



INFLUENCING FACTORS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND TRUST AS MEDIATORS ON THE INTENTION TO TRAVEL AMONG THE YOUNG GENERATION

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the factors that influence social media usage and to analyse how trust functions as a mediator between social media usage and travel intentions among young people. In the current digital era, social media now has played a major role in shaping travel decisions, especially among young travelers. Using a systematic sampling approach, 400 questionnaires was distributed to young tourists, with 306 respondents (78%) completing and returning the questionnaires. The data was then examined through covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM), which enabled the researchers to explore the relationships among the study's variables. The findings identified several key insights. First, the perceived ease of using social media had a significant impact on its adoption by young travelers. Social media usage also emerged as a strong predictor of travel intention. Most notably, the research highlighted that trust plays a critical mediating role between social media usage and travel intention. This indicates that while social media platforms impact the travel decisions of young tourists, their trust in the content and information shared on these platforms increases the likelihood of them making travel decisions based on that content. This research contributes to the current body of literature by emphasizing the importance of trust in the digital space, particularly in relation to social media and travel intentions. The insights gained from this research are valuable for tourism operators and service providers, offering guidance on how to tailor social media content and strategies to align with the preferences of young tourists. By understanding the role of trust in shaping travel intentions, tourism businesses can optimize their marketing efforts and engage more effectively with this key demographic.

Keywords: Factors Influence; Social Media Usage; Trust; Travel Intention; Young Generation

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INTRODUCTION

A wide range of digital gadgets and applications has emerged as a result of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The various websites and online platforms referred to as social media, which allow users to communicate and engage with one another, are examples of these advances. Social media is now an essential tool for creating communities, fostering relationships, and sharing ideas online. It gives people the ability to create and distribute content while using social networking. According to Green and Quigley (2010), these sites can also be used as tools for international communication, job searching, and trip planning. In 2018, there were over 24.6 million social media users in Malaysia, according to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC, 2019). The most widely used platform was Facebook, where 97.3% of users kept an account. Instagram (57.0%), YouTube (48.3%), Google+ (31.3%), Twitter (23.8%), and LinkedIn (13.3%) were among the other platforms that were utilised most frequently. Social media and ICT's quick development has drastically changed how individuals engage with products, access services, and get information. In particular, social media has been crucial in creating a digital culture where people actively share their experiences, frequently impacting attitudes, behaviours, and social norms. Therefore, a lot of individuals now think about whether a situation is "share-worthy" before experiencing it completely, and content production occasionally takes precedence over in-person interaction.

The rise of Web 2.0 has significantly increased the appeal of platforms that facilitate user-generated content, even though social media has existed since 1981. These platforms have been ingrained in internet users' lives since about 2003. Younger populations, particularly Generation Y and Generation Z, account for a significant amount of social media involvement since they have incorporated these platforms into their daily lives with ease. Social media is a vital means of communication for these generations. An overview of Malaysia's internet user demographics by age as of 2020 is shown in the following figure. Although social media has been around since 1981, the emergence of Web 2.0 has drastically accelerated the popularity of platforms that support user-generated content. Since around 2003, these platforms have become deeply embedded in the lives of internet users. A large proportion of social media engagement comes from younger demographics, especially Generation Y and Generation Z, who have seamlessly integrated these platforms into their everyday routines. For these generations, social media serves as a key communication channel. The following figure provides an overview of the age-based distribution of internet users in Malaysia as of 2020.

