencers to promote destinations on social platforms and make fair use of hangtags to obtains audiences' attention (Marketing Interactive, 2016; PR Newswire, 2018; Kang, 2019).

In the next five years, 50% of visitors will be using influencers' information to decide their travel (Deloitte Access Economics 2019). In this context, making

fair use of influencers could attract more attention from people, increase the reputation and attractiveness of destinations and hotels, and deliver interests to tourism and hospitality, in which influencers become a critical part of tourisms' branding campaign (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel 2019; Gretzel & Sigala 2017; Glover 2009). Gretzel and Sigala (2017) also stated that influencers are often used in tourism and hospitality to break down the conventional image of destinations or the hospitality industry, show fresh ideas to cause behavioral change (Li et al. 2017). Different types of travel could also be presented by influencers that might stimuli travel to less-visited destinations, solve over-tourism, and reach redirect tourism mobile (Gretzel 2019; Li et al. 2017). Tourism marketers also employ 'micro-influencers' who have fewer followers (below 100,000 followers), aiming to attract a smaller scale and enhance noise (Mahajan & Gupta 2019; Femenia-Serra & Gretzel 2019). Specifically, searching for travel information on social media or platforms, people are often influenced by who bonded with, and strong attachments influence their intention and opinions (Chung & Han 2017).

This research paper emphasizes on hotels' consumer decisions be affected by influencers. Glover (2009) noted that the long-time relationship between hotels and influencers would deliver benefits, such as attention, reputation, repurchase, and brand awareness. Meanwhile, influencers have been commonly used by international hotels. When an influencer endorses a hotel, it could significantly increase the hotels' awareness and attractiveness (Glover 2009; Femenia-Serra & Gretzel 2019). For example, YouTuber Taryn Southern was invited by Marriott to promote their new brand, "Moxy Hotels," and video blogger Jack Harries collaborated with Marriott to create travel videos of New Orleans that attracted nearly nine hundred thousand views (Gretzel & Sigala

2017). Hotels use influencers' characteristics and measure influencers' performance to determine correct engagement strategies to attract their target customers (Gretzel & Sigala 2017).

Additionally, become successful influencers must ensure ethical and adequate methods to promote hotels and speak the annunciation of sponsorship in which followers and consumers can measure their decision (Ahmed & Nafi 2019). Table 5 shows that the example of several top chain hotels employed influencers to share their experiences at hotels to promote new properties, services, and programs. The survey of Axon Marketing & Communications (2019) stated that influencers play an essential role in hotel businesses, as 75% of people to consume in hotels is inspired by influencers. Influencers' description, hashtags, videos, photos, and tone significantly influence a hotel image and other aspects. For example, influencers use hashtags and hyperlinks on their posts that attracted hidden consumers to the hotel website and made a reservation directly, which helps a hotel maximize the probability of profit (Ahmed & Nafi 2019; Axon Marketing & Communications 2019). Besides, influencers might raise cross-sell and up-sell chances since their hotels' experiences touch upon several services (Ahmed & Nafi 2019; World Luxury Media, 2019). Therefore, influencers have a significant role in tourism and hospitality as they could increase the reputation and awareness of the destination and the hospitality industry, also might solve the problem of tourism and provide suggestions for their followers.

Table 5 List the Example of Hotels Uses Influencers (Ahmed & Nafi 2019; World Luxury Media, 2019; Manvi 2017; Stephen Leung 2020a & 2020b)

Hotel Name	Examples
1) **Starwood Resorts**	• In 2014, Starwood Resorts used five related travel influencers on the latest events. Influencers helped hotels promote new properties. e.g., Le Metropolitan and Le Dohan. • Posted photos and content of their experience at the hotel and connected to the shopping website to increase booking numbers. • Result: Increased thousands of revenues and reached 500,000 new followers on Starwood's Instagram.
2) **Marriott**	• Marriott is always active in influencer marketing. • Influencers use Snapchat to promote their brand. • Marriott employed four influencers for the Marriott Rewards program and have a trip to Berlin, Seoul, Dubai, and New York. Marriott requested influencers to share their weeklong video on Marriott's Snapchat and influencers' account.
3) **Hilton Hotels**	• The Hilton@Play initiative aims to reach a young generation through social media to provide live music events and invite artists like Nick Jonas, which established hype in teenagers.

4) Bellagio	• Bellagio invited 20 influencers worldwide and different fields, like fashion influencers, YouTube gamers, and beauty bloggers, aiming to promote their hotel and attract different customers. • They allowed influencers to use their unique way to present the hotel in order to reach their followers.
5) The Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong 6) Gateway Hong Kong	• Since the COVID-19 pandemic people cannot travel abroad and go out, hotels invited YouTubers and hotel influencers to promote the "Staycation Plan" to enjoy a favorable price of hotel's facilities and services, such as Food and Beverage, swimming pool, and room services.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Research is a process of gathering, investigating, and explaining data to comprehend the phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod 2015). Based on the research question, the researcher should imagine what data variables are needed to interpret the research, for example, numerical or names and labels or both numerical and textual (Williams 2007). There are three conventional research methods for collecting the primary data, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Williams 2007). Each research approach is significant to help respond and apply to the particular research question (Williams 2007). Qualitative research is a holistic way to collect in-depth details on one specific issue and understand the social fact from respondents' viewpoints (Creswell 1994), such as in-depth interviews. Quantitative research is a scientific method such as surveys and experiments, which collects extensive numerical data without emotion and feeling to proceed with the statistical test to illustrate and analyze phenomena (Aliaga & Gunderson 2002). The mixed-method combined quantitative and qualitative research methods in a single study, which approach to draw from the effectiveness of each research method (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2002).

The qualitative approach aims to gather detailed information and unstructured data on the specific research question instead of collecting an extensive population sample (Creswell 1994). The respondents' group provides a significant explanation of the structure, gradation, and broad patterns (Bhawna & Gobind 2015: 49). Also, it can help in understanding the respondents' feelings and emotions. It is called ethnomethodology or field

research (Bhawna & Gobind 2015: 49). In contrast, the quantitative approach focuses on gathering numerical data from a large sample (Leedy & Ormrod 2015). It utilizes the collected data to picture the cause-effect relationship, thereby confirming or ratifying the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Leedy & Ormrod 2005). The result of collected data is often used objectively to define the actuality and found sense (Williams 2007). The mixed-methods approach is the extension of quantitative and qualitative research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004). As mentioned above, mixed-method is taking the benefit of quantitative and qualitative research approaches, which are suitable for dealing with complex research problems (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004).

Williams (2007) stated that the research design is based on the research question and its overall objectives. The use of a quantitative research approach seemed appropriate in this thesis and was put into action by using a survey. The survey includes four methods: face-to-face, mail, telephone, and online interviews (Snoj et al. 2004). Therefore, this study chose an online survey, and this form has several advantages, such as collecting data speedily, accuracy, cost efficiency, safeguard, and quantifying numerous data effortlessly (Young 2015; Fowler 2001). Electronic questionnaires use the sampling method to gain extensive numerical data, and probability sampling could generally decrease bias and generally retain reliability (Rahi 2017). Besides, an online survey could reduce respondents' embarrassment and more objective than qualitative research approaches since anonymity (Young 2015; Fowler 2001). Nevertheless, Young (2015) and Fowler (2001) stated that researchers should understand about an online survey also got drawbacks like an incomplete or lack of response rate that will influence the sample size and result.

The typical types of questions in questionnaires are open-ended, closed-ended, and filled in the blank (Snoj et al. 2004). The open-ended question does not have any predefined answers and allows respondents to state their opinions freely, but it would be laborious to analyze and categorize collected answers since answers are different (Leung 2001). Besides, closed-ended designs provide schema information and more comfortable to manage and analyze (Leung 2001). Also, respondents need to select the most suitable answers to the question (Leung 2001). The closed-ended formats include a choice of sorts, checklists, rankings, yes/no, and Likert scale questions (Leung 2001). Five-point Likert scale questions are often used in questionnaires, in which respondents decide their agreement level: 5 — strongly agree, 4 — agree, 3 — Neither agree nor disagree, 2 — disagree, 1— strongly disagree (Leung 2001). In general, Leung (2001) recommended that the order of questions should be: 1) from general to specific, 2) from easy to challenging, and 3) from real to abstract. The start of questions should also use closed-ended questions and correspond to the particular topic (Snoj et al. 2004; Leung 2001).

3.2 Survey Development

The online survey was developed with the object of responding to two research questions by testing the hypotheses:

H1: Professional knowledge has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers

H2: Trustworthiness has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers.

H3: Integrity has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers.

H4: Knowledge of products or services has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers.

H5: Real-time experience sharing has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers.

H6: Interpersonal interaction has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers.

H7: Reliability has a positive relationship with the intention to stay in the hotel.

The survey is divided into four parts and consists of 16 questions, including both open-ended and closed-ended in style. The closed-ended questions typically use a choice of sorts, checklists, semantic differential scales, and Likert-scale questions to run through the questionnaire. At the beginning of the survey, the researcher offered a slight definition of influencers, and the second part provided screenshots of a hotel influencer's profile and post as an example. These are designed to help respondents understand the questions. The survey can be found in Appendix 1.

The first part of the survey (Question 1-3) will mainly concern with general questions, asking respondents if they have already followed any influencers, which social platforms they frequently use, and which categories of influencers would lead respondents follow frequently (Wang et al. 2017; Belanche et al. 2020).

The second part (Question 4-11) deals with influencers' reliability. The survey captured the reliability of hotel influencers' messages by measuring the

respondents' answers to the statements. This study measured the six characteristics of reliability of hotel influencers' messages were constructed, based on various sources (Bansal & Voyer 2000; Hong et al. 2017: 4; Lim et al. 2017; Seidman 2014; Levin & Cross 2004; Wang and Hsu 2008; Meng and Wei 2014; Liu & Arnett 2000; Heinonen 2011; Tang et al. 2014; Teng et al. 2014b). Aims to perceive which characteristics impacting the reliability of influencers' messages.

To measure "rate the reliability of messages posted by hotel influencers," "Professional Knowledge of influencers," and "Trustworthiness of influencers," items are adapted from the study of Wang (et al. 2017). Respondents were required to select their agreement level with each statement, and all constructs were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "1- strongly disagree" to "5- strongly agree." Four items of the influencers' integrity construct are adopted and adjusted from the study by Seidman (2014) and Liljander (et al. 2015), using four 5-point semantic differential scales anchored. To measure "influencer's knowledge about an endorsed product or service," two items are adopted from Wang (et al. 2017); "Real-time experience sharing of influencers," two items are adopted from Wang (et al. 2017) and Arora (et al. 2019) respectively. Those items are measured using a five-point Likert scale. In the last question of the second part, five items of hotel influencers' interpersonal interaction were adopted and adjusted from Spears and Singh (2004) and Lin and Utz (2017), and those items were measured on 5-point semantic differential scales.

The third part of the survey (Question 12) is focusing on purchase intention. The H7 aims to determine the relationship between reliability and the intention to stay in a hotel. Since "intention to stay in a hotel" is difficult to

define, using the "buy intention" estimate the intention to stay in a hotel (Azjen & Fishbein 2005). To measure the respondents' buy intention by using respondents' agreement with two statements adapted by the study of Wang (et al. 2017) and Liljander (et al. 2015). Respondents were required to select their purchase intention level, a 5-point intention scale ranging from "1- definitely would not buy" to "5- definitely would buy" (Morwitz et al. 2007).

Lastly, in the fourth part (Question 13-16), the researcher will ask respondents for their demographics and background information adapted and modified from Liu and Arnett (2000) and Wang (et al. 2017), such as nationality, age, gender, and education level.

All question items/statements in this survey were adopted from existing literature, and the choice of words was briefly adjusted to suit the study's case.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data for the research is collected online within two weeks, from 25 November 2020 to 9 December 2020. The questions are developed in English, and the survey is carried through Google Forms. The sample size involves different populations, and the researcher tries to attain different respondents by employing different channels. Hence, the researcher posted the survey link on Facebook, on both the researcher's account and MODUL University Vienna Community on 25 November 2020, at 9:30 am. On the same day, the survey link was also posted on Instagram and other Facebook pages to invite respondents and enhance the range, for instance, different age, country, education level, and gender. This survey sampling was used non-probability sampling (Convenience sampling) since the sample was drawn from the

population that handily available to the researcher and ruled out non-internet users (QuestionPro Survey Software n.d.). The survey was available for 15 days, until the whole day of 9 December 2020. During the period, respondents were able to access the survey through the posted link on several locations. The screenshot of Facebook posts can be found in Appendix 2, 3, 4, 5, and Instagram posts in Appendix 6.

In this period, collected 93 valid responses since Google Forms only reserved fully completed responses. After the survey was conducted, the results are studied, ordered, and intended for analysis. For the statistical analysis, the RStudio (Version 1.2.5033) was used. RStudio can efficiently process extensive data and measure mean, correlation, and p-value to verify or decline developed hypotheses. Also, use the data to export some tables, scatterplots with a regression line, and graphs by Google Forms, Rstudio, and Excel. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used in the statistical procedure to discover the correlation and monotonic relationship between independent and dependent variables.

4 Results

4.1 Background Statistics

Overall, 93 effective survey responses were collected on Google Forms, and Table 6 indicated an outline of the respondents' demographic profile. Of all the respondents, 64.5% were female and 35.5% were male. Regarding the respondents' age group, 65.6% were 18-24 years old, followed by 25-34 years old with 25.8%. 35-44 years old with 3.2%, 45-54 years old and 55-64 years old both accounted for 2.2%, and 1% were under 18 years old. There were no respondents who were 65 or above. Regarding the highest level of education, 59.1% of respondents obtained a Bachelor's degree, followed by 18.3% who obtained a Master's degree or higher, 11.8% with high school, and 10.8% were referred to college. Regarding the last demographic factor, nationalities (Table 7), survey participants represented 32 different nationalities. The majority of the respondents were Hongkongers (25.81%), followed by Brits (13.98%), Americans (10.75%), Indians (5.38%), Chinese, German, Polish, Austrians and others, that accounted for 3.2% to 1.08%.