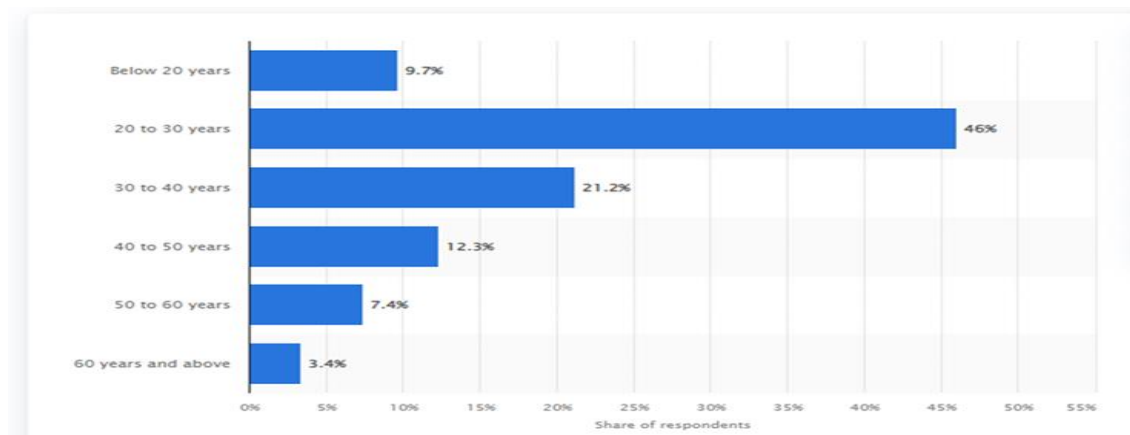


Figure 1: Age group distribution of the internet users in Malaysia in the year 2020

Source: Statista Research Department (2020)

Travelers can now study, book, and confirm their travel plans online thanks to technological breakthroughs, which have completely changed the way they organize their journeys and eliminated the need for laborious traditional techniques. Through social media platforms and other online tools, travelers may now obtain information and make reservations thanks to modern technological developments, particularly those fueled by user-generated content. The traditional function of travel companies in vacation planning has been challenged by the internet, which has consequently drastically changed the tourism sector. Costello et al. (2012) stress that in order to adapt, tourist providers need to combine traditional methods with contemporary means of communication. More significantly, they must concentrate on using social media to distribute material in ways that suit the tastes of their audience.

It is crucial to analyze the factors that influence social media usage and trust as mediators on young people's intention to travel, in order to deliver the best tourism content through social media websites that meet travel trends and preferences based on the behavioral characteristics of the younger generation. This way, tourism operators and providers can integrate their delivery methods for tourism-related products that the younger generation can consume or purchase. Furthermore, it is still unclear and needs further research to fully grasp how Malaysia's youthful Generation Y and Z make decisions about travel based on social media influence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Young Generation Tourist

Any travel-related activity done by people between the ages of 15 and 29 is considered youth tourism (Horak and Weber, 2000). This market is one of the most vibrant and quickly expanding segments of the worldwide tourist business, and it is receiving a lot of attention. Furthermore, young tourists are frequently self-sufficient and travel for certain reasons, such as cultural discovery and educational experiences (Boukas, 2013; Du Cros and Jingya, 2013).

Furthermore, the youth tourism market is acknowledged as an essential sector of the economy since young people are usually just starting their jobs, which can influence their travel habits in the future (Eusébio and João Carneiro, 2015). This market frequently gets little attention, although it has great potential to boost demand for travel and tourism (Boukas and Sourouklis, 2015). Given their present and future impact on the tourism industry, it is critical to recognise the younger generation's critical role (Richards and Wilson, 2004; World Tourism Organisation, 2008; Prendergast et al., 2010). Younger people will progressively replace older generations in the demographic pyramid as they get older. As a result, the tourist sector needs to prepare for this change by creating goods and services that suit their tastes and requirements. To effectively serve this changing market, it is imperative to comprehend this generation's demands, motivations, and travel habits.

Social Media Usage

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is a collection of online platforms where users, not marketers or service providers, create and distribute the majority of the information. Owing to its growing popularity, social media is frequently seen as a more reliable information source than conventional tourism marketing strategies, including commercials, travel agencies, and official tourism websites (Fotis et al., 2012). Social networking sites, blogs, virtual social worlds, content communities, collaborative projects, and virtual game

worlds are the six categories into which Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) divide social media. Every category offers distinct features that facilitate different kinds of online communication and involvement.

Since social media has become a significant information source for tourists looking for online travel content, its influence on the tourism sector is growing rapidly (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). By providing information before a trip and serving as a forum for people to discuss their own travel experiences afterward, it plays a crucial part in the travel planning process (Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2012).

By enabling tourists to share experiences, memories, and images with their networks, social media serves as a potent promotional tool that improves tourism marketing. These user-generated narratives can be used by destination marketing organisations (DMOs) to interact with audiences and establish genuine connections. Social media is a powerful tool for DMOs to engage with younger generations and improve their travel experiences since it is so ingrained in their life (Leask, et al., 2014).

According to a 2013 study by the Digital Tourism Think Tank (2013), 80% of travellers look to their social networks for advice and recommendations before making travel-related purchases, and 93% of travellers are affected by online evaluations while making vacation plans. Potential tourists are greatly influenced by objective, first-hand accounts posted on social media (Martin et al., 2007). The significance of social media in the travel industry has been further emphasised by the rise of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on websites like Facebook and TripAdvisor. Destinations and tourism firms must build credibility in order to draw and keep tourists, as trust is a major factor in travel decisions.