Table 6 Demographic Profile Respondents (n= 93)

Demographic	Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	32	35.5%
	Female	60	64.5%
	Total		100%
Age	Under 18	1	1%
	18 - 24 years old	61	65.6%
	25 - 34 years old	24	25.8%
	35 - 44 years old	3	3.2%
	45 - 54 years old	2	2.2%
	55 – 64 years old	2	2.2%

	65 or Above	0	0%
	Total		100%
Education Level	High School	11	11.8%
	College	10	10.8
	Bachelor Degree	55	59.1%
	Master Degree or higher	17	18.3%
	Total		100%

Table 7 Nationality of the respondents (n= 93)

Nationality	Percentage (%)	Nationality	Percentage (%)
American	10.75%	**Italian**	1.08%
Austrian	2.15%	**Lithuanian**	2.15%
Belgian	1.08%	**Malaysian**	1.08%
British	13.98%	**Moroccan**	1.08%
Bulgarian	2.15%	**Philippine**	2.15%
Canadian	1.08%	**Polish**	3.23%
Chinese	3.23%	**Portuguese**	2.15%
Dominican	1.08%	**Russian**	1.08%
Dutch	1.08%	**Russian-American**	1.08%
European	1.08%	**Rwandans**	1.08%
French	2.15%	**Slovak**	1.08%
German	3.23%	**South Korean**	2.15%
Hongkonger	25.81%	**Spanish**	1.08%
Hungarian	1.08%	**Taiwanese**	1.08%
Indian	5.38%	**Turkish**	1.08%
Indonesian	1.08%	**Vietnamese**	1.08%
		Total (n=93)	100%

Regarding the first part of the questionnaire, asked how many influencers (or key opinion leaders) do respondents followed, most of the respondents followed 1-10 influencers with 53.8%, secondly, 30 or above influencers with 17.2%. Respondents followed 11-20 and 21-30 influencers, both accounted for 11.8%, while only 5.4% of respondents did not follow influencers. Regarding

which social platforms respondents would use frequently, namely are Instagram (80.6%), YouTube (74.2%), and Facebook (71.%) were significantly higher than others. The other social platforms used within 23.7% to 16.1%. Figure 5 indicates the percentage of social platforms frequently used by respondents. Looking at which categories of influencers that respondents follow frequently (Figure 6), most of the respondents were following lifestyle with 62.4%. Secondly, travel and hotel with 59.1%, both food and entertainment accounted for 53.8%, and beauty and fashion with 51.6 %. In contrast, only 22.6% and 5.4% of respondents would follow gaming and automotive.

Figure 5 Result of Social platforms frequently used by respondents

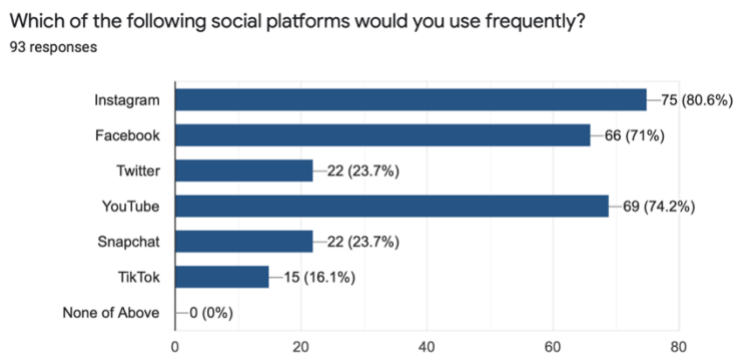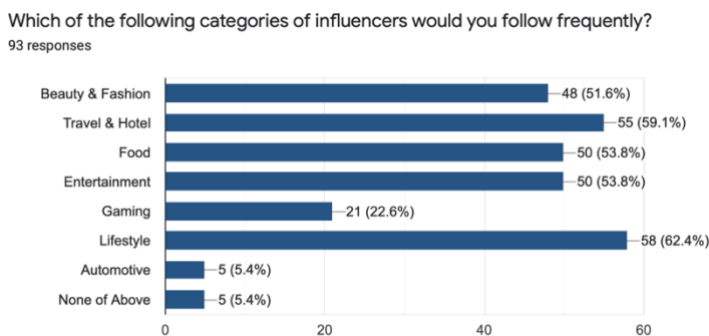Which of the following social platforms would you use frequently?
93 responses

Figure 6 Result of categories of influencers that respondents frequently follow.

Which of the following categories of influencers would you follow frequently?
93 responses

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 8 shows the response number, mean, Cronbach alpha values, and standard deviation for this research's respective variables. Overall, 93 responses for each variable, the mean of variables were between 3.31 to 3.856, and the standard deviation was from 0.8727 to 0.9695. Besides, Cronbach's alpha is the most well-known method to measure the reliability of statistics, and "the acceptable values of 0.7 or 0.6" (Van Griethuijsen et al. 2014; Taber 2017). Concerning each variable, Cronbach's alpha was between 0.61 to 0.8873, which all of the variables were better than the proposed standard and indicated its reliability.

Table 8 Measurement scales and summary statistics

Construct/ Number of responses — n /Mean/Cronbach alpha — Reliability /Standard Deviation — SD	Reference
Reliability of the presented message (n: 93; Mean: 3.452; Reliability: 0.8228; SD: 0.9031) Influencer's message conveys correct information Influencer's message delivers what it ensures Messages posted by the influencer are not pretentious	Wang et al. 2017
Professional knowledge (n: 93; Mean: 3.505; Reliability: 0.8615; SD: 0.9584) I think influencer has expertise (capable, knowledgeable, experienced) in the topic he\she promotes The message posted by the influencer in reliable I pay more attention to the posts shared by a professional influencer I think a brand that is supported by the professional hotel influencer is reliable	Wang et al. 2017

Trustworthiness (n: 93; Mean: 3.31; Reliability: 0.8873; SD: 0.9077)	Wang et al. 2017
I think the influencers' messages are trustworthy (dependable, dignity, believable, reliable)	
I feel that the posts of the influencers I follow help me to remember that advertisement and the product that is being endorsed.	
An influencer is a trustworthy person.	
I think brands that are being endorsed by influencers are more respectable.	
I think brands that are being endorsed by influencers are more desirable	
Influencers' integrity (n: 93; Mean: 3.503; Reliability: 0.8722; SD: 0.8949)	Seidman 2014; Liljander et al. 2015
Not true self/True self	
Non-openness/Openness	
Insincere/Sincere	
Not honorable/Honorable	
Knowledge about an endorsed product or service (n: 93; Mean: 3.656 Reliability: 0.77; SD: 0.9695)	Wang et al. 2017
I think an influencer is knowledgeable (understand, clear, realize) with products or services	
I think that knowledge of products or services is an important characteristic of a hotel influencers' message	
Real-time experience sharing (n: 93; Mean: 3.667; Reliability: 0.78; SD: 0.9593)	Wang et al. 2017; Arora et al. 2019
Influencer's messages allow me to follow the brand in real-time	
An influencer's real-time experience sharing increases the realism of the message	
Interpersonal interaction (n: 93; Mean: 3.856; Reliability: 0.8221; SD: 0.7011)	Spears & Singh 2004; Lin & Utz 2017
Unfriendly/Friendly	
Unpleasant/Pleasant	
Boring/Entertaining	

Not intimate/Intimate
Cold/Warm

Purchase Intention (n: 93; Mean: 3.339; Reliability: 0.61; SD: 0.8727) I will buy the product if the influencer I like started endorsing it I would continue buying some products from the market irrespective of the act of advertising the same product through any specific influencer	Wang et al. 2017; Liljander et al. 2015

Table 9 shows the descriptive statistics of the reliability of the presented message. Respondents rated on a five-point Likert scale (From "5- strongly agree" to "1- strongly disagree") to the three statements to measure how reliability are influencers' messages. The agreement (4 - Agree and 5 - Strongly agree) ranges of these statements from 65% to 44%. Relia3 (Messages posted by the influencer are not pretentious) has a significantly lower agree rate (44%) than others, and 32% of the respondents express disagreed (1 – Strongly disagree and 2 – Disagree), implying some influencers' posted messages were pretentious. From the Relia2, there were 65% agree with the influencers' message delivers what it ensures, and 58% with the influencer's message conveys the correct information (Relia1). Moreover, 20% to 30% of the respondents were answered neither agree nor disagree with these statements. Overall with these three statements, 66% of respondents were agreed with the reliability of the presented message.