Perceived Usefulness

The degree to which a person thinks that utilising a specific technology will enhance their performance is known as perceived usefulness (Henderson and Divett, 2003). The advantages of using social media platforms for travel, particularly among younger people, are discussed in the context of this study (Dzandu et al., 2016). Since travellers share comparable behaviour patterns and a common understanding of the importance of social media in travel planning, it is difficult to pinpoint these benefits because they are diverse and constantly evolving (Parra-López et al., 2011).

Functional, social, and hedonistic benefits are the three primary categories into which Parra-López et al. (2011) further subdivide perceived usefulness. This study investigates the ways in which these three factors affect young people's social media interactions and travel motivations. Practical applications like reading reviews, getting recommendations, and getting real-time flight information are examples of functional benefits. Social benefits include interacting with people, exchanging stories, and getting feedback from internet forums.

Conversely, hedonic advantages are associated with the enjoyment and amusement that come from viewing travel-related content on social media. Furthermore, people's intentions to adopt new technology or adopt new behaviours are greatly influenced by perceived usefulness (Davis et al., 2006). Users are more inclined to adopt a technology into their daily routines if they find it useful. Users are more likely to rely on social media for trip planning when they believe it to be a useful tool for locating and evaluating travel resources (Cheung et al., 2008). As a result, social media plays a significant role in influencing travel decisions, especially for younger tourists who are more tech-savvy and open to online information.

Perceived Ease of Use

The amount of effort a user feels is necessary to operate a specific technology is known as perceived ease of use (Venkatesh, 2000). It refers to the ease with which users can post or retrieve travel-related content on social media platforms in the context of this study (Davis et al., 1989). People are more likely to adopt a positive attitude towards technology and be more likely to stick with it if they believe it to be both useful and simple to use (Davis et al., 1989; Rosen et al., 2013).

Additionally, according to Al-Busaidi and Olfman (2014), users may be encouraged to actively distribute content within their networks if it is simple to use. Furthermore, prior research has demonstrated that perceived simplicity of use, particularly on blogging platforms, is a key factor in encouraging knowledge-sharing behaviours (Hsu and Lin, 2008). Users are therefore more likely to choose social media as their main platform for travel-related interaction when it is perceived as an easy-to-use and convenient way to find and share travel-related information.

Subjective Norm

According to Ajzen (1991), a subjective norm is the perceived social pressure to engage in or refrain from a particular behaviour. The Theory of Planned Behaviour states that people are more likely to be swayed by the opinions and expectations of those around them, especially if they have a strong desire to conform to these outside influences (Van Zoonen et al., 2014). Subjective norms in online communities have a big impact on users' intents to use digital platforms and interact with them (Zhou, 2011).

Furthermore, Mishra et al. (2014) stress that people's intentions to use social media networks are significantly influenced by subjective standards. Izuagbe et al. (2019) showed that one of the most important elements influencing social media usage in university libraries is subjective norms. But according to Zhuang (2021) research, the impact of subjective norms might vary depending on the age group. For instance, compared to their millennial counterparts, non-millennial travellers were found to be less impacted by social pressure when utilising augmented reality (AR) technology.

Intention to travel

The willingness to carry out a particular action is known as intention. When it comes to tourism, a person's propensity to travel is a major determinant of the destination they choose. To promote travel and boost the tourism economy, scholars and industry professionals have long examined how travel intentions are created and altered (Baloglu, 2000; Lam and Hsu, 2006). A person's drive to travel is greatly influenced by outside factors, such as information sources, claims Baloglu (2000). Numerous studies have examined how various information sources influence passengers' intentions to travel, emphasising that before choosing to visit a place, travellers frequently compile a wealth of information from a variety of sources. A traveler's propensity to visit a specific location may be influenced directly or indirectly by the number and type of outside information sources. The beneficial benefits of tourism promotion on influencing travel intentions have also been supported by a number of studies (Cheng et al., 2020; Su et al., 2022). Cheng et al. (2020) further stress that watching vlogs greatly increases the intention to travel, especially when viewed through the lens of consumer behaviour in a tourist environment.