Table 9 Descriptive statistics of the reliability of the presented message (Relia 1-3)

Items	1 – Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 – Strongly Agree
Relia1	4%	8%	30%	39%	19%
Relia2	5%	10%	20%	53%	12%
Relia3	5%	27%	24%	32%	12%

Table 10 shows the descriptive statistics of professional knowledge. Respondents rated on a five-point Likert scale to the four statements. Regarding professional knowledge, there were only 52% to 63% of respondents agree with the statements. For instance, most respondents agreed with PK1 (63%), which means respondents believed influencers have expertise in the topic they promote. Followed by PK3 (60%), respondents would pay more attention to the posts shared by a professional influencer, and 58% of respondents agreed to PK4 (I think a brand that is supported by the professional hotel influencer is reliable). In contrast, PK2 (The message posted by the influencer in reliable) only got 52% of agreement, and 28% of respondents were selected neither agree nor disagree with the PK2 statement.

Table 10 Descriptive statistics of influencers' Professional Knowledge (PK 1-4)

Items	1 - Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 - Strongly Agree
PK1	4%	19%	13%	45%	18%
PK2	3%	17%	28%	33%	18%
PK3	6%	19%	14%	33%	27%
PK4	5%	15%	22%	43%	15%

Table 11 shows the descriptive statistics of trustworthiness. Regarding trustworthiness, the agreement level of the five statements was away from 73% to 30%. Significantly, there were 73% of respondents agree with TT2 (I feel that the posts of the influencers I follow help me to remember that advertisement and the product that is being endorsed.), followed by 57% of respondents who agree to TT5 (I think brands that are being endorsed by influencers are more desirable). Considering neither agreement nor disagreement, TT1 (I think the influencers' messages are trustworthy (dependable, dignity, believable, reliable)), TT3 (An influencer is a trustworthy person.) and TT4 (I think brands that are being endorsed by influencers are

more respectable.) were between 30% to 38%. Besides, 32% of respondents disagreed with TT3, while 30% disagreed with TT4.

Table 11 Descriptive statistics of influencers' Professional Knowledge (TT 1-5)

Items	1 - Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 - Strongly Agree
TT1	4%	22%	34%	25%	15%
TT2	2%	13%	12%	55%	18%
TT3	10%	23%	38%	20%	10%
TT4	9%	22%	30%	29%	11%
TT5	9%	11%	24%	40%	17%

Table 12 shows the descriptive statistics of influencers' integrity. This part was stated four semantics, which respondents rated on 5-point semantic differential scales. Since the Google form was limited to survey design, it used 1 to indicate strongly agree with negative semantic and 5 to indicate strongly agree with positive semantic (i.e., 1 – Strongly agree with negative semantic, 2 – Agree with negative semantic, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree with positive semantic, 5 – Strongly agree with positive semantic). The agreement levels of four positive semantics range from 66% to 45% and they agree with negative semantics only between 12% and 22%. Integ2 (Non-openness/ Openness) has a high positive semantic agreement (66%), followed by Integ1 (Not true self/ True self) and Integ4 (Non-Honorable/ Honorable) both positive semantic agree rate was 52% (range from 4 to 5). However, 37% of respondents believed influencers neither non-honorable nor honorable. Besides, Integ3 (Insincere/ Sincere) only 45% of positive semantic agreement, 22% of respondents believed influencers are insincere (range from 1 to 2), and 33% thought influencers are neither insincere nor sincere.

Table 12 Descriptive statistics of influencers' integrity (Integ 1-4)

Items		1	2	3 - Neutral	4	5	
Integ1	Not true self	4%	18%	27%	35%	16%	True self
Integ2	Non- openness	3%	11%	20%	41%	25%	Openness
Integ3	Insincere	5%	16%	33%	27%	18%	Sincere
Integ4	Non-Honorable	3%	9%	37%	39%	13%	Honorable

Table 13 shows the descriptive statistics of knowledge about an endorsed product or service. Respondents rated two statements on a five-point Likert scale. Regarding the Know2, 77.42% of respondents agreed that knowledge of products or services is an important characteristic of a hotel influencers' message, and only 12% of respondents disagreed. In contrast, Know1 (I think an influencer is knowledgeable (understand, clear, realize) with products or services) was solely agreed by 53% of respondents, and 25% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

Table 13 Descriptive statistics of knowledge about an endorsed product or service (Know 1-2)

Items	1 - Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 - Strongly Agree
Know1	6%	16%	25%	37%	16%
Know2	3%	9%	11%	48%	29%

Table 14 shows the descriptive statistics of real-time experience sharing. Look at the agreement level of real-time experience sharing, ranging from 67% to 65%. RT1 (Influencer's messages allow me to follow the brand in real-time) and RT2 (An influencer's real-time experience sharing increases the realism of the message) both got a similar result and the disagreement level with only 17% and 15%. Therefore, most respondents believed real-time experience sharing were influenced their attention and realism of the message.

Table 14 Descriptive statistics of real-time experience sharing (RT 1-2)

Items	1 - Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 - Strongly Agree
RT1	3%	14%	16%	48%	18%
RT2	4%	11%	20%	41%	24%

Table 15 shows the descriptive statistics of interpersonal interaction, this variable also used 5-point semantic differential scales to rate the five statements, and the meaning of 1-5 are the same as the previous explanation. The positive semantic agreement level ranged from 81% to 51%, and the negative semantic agreement level ranged from 35% to 4%. Besides, II1 (Unfriendly/Friendly) was significantly high in positive semantic (81%), only 24% agreed to negative semantic. Followed by II2 (Unpleasant/ Pleasant) with 76% positive semantic, II3 (Boring/ Entertaining) with 68% positive semantics, and II5 (Cold/Warm) with 65% positive semantics. II4 (Not intimate/ Intimate) only has 51% agreement of positive semantic, while 35% of neutral, and the negative semantic agreement level was 14%. Also, there were not respondents who rated strongly agree with negative semantic with II2 and II5.