Trust in Social Media Usage

According to Fishbein and Ajzen's (1991) belief-attitude-intention paradigm, "trusting belief" refers to a person's faith in the reliability and integrity of a source. According to this theory, people view social media as a trustworthy information source that helps them without betraying their confidence (Kamtarin, 2012; McKnight et al., 2002; Wu

and Tsang, 2008). Honesty, which Brengman and Karimov (2012) correlate with integrity or faith in a source, is frequently linked to trusting beliefs. Products and services in the tourist sector are intangible and categorised as experience-based, which means that until they are used, their qualities cannot be completely comprehended (Pan and Chiou, 2011).

Travellers may feel vulnerable or at risk as a result of this inherent ambiguity (Casaló et al., 2011). Travellers commonly use online information, primarily social media networks, to help them make decisions in order to allay these worries. According to research by Yoo et al. (2009), travellers who regularly utilise social media to plan their trips are more likely to have more faith in these sites. Additionally, some research has shown that trust is a key factor in determining one's confidence when using social media (Hsieh and Li, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2021).

Hypothesis Development

Perceived Usefulness and Social Media Usage

The degree to which people think that utilising a certain technology would give them real advantages is known as perceived usefulness. In essence, consumers evaluate a technology according to its benefits or value. Users are more inclined to accept technology if they believe it will be useful and worthwhile; if not, they are more likely to reject it (Dzandu et al., 2016). According to a study by Caffaro et al. (2020), farmers' propensity to accept innovations meant to increase production, lower costs, and save resources is significantly impacted by perceived utility. Cheng and Mitomo (2017) found that customers' perceptions of smart wearable devices' utility had a significant impact on their value for disaster-related reasons. Existing research on social media constantly shows a strong and favourable correlation between consumers' propensity to adopt these platforms and their perception of its usefulness. For example, Dzandu et al. (2016) found that perceived utility was a significant predictor of young people's adoption of social media. Building on these insights, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: There is a significant relationship between perceived usefulness and social media usage.

Perceived Ease of Use and Social Media Usage

A key element of the original Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), perceived ease of use measures how much people think a certain technology would be simple to use (Sukendro et al., 2020). This view is associated with the notion that using the technology involves little work, frequently involving elements like simplicity and self-efficacy. Prior studies have consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between real technology use and perceived ease of use (Chatterjee and Kumar Kar, 2020). Additionally, Sukendro et al. (2020) discovered that perceived utility is highly influenced by perceived simplicity of use; consumers are more likely to consider e-learning platforms advantageous when they are simple to use, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Likewise, Alamri et al. (2020) found a strong correlation between college students' use of social networking apps and how user-friendly they thought they were. Hence, this study hypothesizes that:

H2: There is a significant relationship between perceived ease of use and social media usage.

Social Media Usage and Intention to Travel

The use of social media has become a significant determinant of travellers' intentions. Numerous processes by which social media influences these intentions are highlighted by recent study. Tang et al. (2024), for instance, discovered that social media not only makes a destination more visible but also promotes place attachment and

perceived value, both of which function as moderators in the influence of social media on travel intentions. By providing rich stories and relatable experiences, these practical and emotional ties increase travellers' motivation to visit places. Similarly, Çavuş and Tuncel (2024) found that social media's engagement and accessibility aspects shape travellers' lodging preferences and encourage them to continue using it for winter travel decisions by influencing their trust, perceived utility, and entertainment levels. Furthermore, the advantages of social media for rural tourism—a developing market—were highlighted by Rafiq et al. (2022). It is an affordable way to promote less developed places by highlighting their natural beauty and simplicity. The ability of social media to promote these places and uphold arbitrary standards and beliefs has a big influence on travellers' intentions, especially for younger travellers. Drawing from this discussion, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H3: There is a significant relationship between social media usage and intention to travel.

Subjective Norm and Intention to Travel

The term "subjective norms" describes how a person perceives the standards that significant others in their lives, such as friends, family, or social groups, have for particular actions. The importance of these norms in affecting travel intentions has been highlighted by recent studies. For example, Hu et al. (2023) discovered that, particularly in the post-pandemic period, subjective standards have a positive and significant impact on intentions to go outside. The relationship between personal attitudes and the intention to travel was found to be mediated by social group support or acceptance, underscoring the role that social expectations play in influencing choices (Hasan et al., 2023). This implies that when making travel-related decisions, travelers—especially those from collectivist civilisations or cultures that prioritise group harmony—frequently assign significant weight to the opinions and acceptance of their social circles. In light of these insights, the following hypothesis was developed.