Table 15 Descriptive statistics of Interpersonal interaction (II 1-5)

Items		1	2	3 – Neutral	4	5	
II1	Unfriendly	1%	3%	15%	48%	32%	Friendly
II2	Unpleasant	0%	4%	19%	49%	27%	Pleasant
II3	Boring	2%	6%	24%	39%	29%	Entertaining
II4	Not intimate	4%	10%	35%	30%	20%	Intimate
II5	Cold	0%	6%	29%	40%	25%	Warm

Table 16 shows the descriptive statistics of purchase intention. Respondents rated the two purchase intention statements on the five-point Likert scale (1 - Definitely would not buy to 5 - Definitely would buy). The agreement (from 4 to 5) of these two statements was 58% to 32%. PI2 (I would continue buying

some products from the market irrespective of the act of advertising the same product through any specific influencer) with 58% of would buy (from 4 to 5) and 29% of might or might not buy. In contrast, PI1 (I will buy the product if the influencer I like started endorsing it) was only 32% of would buy, and 29% of respondents would not buy (from 1 to 2). It implied that influencers might not really influence respondents' purchase intention. Even if there no specific influencers, respondents will still buy products from the market.

Table 16 Descriptive statistics of Purchase Intention (PI 1-5)

Items	1 - Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 - Strongly Agree
PI1	6%	23%	39%	24%	9%
PI2	3%	10%	29%	38%	20%

4.3 Hypothesis test

In this research, the Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient (Spearman's correlation — r_s) was used to assess the relationship among the dependent and independent variables and prove the hypothesis (Lobo & Guntur 2018; Lund Research Ltd n.d.-a & n.d.-b). The interpretation of correlation will be based on the standard approach published in the previous study: Negligible correlation: 0.00-0.9, Weak correlation: 0.10–0.39, Moderate correlation: 0.40–0.69, Strong correlation: 0.70–0.89, and Very strong correlation: 0.90–1.00. Also, create scatterplots for each hypothesis to indicate the power and direction (Lund Research Ltd n.d.; Schober et al. 2018).
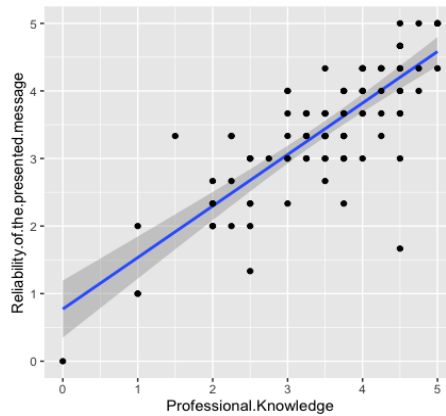
Figure 7 Scatterplot presenting the Spearman (two-tailed) positive correlation of H1.

Firstly, H1 posits that professional knowledge has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers. Spearman's correlation shows a statistically significant and strong correlation between the constructs (r_s=0.7574, p<0.05). Thus, H1 was proved and rejected the null hypothesis of H1. The scatterplot also presented the positive correlations of H1 (Figure 7).
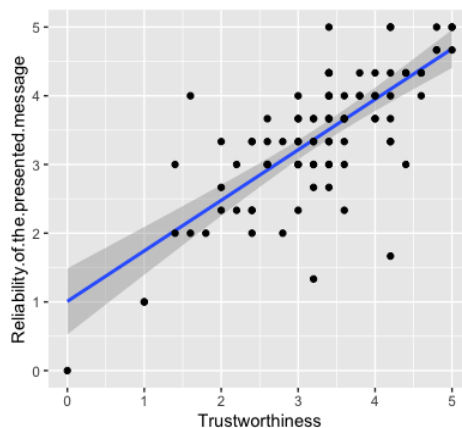

Figure 8 Scatterplot presenting the Spearman (two-tailed) positive correlation of H2.

Hypothesis 2 posits that trustworthiness has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers. H2's Spearman

correlation was 0.6825 (p<0.05), which shows a statistically significant and moderate correlation within the constructs. Therefore, it proved H2 and rejected the null hypothesis of H2. The scatterplot also presented the positive correlations of H2 (Figure 8).
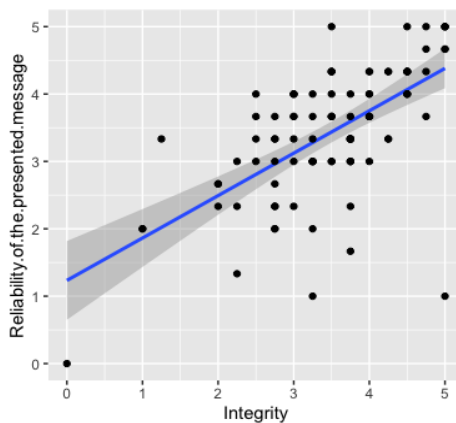

Figure 9 Scatterplot presenting the Spearman (two-tailed) positive correlation of H3.

Hypothesis 3 is proved by the Spearman correlation (rs= 0.6105, p<0.05), which has a statistically significant and moderate correlation. It proved that influencers' integrity has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers and rejected the null hypothesis of H3. Figure 9 was presented the positive correlation of H3 as the scatterplot.
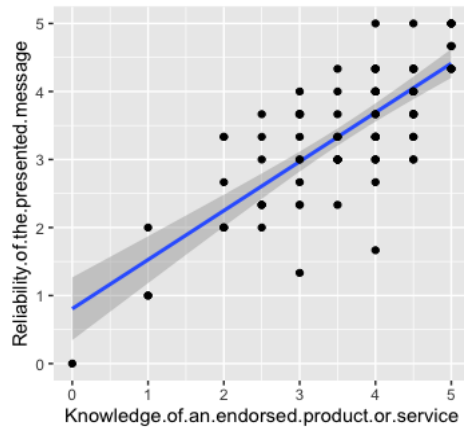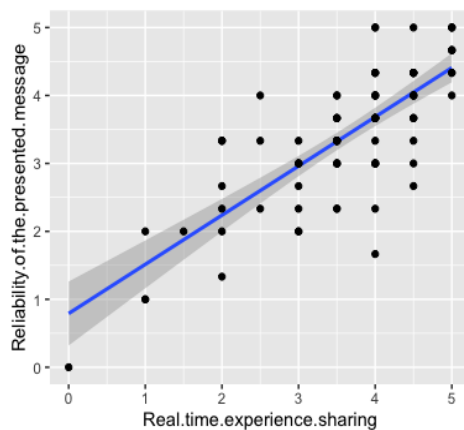
Figure 10 Scatterplot presenting the Spearman (two-tailed) positive correlation of H4.

Hypothesis 4 posits that influencers' knowledge of products or services has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers. The Spearman correlation of H4 was 0.7022 (p<0.05), which has a statistically significant and strong correlation between the variables. The scatterplot (Figure 10) also showed a positive correlation of H4, thus proved H4 and rejected the null hypothesis of H4.

Figure 11 Scatterplot presenting the Spearman (two-tailed) positive correlation of H5.

Hypothesis 5 proved by the Spearman correlation (r_s= 0.7133, p<0.05), which has a statistically significant and strong correlation between the constructs.

Therefore, it proved H5: real-time experience sharing has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers and rejected the null hypothesis of H5. Figure 11 was also presented the positive correlation of H5 as the scatterplot.
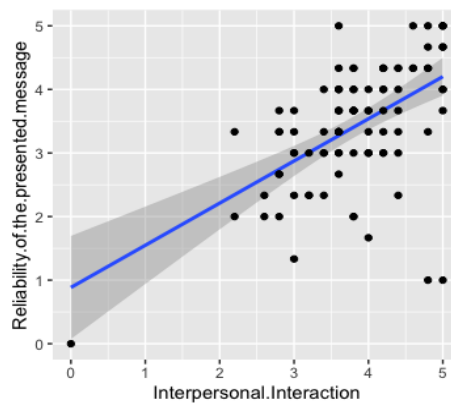

Figure 12 Scatterplot presenting the Spearman (two-tailed) positive correlation of H6.

The Spearman correlation of hypothesis 6 was 0.5140 ($p < 0.05$), which shows a statistically significant and moderate correlation. Thus, proved H6: interpersonal interaction has a positive relationship with the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers and rejected the null hypothesis of H6. The scatterplot also showed a positive correlation between the constructs (Figure 12).
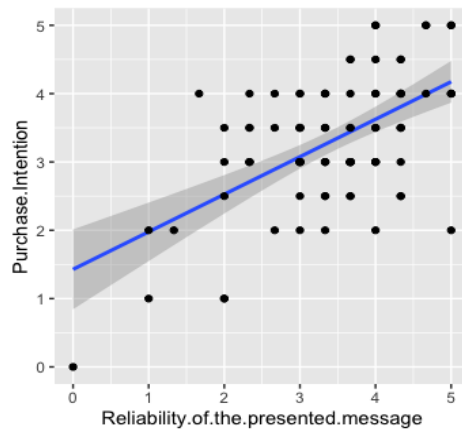
Figure 13 Scatterplot presenting the Spearman (two-tailed) positive correlation of H7.

Lastly, hypothesis 7 posits that influencers' reliability has a positive relationship with the intention to stay in the hotel. Spearman correlation was 0.4191 ($p<0.05$), and the correlation was lower than the above hypotheses but still shows a statistically significant and moderate correlation. Therefore, it indicated that reliability has a positive relationship with the intention to stay in the hotel and rejected the null hypothesis of H7. Figure 13 presented the positive correlation of H7.

Overall, Table 17 shows the regression analysis and proved that all of the hypotheses assumed previously in part three - Methodology. Significantly, H1, H4, and H5 proved to have a strong correlation. In contrast, H2, H3, H6, and H7 only have a moderate correlation but still have positive correlations. All of these hypotheses were statistically significant ($p<0.05$) and proved that cause-and-effect relationships.

Table 17 Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

H#	Hypothesized Paths	r_s	Interpretation	Hypothesis
H1	Professional knowledge → Reliability of the presented message	0.7574	Strong correlation	Accepted
H2	Trustworthiness → Reliability of the presented message	0.6825	Moderate correlation	Accepted
H3	Integrity → Reliability of the presented message	0.6105	Moderate correlation	Accepted
H4	Knowledge of products or services → Reliability of the presented message	0.7022	Strong correlation	Accepted
H5	Real-time experience sharing → Reliability of the presented message	0.7133	Strong correlation	Accepted
H6	Interpersonal interaction → Reliability of the presented message	0.5140	Moderate correlation	Accepted
H7	Reliability → Purchase Intention	0.4191	Moderate correlation	Accepted

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This study aims to understand influencers' contribution to hotel consumers' decision-making, seeking out which characteristics contribute to the perceived reliability of the hotel influencer's message and whether perceived message reliability relates to the intention to stay in the hotel. Based on extant literature and the framework of electronic word-of-mouth, which constructed six characteristics of reliability of hotel influencers' messages, including *Professional knowledge, Trustworthiness, Integrity, Knowledge of products and or service, Real-time experience sharing, and Interpersonal interaction*. Therefore, the researcher used these characteristics to investigate a relationship with perceived message reliability. As well as investigate whether reliability has a positive relationship with *the intention to stay in the hotel*. The aim of this study was achieved by an online survey and conducted by 93 respondents. This section will examine the results, relate the results to the study's aims, and bring out further recommendations.

5.1 Discussion

The results show that seven hypotheses are proved in the results section, as well as all of the hypotheses were statistically significant ($p<0.05$) and have a positive relationship, which all the null hypotheses were rejected. Hypotheses show a strong correlation and moderate correlation between constructs, which means that six characteristics of reliability were related to reliability of the hotel influencer's message, including *Professional knowledge, Trustworthiness, Integrity, Knowledge of products or services, Real-time experience sharing,* and *Interpersonal interaction*. Meanwhile, influencers' reliability also has a positive relationship with the *intention to stay in the hotel*.

Therefore, the results are suited to the previous hypotheses and show that half of the respondents believed influencers' presented messages are reliable.

Within all six characteristics, professional knowledge, knowledge of products or services, and real-time experience sharing show a strong correlation with perceived message reliability, which indicated that most respondents would depend on the above characteristics to judge the reliability of the message posted by hotel influencers, as well as highlighted the significance of these three characteristics in perceived message reliability. Therefore, the results also supported the arguments mentioned before. Influencers' professional knowledge and knowledge of products or services attain for the reliability of influencers' messages, and real-time sharing is a great way to prove messages' reliability (Nafees et al. 2020; Bansal & Voyer 2000; Teng et al. 2014b; Zhou et al. 2019; Heinonen 2011).

Although all of the results are expected with positive relationships and matched previous hypotheses, the surprising outcome was influencers' trustworthiness, integrity, and interpersonal interaction merely have a moderate correlation with perceived message reliability. Firstly, the result of influencers' trustworthiness, there were only two out of five statements exceeded the 50% agree level, and the overall mean low, which influencers' trustworthiness significantly lower than other characteristics. It shows that influencers are weak at developing trustworthiness since most respondents were uncertain and disagree that brands endorsed by influencers are more respectable, an influencer is trustworthy, and influencers' messages are trustworthy. Therefore, it indicated the weakness of influencers and needs to be improved. Secondly, the rating of influencers' integrity was not high as well, and fewer respondents thought influencers are sincere, honorable, and true-

self, which might influence sources reliability, and those factors are essential to the reliability of influencers' message. The last characteristic that has a moderate correlation with perceived message reliability is interpersonal interaction. The results show that only a little more than half (57%) of the respondents accept influencers' interpersonal interaction. Besides, most of the respondents' uncertain influencers are "not-intimate or intimate," "boring or entertaining," and a part of respondents believed influencers are cold. Therefore, resulting in a sicker rating and only have a moderate correlation.

Overall, the rating of influencers' trustworthiness, integrity, and interpersonal interaction seems worse than other characteristics even though they have a positive relationship. As mentioned in the literature review, influencers' trustworthiness, integrity, and interpersonal interaction build on a long-term and close relationship (Tang et al. 2014). When influencers' integrity and interpersonal interaction develop unhealthily, it will also affect influencers' trustworthiness (Cacioppo et al. 1986; Levin & Cross 2004). Therefore, this may be why trustworthiness, integrity, and interpersonal interaction only had a moderate correlation with perceived message reliability. Besides, these three characteristics can launch a strong inclination to consume, influence audiences' intentions, and increase the reliability of influencers' messages (Tang et al. 2014; Teng et al. 2014b). From this, hotel influencers have to improve the weak points to increase audiences' or followers' perception and improve those characteristics' correlation with message reliability.