H4: There is a significant relationship between subjective norm and intention to travel.

Trust as a Mediator

Recent studies have thoroughly examined trust as a mediator in the association between social media use and travel intention. Social media sites, whose consumers prioritise relevance, openness, and credibility, are important sources of information about travel. When information seems objective and genuine, trust is developed, which affects consumers' confidence in their trip choices. By increasing perceived trustworthiness and lowering information-related uncertainty, trust mediates the relationship between social media use and intention, as shown by Ravichandran et al. (2023). Reliable, high-quality material builds trust and makes people more likely to follow through on their trip plans. These qualities are especially important when compared to official promotional materials, user-generated content—such as reviews or shared experiences—is seen as impartial and reliable (Rol and Sert, 2023). Thus, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H5: Trust mediates the relationship between social media usage and travel intention

Conceptual Framework

This study was carried out to determine the relationship between the factors of social media usage and the intention to travel among the young generation in Malaysia. The findings can be used as valuable guidance for conducting more research on tourism and social media usage in the future. The elements of the perceived level of trust have been added to the proposed conceptual model for this study. The proposed conceptual framework for this study is shown in the figure below:

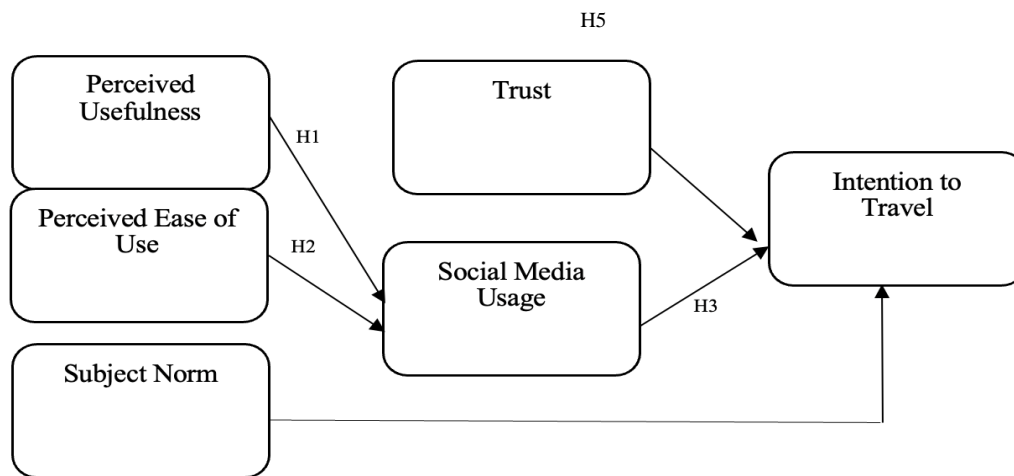


Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Framework of the Study

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

The target population for this study consists of young individuals aged 18 to 29 years old. Given time and financial constraints, it was not feasible to survey all young tourists across the 14 states in Malaysia. Therefore, the study employed purposive sampling, where the researcher specifically targeted individuals aged 18 to 29 through an online questionnaire survey. Purposive sampling was chosen to focus on a specific group, with all participants selected because they met the defined criteria. For this study, a sample size of approximately 306 respondents from the 18 to 29 age group was selected.

Data Collection and Research Instrument

The questionnaires were distributed and shared via social networking platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram, as these are among the fastest channels for disseminating messages and information. Additionally, these platforms are widely used by the younger generation. The research instrument was divided into four sections. Section A focused on respondents' profiles while Section B addressed social media usage across popular online platforms. The following Section C explored the key determinants of social media usage, and the last section, Section D, examined the influence of social media engagement on travel intentions. A 5-point Likert scale was adopted to measure participants' responses, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Data Analysis

Two main types of analysis were performed: descriptive analysis (including frequency and mean) and regression analysis (both simple and multiple regression). Descriptive statistics were utilised to establish the sample's profile. Specifically, frequency and mean distributions were applied to describe the sample about the study variables, with the results expressed as percentages (%). The mean, a measure of central tendency that represents the arithmetic average (Zikmund, 2003), was used to determine the average responses concerning social media adoption across various popular platforms among respondents.

The study also evaluated the validity and reliability of the adapted scale. Validity testing ensures that the instrument accurately measures the intended construct, while reliability refers to the consistency of the measurements over time (Sekaran, 2000). Reliability analysis was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the items and to establish the scale's convergent validity. To explore the relationships between variables, the Pearson correlation coefficient was employed. This statistical tool supports testing the study's hypotheses by indicating the magnitude and direction of the association between variables. The coefficient of correlation lies between +1.0 and -1.0, representing the strength and direction of the relationship.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to the data gathered, 48 male respondents made up 15.7% of the sample, while 258 female respondents made up 84.3%. A significant number of respondents (193 respondents, or 63.1% of the total) were between the ages of 21 and 23. With 50 responders, or 16.3% of the total, the second-largest age group was those aged 24 to 26. The age group of 18 to 20 years old consisted of 49 respondents, or 16% of the total, while the group of 27 to 29 years old had the fewest responses, or 14.6% of the total.

When it comes to marital status, the largest percentage of respondents—285 or 93.1%—are single, whereas the smallest percentage—21 or 6.9%—are married. Additionally, the majority of respondents' educational backgrounds were found to be bachelor's degrees, with 224 respondents accounting for 73.2% of the sample; diplomas, with 55 respondents representing 18%; secondary education, with 18 respondents representing 5.9%; and, finally, master's and doctoral degrees, with 9 respondents representing 2.9% only.

Table 1: Categorical variables (frequency analysis): Respondents' demographic

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	48	15.7
Female	258	84.3
Age		
18 to 20 years old	49	16.0
21 to 23 years old	193	63.1
24 to 26 years old	50	16.3
27 to 29 years old	14	4.6
Marital status		
Single	285	93.1
Married	21	6.9
Education		
Secondary	18	5.9
Diploma	55	18.0
Degree	224	73.2
Masters/PhD	9	2.9
Profession		
Student	227	74.2

Unemployed	18	5.9
Self-employed	19	6.2
Government servant	9	2.9
Private organization employee	33	10.8

Measurement Model

Convergent and discriminant validity tests were performed after confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to evaluate the measurement model. $\chi^2 = 214.777$ ($p = 0.00$), degrees of freedom (df) = 89, $\chi^2/df = 2.413$ (<3), GFI = 0.918, CFI = 0.953 (>0.9), NFI = 0.923, IFI = 0.953, TLI = 0.936, and RMSEA = 0.068 (<0.08) were the model's fit statistics, which were shown in Table 1. According to the suggested thresholds put out by Bentler and Bonett (1980), McDonald and Marsh (1990), Bagozzi and Yi (1988), and Byrne and Johnson-Laird (1989), these values show a satisfactory model fit. "The extent to which a measure correlates positively with alternative measures of the same construct" is known as convergent validity (Sarstedt et al., 2014).

Composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and standardised loadings were used to assess convergent validity. First, although values as low as 0.5 are still considered acceptable (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988), standardised loadings should be greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 1998). Second, according to Hair et al. (1998), the lowest acceptable values for average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) are 0.5 and 0.7, respectively. The evaluation attests to the establishment of convergent validity, as indicated in Table 1. "The extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs by empirical standards" is the definition of discriminant validity (Sarstedt et al., 2014). This study evaluated discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. With each factor's AVE surpassing the correlations between the research variables, the results show that all constructs were unique, as shown in Table 2 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 2: Convergent Validity, AVE and CR results

Construct	Measurement Items	Loading	AVE	CR
Perceived Usefulness	PU1	0.882	0.759	0.904
	PU2	0.837		
	PU3	0.893		
Perceived Ease of Use	PEoU1	0.722	0.555	0.789
	PEoU2	0.761		
	PEoU3	0.752		
Social Media Usage	SMU1	Delete	0.500	0.665
	SMU2	0.653		
	SMU3	Delete		
	SMU4	0.756		
Subject Norm	SN1	0.834	0.730	0.890
	SN2	0.841		
	SN3	0.888		
Trust	T1	0.695	0.589	0.811
	T2	0.818		
	T3	0.785		

Intention to Travel	ItT1	0.842	0.591	0.741
	ItT2	Delete		
	ItT3	0.688		

Table 3: Discriminant validity

Construct	Mean	SD	PU	PEoU	SMU	SN	T	ItT
PU	4.436	0.657	0.759					
PEoU	4.431	0.578	0.500	0.555				
SMU	3.609	0.772	0.382	0.341	0.500			
SN	3.958	0.859	0.441	0.336	0.381	0.730		
T	3.938	0.715	0.332	0.339	0.327	0.428	0.589	
ItT	4.146	0.663	0.518	0.441	0.365	0.297	0.453	0.591

Notes: The bold data represent the square root of AVE = average variance extracted; under the diagonal represents estimated correlations

Structural Model

The goodness of fit (GoF) of the suggested framework was assessed by testing the structural model once the measurement model analysis was finished. Determining how well the model fits the data requires evaluating GoF. The structural model was assessed using the same fit indices, which included the goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and normed chi-square (CMIN/df). To make sure the model satisfied the required fit requirements, the analysis was carried out several times using Amos 24.0.

Covariances between variables and a review of the modification indices were used to make adjustments. To enhance the model, four covariances were included based on the highest modification index values. The structural model's fit statistics were as follows: $df = 92$, $\chi^2/df = 2.097 (<3)$, $GFI = 0.930$, $CFI = 0.962 (>0.9)$, $NFI = 0.931$, $IFI = 0.962$, $TLI = 0.951$, $RMSEA = 0.063 (<0.08)$, and $\chi^2 = 192.920 (p = 0.00)$. The model showed a strong fit to the thresholds suggested by Byrne and Johnson-Laird (1989), McDonald and Marsh (1990), Bagozzi and Yi (1988), and Bentler and Bonett (1980). Figure 2 shows the results of the structural model, while Table 4 provides more specific information.

Table 4: The results of the structural model of the study

Model Path	Estimate (β)	SE	t- value	P	Results
Direct effect					
Perceived Usefulness – Social Media Usage (H1)	0.036	0.198	4.284	0.808	Not supported
Perceived Ease of Use and Social Media Usage (H2)	0.849	0.148	0.243	***	Supported
Social Media Usage and Intention to Travel (H3)	0.61	0.117	5.193	0.02	Supported
Subject Norm and Intention to Travel (H4)	0.038	0.071	0.530	0.596	Not Supported
Indirect effect					
Social media usage – trust – Intention to travel (H5)	0.565	0.115	4.928	***	Supported

Note: Significance of the estimates: ** $p < 0.05$

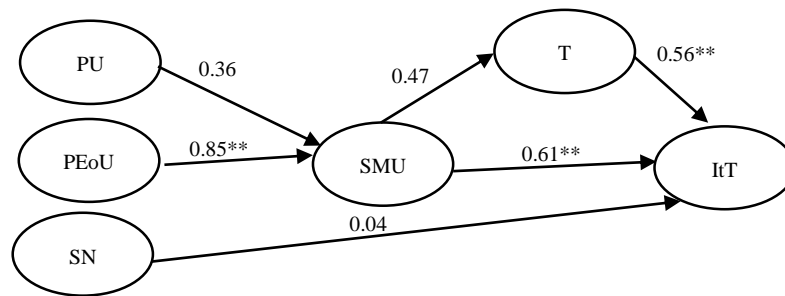


Figure 3: Structural Model

The results do not support the hypothesis that social media usage and perceived utility are related (H1). This result could be explained in a number of ways. Technology adoption is typically predicted by perceived utility, albeit its impact may be lessened in particular user groups or situations. For example, travellers may view social media platforms pertaining to tourism as interesting or entertaining rather than immediately helpful for accomplishing particular objectives, such as trip planning. Additionally, rather than focusing on task efficiency, travellers frequently use social media to find inspiration, relaxation, or emotional relationships. As a result, in this situation, perceived usefulness has less of an impact on how they use social media. There is evidence to support the link between social media usage and perceived ease of use (H2). This result is in line with earlier research by Alamri et al. (2020) and Sukendro et al. (2020). This indicates that social media platforms are made to be very user-friendly, making it simple for travellers to look for places to visit, things to do, and places to stay. Because social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest offer visually stimulating and interactive features that make them easy to use and enjoyable for users, they lower barriers for users who might not be tech-savvy, increasing the likelihood that they will use social media for tourism-related purposes. These features are valued by tourists because they facilitate rapid information exploration and sharing, creating smooth user experiences that increase adoption rates.

H3's hypothesis is validated. Therefore, there is a strong correlation between social media use and trip intention. It aligns with earlier research like Çavuş andTuncel (2024) and Tang et al. (2024). Research on tourism has shown that social media use and travel intention are closely related, with active social media use having a major impact on the behaviour of young tourists. Exposure to visually appealing content, like YouTube travel vlogs or Instagram pictures, piques curiosity and makes people want to visit popular tourist destinations. Peer-shared experiences are easily accessible, which boosts credibility and encourages young travellers to explore new places. The lack of evidence supporting the link between subjective norm and intention to travel on social media may be the reason why H4 is not supported, which illustrates how tourism decision-making is changing. Personal motives, informational value, and emotional appeal are becoming more and more important to travellers over perceived societal pressure. According to this research, marketers should place more emphasis on personal factors like trust, genuineness, and tailored interaction than on following social conventions. H5 is not compatible. Recent study significantly supports the idea that, in the context of tourism, trust mediates the association between social media usage and travel intention.

Tourists' perceptions and actions regarding information they come across on social media platforms are greatly influenced by trust, which in turn affects their travel choices. The reliability of the content becomes crucial when travellers interact with social media posts about places, things to do, or places to stay. Having faith in the

information's source, be it a peer, an influencer, or a travel company, lowers uncertainty and motivates tourists to develop favourable plans to visit a specific location. According to research, travellers' trust in the source increases when they believe the content to be genuine and reliable, which favourably affects their plans to travel (Rol and Sert, 2023).

CONCLUSION

With a primary focus on important elements like perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, subjective norms, trust, and real social media usage, this study investigated the influence of social media on travel intention. The results show that social media usage is highly influenced by perceived ease of use, indicating that users are more inclined to interact with platforms that provide smooth navigation and intuitive user interfaces. This suggests that in order to promote greater interaction, digital travel platforms and content producers should concentrate on improving the usability and accessibility of their online services. Tourism companies should put a high priority on creating user-friendly, aesthetically pleasing platforms with interactive elements like AI-powered trip recommendations, virtual destination previews, and smooth booking connections to improve the user experience.

The significant positive correlation between social media use and travel intention is another important discovery. This demonstrates how social media influences travel choices, with interactive and visual information serving as a compelling motivator for prospective tourists. In light of this, destination marketing initiatives ought to make use of aesthetically appealing websites such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok in order to produce captivating narrative experiences. Travel selections can be greatly influenced by interactive Q&A sessions, live streaming, short-form movies, and excellent travel photography. Furthermore, incorporating cutting-edge technology like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can provide tourists with immersive sneak peeks at places, increasing their desire to come.

Furthermore, a significant mediating factor between social media use and travel intention was discovered to be trust. This suggests that rather than just being exposed to advertising materials, tourists are more likely to base their judgements on where to go on trustworthy and genuine content. Establishing credibility through openness, sincere storytelling, and validated user-generated content should be the main goal of tourism companies, travel influencers, and content producers. Rebuilding trust can be facilitated by preserving openness in sponsored content, encouraging real traveler testimonials, and promoting candid evaluations. Credibility among prospective travellers can be further increased by collaborating with respectable travel influencers who regularly offer truthful and objective information. Influencers should put an emphasis on producing ethical content and encourage greater audience participation through interactive dialogues, private travel communities, and tailored suggestions if they want to preserve long-term trust.

Curiously, the study discovered that social media usage was not significantly impacted by perceived usefulness, indicating that young travellers could value involvement and enjoyment over strictly practical advantages. This suggests that instead of only offering educational content, tourism marketers should focus on producing captivating, eye-catching experiences that pique interest and inspire travellers. Additionally, the findings demonstrated that subjective norms had no discernible impact on travel intention, emphasising the greater significance of individual reasons in determining travel choices. In light of this, marketing tactics ought to place more emphasis on individualised experiences that satisfy personal preferences than on societal pressures. By

customising material to passengers' individual interests, AI-driven recommendation systems, behavioural analytics, and targeted social media ads can increase the efficacy and relevance of marketing initiatives.

Future studies should examine how developing technologies affect travel behaviour as social media continues to change. Understanding their impact could yield important insights for the travel industry. AI-powered travel assistants, blockchain-based review systems, and AR/VR experiences could further improve travel decision-making. Additionally, tourist organisations can improve their digital marketing efforts by looking at how various demographic groups use social media and how cultural variations influence travel behaviours. By putting these suggestions into practice, tourism stakeholders may make the most of social media's potential as a formidable instrument for influencing travel choices, building confidence, and raising general industry engagement. This study emphasises how crucial user experience, credibility, and interesting content are in shaping traveler behaviour. It provides useful information to help digital platforms, travel influencers, and tourism marketers hone their tactics for a more powerful and successful online presence.

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