Additionally, recalling the second aim of this study was to investigate whether perceived message reliability relates to the intention to stay in the hotel. For this aim, the survey used "buy intention" to estimate "intention to stay in a hotel" because staying in a hotel is hard to clarify. As seen from the results,

only a little more than half of the respondents would buy hotel products endorsed by an influencer. The results show that perceived message reliability has a positive relationship and moderate correlation with the intention to stay in the hotel, as well as held out Lin's argument (et al. 2019) mentioned in the literature review. Simultaneously, no more than half of the respondents would buy, and most of them were uncertain or would not buy, even if their favorite influencer endorses the hotel. Besides, most respondents would continue buying some products from the market irrespective of the act of advertising the same product through any specific influencer. Overall, the results supported the point that influencer or celebrity endorsement is practical on purchase intention, but the crucial point is that products and services should be rational and suitable for consumers and followers (Silvera and Austad 2004). Although the results supported that perceived message reliability could influence people's buy intention, people will also depend on their needs and products' or services' elements to decide. Also, as mentioned before, hotel consumers will consider intangible and tangible elements of a hotel instead of only takes hotel influencers' reliability messages (Chow et al. 1994). Therefore, the extant literature and the result revealed the reason causing a moderate correlation within the constructs.

5.2 Limitations

This study is not without limitations. The study measured six characteristics of reliability to understand which factors contribute to the perceived reliability of the messages posted by hotel influencers. During the literature review, the researcher got a clear understanding of other related factors that also may affect the reliability of the messages posted by hotel influencers. Nevertheless, those factors were not included in this study, such as sponsorship relationship,

influencers' language, reputation, and number of followers. Secondly, this study asked about the reliability of influencers and whether reliability influence consumers' purchase intention. However, the respondents follow different influencers, and thereby their answers are based on the perceptions of their favorite influencers rather than regarding the same influencer. Also, influencers might create different presentation ways on different platforms even though the message post by the same influencer or same product, which might affect the completeness. A future study would be suggested to use specific influencers or key opinion leaders and social platforms to investigate the results.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, this study aims to investigate whether perceived message reliability relates to the intention to stay in the hotel, and this study used "buy intention" to estimate "intention to stay in a hotel." The estimate might influence the correctness and completeness. Besides, the existing literature and the results found that "buy intention" is also affected by other elements instead of perceived message reliability only. The results also indicated that without influencers or specific influencers' messages, and respondents would still purchase hotel products or services from the market. Although the results proved that buy intention is related to reliability, future research could also investigate which factors are significantly related to intention to stay in a hotel, such as influencers' power, influencers' reputation, product or service elements, and messages' entertainment.

5.3 Significance

The study indicates whether six characteristics are related to the perceived reliability of the message and whether perceived message reliability is related

to the intention to stay in the hotel. The influencers, marketers, or those who decided to use influencer marketing would surely be the ones who occur the most value and information in this study. Therefore, they could gain in-depth insights into the relationship between influencers and followers and learned the importance of influencers' reliability. As mentioned before, the study invented a few weaknesses of influencers' reliability, including influencers' trustworthiness, integrity, and interpersonal interaction, and discovered other elements that influenced hotel customers' intention. Besides, the respondents' demographic profile could help influencers and marketers understand how internet users' and followers' thought of influencers since most of the respondents were young adults and have followed several and different categories' influencers. They can also use the data of which social platform that respondents frequently used as a reference, thereby target customers and followers correctly. This study helps related people improve and arrange resources to increase influencers' power and use several ways to influence consumers' purchase intention.

5.4 Recommendation

According to this study and the results, the implications for influencers are that message reliability is related to the six characteristics set before. Significantly influencers should improve their trustworthiness, integrity, and interpersonal interaction because these characteristics were worse than. The results stated which statements or elements influence the overall rating of influencers' characteristics and the correlation with reliability. These three elements also will affect each other, as mentioned above. Therefore, influencers should input more time to launch a close relationship with followers and audiences. For instance, influencers should show their true-self through daily routes, share

more messages without a sponsor or advertisement elements, and communicate with followers sincerely. Besides, influencers could understand the perception of followers through interpersonal interaction on social platforms. For example, if influencers have to take followers' opinions, that might increase the trustworthiness, and followers can feel influencers are concerned with them. On the other hand, when a long-term relationship develops well that will benefit influencers' development, influencers may get more job opportunities, reputation, as well as influence others powerfully.

Moreover, marketers and companies need to understand that perceived message reliability has a positive relationship with the intention to stay in the hotel. Still, the intention of consumers is also affected by other factors. According to the extant literature and the survey results, marketers should make fair use of influencers to present and promote a hotel, products, or services. As mentioned before, hotels included tangible and intangible elements (Chow et al. 1994). Intangible elements are hard to present since consumers did not consume before. Therefore, influencers' experiences and eWOM as information for consumers to decide whether they should book a hotel, and cause consumers to get products or services in mind (Chow et al. 1994; Kotler & Keller 2012). Especially in intangible elements, marketers have to be arranged different resources and coordinate with influencers rather than merely utilize influencers' reliability (Chow et al. 1994). For instance, when the hotel hired an influencer to promote its hotel, they should provide appropriate services and products for an influencer. Thereby, an influencer can create more entertaining and real-time posts or videos based on their real experience, rather than posting official information (Lou & Yuan 2019). As the results stated that the influencers' real-time experience sharing could make people

remember that advertisement and the product that is being endorsed, and real-time experience strongly correlates with the reliability of influencers' messages. Although perceived message reliability is the first element to influence others' purchase intention, other factors also influence consumers' purchase intention, like messages' entertainment and a self-element of product or service (Lou & Yuan 2019). Hence, marketers need to provide appropriate resources to support an influence to create content and select a suitable influencer to maximize profitability and play a role in influencing.

To summarizes, the researcher hoped this study could be used as a reference so that influencers can know their weaknesses and improve them. Besides, to provide more information for marketers to open up their promotions and help marketers recognize which reliability characteristics are the most relevant to hotel consumers' decision-making and maximizing influencers' contribution to hotel consumers' decision-making.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 — Questionnaire

Dear participant,

I am an undergraduate student at MODUL University Vienna. The following survey is part of my Bachelor Thesis. The purpose is to determine the contribution of influencers to hotel consumers' decision making. This survey will not take longer than 10 minutes, and I would immensely appreciate it if you would answer all of the questions below. All the answers collected will complete confidentiality. I ensure that any information in the report does not recognize you as the interviewer.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at 1811037@modul.ac.at

Thank you for your time and participation.

Ka Wai Cartier Mok

Definition of influencers

Influencers who are lively on social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Twitter, or blogs) always share their experiences and life with their followers. Compared to traditional celebrities, influencers have higher credibility and persuasion in social media. They based on expertise to create content on social media, influencing others. For instance, beauty YouTuber James Charles, makeup artist Jeffree Star, hotel influencer Kate McCulley on Instagram and personal blog, and other influencers have professional knowledge in different fields such as lifestyle, food, fashion, and automotive.

1. **How many influencers (Key Opinion Leaders) do you follow?**

   - 0
   - 1-10
   - 11-20
   - 21-30
   - 30 or above

2. **Which of the following social platforms would you use frequently?**

    Can select more than one

    - Instagram
    - Facebook
    - Twitter
    - None of Above
    - YouTube
    - Snapchat
    - TikTok

3. **Which of the following categories of influencers would you follow**

    frequently? Can select more than one:

    - Beauty & Fashion
    - Travel & Hotel
    - Food
    - Entertainment
    - Lifestyle
    - Automotive
    - Gaming
    - None of Above

Part 2: Reliability of Influencers

4. **Please, look at the following hotel influencer's profile and the selected post:**
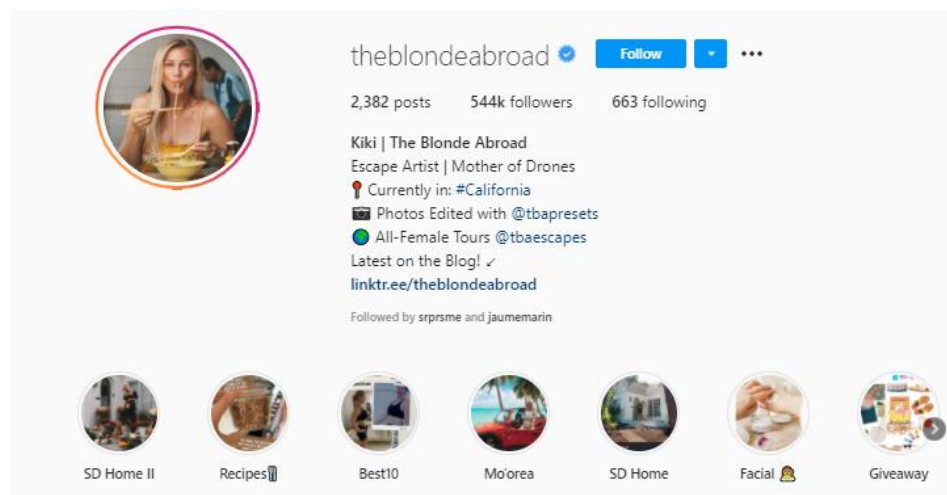
5. **On the scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), please rate the reliability of the presented message (Wang et al. 2017):
Please choose the appropriate response for each item**
(H1-H6 Dependent) (H7 Independent)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Influencer's message conveys correct information (Relia1)					
Influencer's message delivers what it ensures (Relia2)					
Messages posted by the influencer are not pretentious (Relia3)					

6. **On the scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), please rate the influencer's professional knowledge? (Wang et al. 2017): Please choose the appropriate response for each item (H1 Independent)**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think influencer has expertise (capable, knowledgeable, experienced) in the topic he\she promotes (PK1)					
The message posted by the influencer in reliable (PK2)					
I pay more attention to the posts shared by a professional influencer (PK3)					
I think a brand that is supported by the professional hotel influencer is reliable (PK4)					

7. **On the scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), please rate the influencer's trustworthiness (Wang et al. 2017): Please choose the appropriate response for each item (H2 Independent)**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think the influencers' messages are trustworthy (dependable, dignity, believable, reliable). (TT1)					
I feel that the posts of the influencers I follow help me to remember that advertisement and the product that is being endorsed. (TT2)					
An influencer is a trustworthy person. (TT3)					
I think brands that are being endorsed by influencers are more respectable. (TT4)					

I think brands that are being endorsed by influencers are more desirable. (TT5)					

8. **Participants rated the influencers' integrity (honesty, uprightness) on four 5-point semantic differential scales (Seidman 2014; Liljander et al. 2015):**
   Please evaluate the influencer based on the following items
   (H3 Independent)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not true self (Integ1)						**True self**
Non-openness (Integ2)						**Openness**
Insincere (Integ3)						**Sincere**
Not honorable (Integ4)						**Honorable**

9. **On the scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), please rate influencer's knowledge about an endorsed product or service (Wang et al., 2017):**
   Please choose the appropriate response for each item
   (H4 Independent)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think an influencer is knowledgeable (understand, clear, realize) with products or services (Know1)					
I think that knowledge of products or services is an important characteristic of a hotel influencers' message (Know2)					

10. **On the scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), please rate real-time experience sharing of influencers (Wang et al. 2017; Arora et al. 2019):**
Please choose the appropriate response for each item:
(H5 Independent)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Influencer's messages allow me to follow the brand in real-time (RT1)					
An influencer's real-time experience sharing increases the realism of the message (RT2)					

11. **On five 5-point semantic differential scale, please rate the influencers' interpersonal interaction: (Spears & Singh 2004; Lin & Utz 2017)**
Please evaluate the influencer based on the following items
(H6 Independent)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unfriendly (II1)						**Friendly**
Unpleasant (II2)						**Pleasant**
Boring (II3)						**Entertaining**
Not intimate (II4)						**Intimate**
Cold (II5)						**Warm**

Part 3: Purchase Intention

12. **On the scale from 1 (definitely would not buy) to 5 (definitely would buy), please share your opinion about the intention to buy a hotel product endorsed by the influencer: (Wang et al. 2017; Liljander et al. 2015)**
Please choose the appropriate response for each item
(H7 Dependent)

	Definitely would not buy	Probably would not buy	Might or might not buy	Probably would buy	Definitely would buy
I will buy the product if the influencer I like started endorsing it (PI1)					

I would continue buying some products from the market irrespective of the act of advertising the same product through any specific influencer (PI2)					

Part 4: General Information

13. Nationality: _____

14. Please indicate your age group:
Select one option
- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 or above

15. Please indicate your gender:
Select one option
a. Female
b. Male
c. Other

16. Please indicate your highest level of education?
a. High School
b. College
c. Bachelor Degree
d. Master Degree or higher

Submit your survey.

Thank you for completing this survey.

7.2 Appendix 2 — Facebook post on the researcher's account

The survey link, posted on 25 November 2020, 9:30 am:

7.3 Appendix 3 — Facebook post on the Modul University Vienna Community

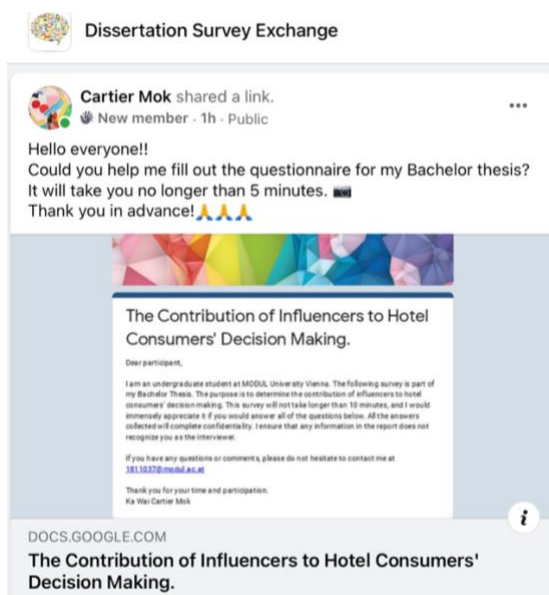The survey link, posted on 25 November 2020, 9:30 am:

7.4 Appendix 4 — Facebook post on the page of Survey Exchange

The survey link, posted on 25 November 2020, 9:30 am:

7.5 Appendix 5 — Facebook post on the page of Dissertation Survey Exchange

The survey link, posted on 25 November 2020, 9:30 am:

7.6 Appendix 6 — Instagram post on the researcher's account

The survey link, posted on 25 November 2020, 9:30 am: