



HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	Effectiveness Study of Social Media Influencers for Destination Marketing : Application of the Self-Congruity Theory on Generational Comparison [an abstract of entire text]
Author(s)	ONG, Yi Xuan
Description	この博士論文全文の閲覧方法については、以下のサイトをご参照ください。 https://www.lib.hokudai.ac.jp/dissertations/copy-guides/
Degree Grantor	北海道大学
Degree Name	博士(学術)
Dissertation Number	甲第14857号
Issue Date	2022-03-24
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/85214
Type	doctoral thesis
File Information	Ong_Yi_Xuan_summary.pdf



Effectiveness Study of Social Media Influencers for Destination Marketing:

Application of the Self-Congruity Theory on Generational Comparison

(DESTINATION・マーケティングのためのソーシャル・メディア・インフルエンサー効果研究
ーセルフ・コングリュイティ理論の世代比較への適用ー)

ONG Yi Xuan

Introduction

The use of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) as a form of marketing has been growing steadily since the evolution of technology has provided users with a platform to share their consumption experience. Not just for products and services, destinations and tourism products have acknowledge the power of social media influencers as effective endorsers, increasingly leveraging the power of social media influencers to achieve their marketing outcomes. With the advancements in practice, SMI marketing research on started flourishing in various fields from 2016 (Hudders et al., 2020). The summary of prior literature has explored SMI marketing with various concepts in social and behavioral psychology (e.g. self-congruity, parasocial relationship, and envy), elucidating various underlying mechanisms on the effects of SMI marketing on brand awareness, purchase intention, and brand loyalty (see Breves, Amrehn, Heidenreich, et al., 2021; Breves, Liebers, Abt, et al., 2019; Ki & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Despite the growth in advertising and communications industry, the growing leverage of SMIs in practice has not seen parallel growth in tourism and hospitality research. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected international travel, resulting over 70% decline in international tourist number and about USD730 billion loss in tourism exports (UNWTO, 2020). However, travel social media influencers and destinations managers have been cooperating actively using social media to keep their audience engaged through virtual travel tours. Yet studies have yet to discuss on how consumers would perceive SMI destination marketing campaign during a pandemic, nor predict how such marketing campaigns would lead to post-COVID-19 travel intention. Chapter One sets the background context, research gaps and the research aims as follows.

Research Aims and Significance

In the current state of SMI research in tourism and hospitality, there are several research gaps that have yet to be addressed. Firstly, extant research have examined the impact of SMIs and influencer marketing based on Ohanian's (1991) source credibility model. However, with experts and academics characterizing how SMIs have been content creators, studies on how audiences' processing and perception of the content would affect their consumer behavior have been nascent. Secondly, vital streams of research related to parasocial relationship between the influencer and the follower, and the effects of advertisement disclosure on the marketing effectiveness of SMI marketing campaigns, have not been explored in the context of tourism and hospitality. Lastly, investigation on the target audience of SMI marketing, the Generation Y and Z consumers, has been limited. With the above research gaps highlighted, this dissertation will be positioned in research with the following research aims:

RQ1: How would consumers' parasocial relationship with the SMI affect consumers' perceptions of SMIs' argument quality and source credibility

RQ2: How would the effects of persuasion knowledge due to advertising disclosure of the SMI destination marketing campaign affect consumers' attitudinal and behavioral evaluations of the campaign?

RQ3: How would generational differences affect consumers' self-image congruity to a social media influencer (SMI) destination marketing and influence their information processing of the SMI campaigns?

Literature Review

Chapter Two is divided into five sections, providing a literature review on topics in relation to SMI marketing and consumer behavior from the consumers' perspective. The literature review aims to expand and critically organize previous studies on the following five topics. The five topics are: Social Media Influencers (SMIs), congruity in consumer behavior, parasocial relationship, effects of advertising disclosure through persuasion knowledge, and generational theory.

The dynamic evolution of defining SMI in extant studies identifies the characteristics and functions of SMIs. Loosely connected to opinion leaders in Katz & Lazarsfeld's (1955) Two-step flow theory, SMIs take the perspective of a consumer, sharing information of products and services, as well as his/her own experience through a dynamic interaction with the followers, and consequently influence the followers to a certain action – from brand loyalty, engagement and even purchase (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). SMIs are also characterized as users or content creators “who are passionate in creating authentic, small-scaled content about a niche area of interest on social media” (Sng et al., 2019, p.302). Contents created by SMIs are shared on social media through textual and visual narration, shaping audiences' attitudes and behaviors (Abidin, 2017; Booth & Matic, 2011; Freberg et al., 2011; Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014).

Till date, most researches on SMI marketing focused on the source attributes of the SMI, investigating the impacts of SMIs based on the source credibility model introduced by Ohanian (1991). However, Leite and Baptista (2021) have suggested that consumers now “may require more than attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness in order to be persuaded by an endorsing SMI” (p.10), indicating that research should consider possibilities where source credibility may not be the most crucial factor that affects marketing outcome such as purchase intention or destination image (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Recent studies have touched upon psychological aspects such as self-disclosure and parasocial relationship to uncover the mechanisms of SMI's influence in consumer behavior research (Breves et al., 2021; Leite & Baptista, 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Despite evidences of SMIs being content creators, as well as being highly involved in the co-creation of communications with various stakeholders, studies related to the impacts of SMI content are nascent.

The substantial growth in research on SMI marketing in advertising and strategic communications during the last five years (Hudders et al., 2020), has not been translated in tourism and destination marketing. Prior literature to date suggested that SMIs play an effective and integral role in amplifying destination marketing, help form destination images, work as sources of travel information, and are influential in consumers' travel decision-making (Asan, 2021; Gretzel, 2018; Ong & Ito, 2019; Xu & Pratt, 2018; Yilmaz et al., 2020). Similar to research in advertising and marketing, the latest studies investigating the impacts of SMIs on travel consumer behavior have focused on the source credibility of the SMI. Jang et al. (2020) illustrated source characteristics of SMI, such as the number of followers and engagement rate of SMI, as respective indicators of SMI's expertise and attractiveness which consequently positively impacts the effectiveness of the SMI campaign. Little has been done to investigate the effects of the content produced by SMIs. Moreover, the growth of SMI marketing literature in advertising and communications as a whole has not been translated in SMI for destination marketing. Topics that affect SMI marketing impacts such as advertising disclosure and parasocial relationship, have been underexplored in destination marketing. Thus, this study would like to introduce a framework to expound on how attributes of the SMI and content produced by the SMI would impact the travel decision-making process of consumers, examining how parasocial relationship and advertising disclosure would affect SMI destination marketing.

Section 2.2 focuses on self-congruity, which explained the four different facets of self-congruity which are directed by their corresponding self-concept motives such as the need for self-esteem and self-consistency that affects travel consumer behavior (Kang et al., 2015; Kressmann et al., 2006; Sirgy & Su, 2000). The four facets are: actual self-congruity, which is directed by self-consistency; ideal self-congruity is directed by individual's self-esteem; social self-congruity by social consistency motive; and ideal social self-congruity by social approval motive (Epstein, 1980; Kressmann et al., 2006; Sirgy & Su, 2000). Section 2.3 introduces the concept and importance of parasocial relationship between SMIs and their followers. Section 2.4 focuses on the effects of advertising disclosure through persuasion knowledge. These two concepts have been investigated in advertising and marketing research, illuminating that the parasocial relationship between SMI and their followers enhance the positive impacts of SMI marketing, while advertising disclosure negatively affects the effectiveness of SMI marketing based on heightened persuasion knowledge of the audiences. Lastly, a concise review on the study of Generation Y and Generation Z consumers are provided, highlighting the lack of quantitative research on generational differences between these two groups of consumers in tourism marketing.

Theoretical Framework

Chapter 3 introduces the framework and related hypotheses developed to uncover the mechanisms of Generation Y and Z consumers' processing and evaluation of SMI destination marketing campaigns. The framework consists of three parts: cognitive processing of persuasive messages based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), predicted by self-congruity, with parasocial relationship, source credibility, and argument quality as constructs. The second part of the model consists of campaign attitude and destination image based on the Attitude-toward-ad (AAD) model by Mitchell and Olsen (1981), and post-COVID-19 travel intention based on Azjen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior.

Cognitive Processing – the Elaboration Likelihood Model

When it comes to understanding consumers' information processing of a persuasive message, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) has been widely applied to explain consumers' information processing of an advertisement (Tang et al., 2012; Teng et al., 2014; Xiao et al., 2018). The ELM is a social psychology theory that posits a two-route information processing, the central and the peripheral routes, in predicting persuasive messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The central route of persuasion occurs via one's cognitive effort of processing argument quality of the messages, undergoing thorough consideration of the relevant information (Kang et al., 2015). On the other hand, the peripheral route takes place under processing affective features of messages, such as source credibility (Kang et al., 2015; Teng et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). Furthermore, the ELM posits that the central and peripheral routes of processing are mutually exclusive (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Xiao et al., 2018), making it a suitable model for this study as it is clear in showcasing the routes of persuasion, by organizing information processing into two distinct routes of persuasion by the ELM allows us to understand how consumers assess information itself, or its source, respectively. With the two routes in ELM postulated to vary according to one's motivation, ability, as well as involvement with the product or service (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), the model can be employed to explain why and how a certain persuasion process may result in the different routes and outcomes based on different socio-cultural contexts of the information recipients.

Based on the ELM, consumers tend to take the peripheral route when they have less motivation, using lesser cognitive effort to evaluate the information (Filieri & McLeay, 2013; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). By undertaking the peripheral route, consumers tend to evaluate based on peripheral cues, such as the brand image or source cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Existing studies that investigated consumers' perception of SMI have grounded evaluation based on the source credibility model introduced by Ohanian (1991).

Defined as the “extent to which an information source is perceived to be believable, competent and trustworthy by information recipients” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), SMIs are examined by audiences based on attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness (Ohanian 1991). Argument quality, on the other hand, is defined as how one sees the persuasive strength of the persuasive argument or content embedded in the message (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). According to ELM, consumers or audiences of the information scrutinize the information they are interested in (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Chu and Kamal (2008) investigated how the argument quality of a blogger’s blog has a positive impact based on the perceived trustworthiness of the blogger. Magno and Cassia (2018) also explored the perceived informativeness of travel bloggers, illuminating the positive effects of the information quality of travel bloggers on the audience’s travel behavioral intention. With the above evidence from previous research, it can be inferred that the content of SMI should be seen as a vital factor that contributes to the power of SMI’s influence, and the impact of SMI’s destination marketing.

Looking at self-congruity as a form of motivation of human behavior (Hung & Petrick, 2012), there is a possibility that consumers would be motivated by their self-concept to consume information of SMI destination marketing campaign. This exposure would then kick-start their information processing journey, where they process information based on either the source attributes of the SMI or the argument quality of the SMI destination marketing campaign. Since the two routes of processing via ELM are postulated to vary with one’s motivation, and prior studies opening the possibilities of self-congruity as influential to persuasion (Wheeler et al., 2005; Xue & Phelps, 2013), it is feasible to include self-congruity as a predictor of the ELM to examine how SMI destination marketing campaigns would be processed by users before entering further elaboration of the information.

Yoon and Kim (2015) have pointed out that self-congruity at an early phase of advertisement perception is able to influence consumers’ perception of SMI credibility. When SMI-audience congruity is achieved, it would positively affect the source credibility of SMI and the subsequent attitudinal and behavioral formation of the audience (Xu & Pratt, 2018; Yoon & Kim, 2015). If the consumer seeks self-consistency as someone who travels to a destination marketed by a SMI based on the source cues of the SMI, it is likely to provide a shortcut for the consumer’s information elaboration process, taking the peripheral route. Since previous literature illustrated the relationship between self-congruity and source credibility based on the congruence of self-SMI image (Breves et al., 2019; Yoon & Kim, 2015). It is possible to deduce that after consumers have formed a SMI-audience congruity with the SMI destination marketing campaign, it motivates them to make use of more cognitive effort to scrutinize the information, undergoing the central route of information elaboration (Breves et al., 2019). This would enhance their perceptions of processing the quality of the information in the SMI destination marketing campaign (Ong et al., 2021; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Therefore, with the above, this study would like to hypothesize that:

H1a: Self-congruity positively affects Source Credibility.

H1b: Self-congruity positively affects Argument Quality.

Recently, the concept of parasocial relationship on social media between SMI and their followers have been examined (Breves, Amrehn, Heidenreich, et al., 2021; Breves, Liebers, Abt, et al., 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Shan et al., 2019; Yuan & Lou, 2020). Shan et al. (2019) have suggested that perceived image congruence between the SMI and the consumer is the initiation of the parasocial relationship. The study proved that self-SMI congruence is a strong indicator of the strength of the parasocial relationship (Shan et al., 2019).

H1c: Self-congruity positively affects Parasocial Relationship.

Existing studies such as Breves, Amrehn, Heidenreich, et al. (2021) and Breves, Liebers, Abt, et al. (2019) have illuminated that parasocial relationship is equivalent to the halo effect, enhancing source credibility, especially on trustworthiness, which in turn positively affects brand credibility and purchase intention. Yuan and Lou (2020) also illustrated that parasocial relationship positively mediates source credibility on consumers’ interest in SMI-marketed products. That is, followers are more likely to form a stronger

parasocial relationship with SMI whom they consider attractive and similar to themselves and this parasocial relationship, in turn, leads to greater interest in the products promoted by the influencers. Hence, it can be inferred that a stronger parasocial relationship with the influencer, followers would tend to perceive the SMI as attractive, an expert, and trustworthy. Yet, little has been done to understand how followers' parasocial relationship with the SMI would affect the argument quality of the SMI marketing campaign. While extant studies have highlighted that parasocial relationships are likely to enhance the source credibility of the SMI, the parasocial relationship can also enhance argument quality (Leite & Baptista, 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Pop et al., 2021). Based on the ELM, when elaboration involvement with the product or service is enhanced, or in this case, the parasocial relationship with the SMI, followers may also undertake the central route of elaboration. With the above, this study would like to propose:

H2a: Parasocial Relationship positively affects Source Credibility.

H2b: Parasocial Relationship positively affects Argument Quality.

Although the central and peripheral routes seem to be distinct from each other, the persuasion process can take place via both routes consecutively (Kang et al., 2015; Sirgy & Samli, 1985; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Consumers can form a positive attitude toward the product, service, or information via the peripheral route, which enhances the personal relevance and involvement, confirming the consumers' self-concept via self-congruity. Previous studies also indicated that processing peripheral cues can generate increased motivation, ability, leading to more comprehensive information processing via the central route (Braverman, 2008; Kang et al., 2015). Thus, there is a possibility that peripheral route-persuasion is undergone first for consumers who are more likely to look out at source cues of the SMI in the campaign, followed by a central route-persuasion for in-depth scrutiny of the campaign content (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Recent studies of ELM applied on online travel review processing have illustrated the possibility of a two-step processing, where the peripheral route-persuasion is undergone first for consumers who are more likely to look out at source cues of the SMI in the campaign, followed by a central route-persuasion for in-depth scrutiny of the campaign content (Li et al., 2020; Ong et al., 2021; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This pathway is evident in current works where the source credibility of the SMI would positively affect how consumers process the content of the SMI (Breves et al., 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019). As such, this study proposes:

H3: Source Credibility positively affects Argument Quality

Affective Evaluation – The Attitude-toward-Ad Model

The attitude-toward-the-ad model (A_{AD}) originated from Mitchell and Olsen (1981) and Shimp (1981). The model was found on the basis whereby an attitude toward the advertisement is formed after exposure to a persuasive advertisement, thereby exerting an influence on effects of persuasive advertising such as attitude change and formation towards a brand and behavioral changes (Leung et al., 2015; Lutz et al., 1983; Mitchell & Olsen, 1981; Shimp, 1981). Just like how the integration of Sussman & Siegal's (2003) Information Adoption Model (IAM) with the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) by Filieri & McLeay (2013) provided a model to examine how a piece of information is perceived with various cues of central and peripheral routes of travel information processing, then form an intention to adopt the certain piece of information (Filieri & McLeay, 2013). The combination of the ELM and the attitude-toward-the-ad model would allow us to examine consumers' their affective evaluation of the campaign and the destination endorsed, and lastly, their intention to travel to the endorsed destination, after their processing of the SMI destination marketing campaign based on the ELM. With the above holistic framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the SMI destination marketing campaign, practitioners would be able to leverage the novel marketing strategy for future communications.

With a higher argument quality perceived by the consumer, it would mean that the information is persuasive and informative, generating a positive attitudinal disposition toward the SMI campaign (Chu & Kamal, 2008). Similarly, consumers would tend to perceive the marketing campaign as useful and persuasive if it comes from a source that is perceived as credible, knowledgeable, and attractive (Schouten et al., 2020;

Yoon & Kim, 2015). In the current study, the audience of the SMI destination marketing will process the campaign based on source credibility and/or argument quality, which forms an attitude toward the campaign. Hence, this study would like to extend beyond the IAM and the ELM, with the affective evaluation of the campaign by combining it with the attitude-toward-ad model. Since, the A_{AD} model posits that after the exposure of the campaign, the consumers would form an attitude toward the campaign, which thereby affects the attitude toward the destination marketed in the campaign (Mitchell & Olsen, 1981; Ong & Ito, 2019; Shimp, 1985; Xu & Pratt, 2018). Thus, it can be hypothesized that:

H4a: Source credibility positively affects the attitude toward the SMI campaign.

H5a: Argument quality positively affects the attitude toward the SMI campaign.

Chen, Lai, Petrick and Lin (2016) illuminated the importance of word-of-mouth and the use of social media as influential in forming organic images and reinforcing stereotypes of destination images. As such, the appropriate use of SMI as endorsers of destination marketing, or having a strong SMI-destination congruity is influential to the forming destination image (Asan, 2021; Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021; Xu & Pratt, 2018). As evident in previous research, SMIs are significant in enhancing the campaign experience of destination marketing, which result in forming a positive attitude toward the campaign and positive attitude and/or image formed of the destination marketed, becoming important predictors for travel intention (Ong & Ito, 2019; Xu & Pratt, 2018). Thus, the following hypothesis is made:

H6: Attitude toward SMI campaign positively affects consumers' destination image of the marketed destination.

Similarly, celebrity studies in tourism have investigated the impacts of celebrities as endorsers on destination image. van der Veen and Song (2014) used source attributes, such as attractiveness and believability, of celebrity endorsers to assess the effect of consumers' image of celebrity endorsers on their travel intention, mediated by destination image of the endorsed destination, and campaign attitude. It is evident that source attributes, or in the case of van der Veen and Song (2014), the attractiveness of celebrity endorsers do positively affect the destination image of the marketed destination. Since attractiveness is one of the factors that make up source credibility, other source attributes from the source credibility model can be used to assess the effect of SMI in the SMI destination marketing campaign, on the destination image of the marketed destination. Hence, this study would like to propose that:

H4b: Source credibility positively affects the destination image of the marketed destination.

In contrast, there is a gap when it comes to examining the effects of the content of endorsers in tourism research. This is because celebrity endorsers, unlike SMIs, do not produce their own content. However, SMI destination marketing campaigns consist of content that was created by the SMI him/herself. Asan (2021) highlighted that SMIs are able to motivate their followers to travel with their aesthetic content. Furthermore, the ways SMIs presented the destination in their content also broadened the minds of their followers from a different perspective, elucidating the positive effects of SMI content on consumers' destination image (Asan, 2021; Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021). As such, the content quality of the SMI content can be and should be seen as a vital attribute used to assess the effects of the SMI destination marketing campaign. This study would like to extend current research on SMI marketing in tourism, to investigate how consumers perceive the argument quality of the SMI content presented in the SMI destination marketing campaign, providing a holistic assessment of the effectiveness of SMI destination marketing beyond source credibility. With the above, this study would like to propose:

H5b: Argument quality positively affects the destination image of the marketed destination.

Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Azjen (1991), intentions indicate how one is likely to engage in certain behavior. As such, travel intention can be referred to as the likelihood of an individual to

travel to the destination. While extant studies in SMI marketing has utilized purchase intention as marketing outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of the SMI and its campaign through source credibility, there is a gap to understand how the information from the SMI or SMI's content would "influence" their audience to develop purchase intention from SMI's content. Current studies have highlighted that the source credibility of SMIs has positively affected followers' travel intention to the SMI endorsed destination (Jang et al., 2020; Pop et al., 2021). Since intentions are likely to be affected by an individual's subjective knowledge, previous travel experiences (Lam & Hsu, 2006). Subjective knowledge obtained from the SMI destination marketing campaign, especially from the content, can influence one's intention to travel to the marketed destination (Asan, 2021; Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021).

Due to the current state of the global pandemic, there is no sight as to when international leisure travel will happen. Existing studies have explored the possibility of post-pandemic travel behaviors whereby psychological fears from the pandemic may have an impact on travel intention (Zheng et al., 2021). As mentioned in the background, travel SMIs have been strongly affected due to the cancellation of projects brought upon by the closure of international borders. However, travel SMIs and destinations managers are still actively using social media to keep their audience engaged while staying indoors. Therefore, in the premise of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this study would like to understand how consumers, would travel after the pandemic is over. As such, as a destination marketing outcome, the study would like to introduce post-COVID-19 travel intention to the SMI marketed destination to understand consumers' behavioral intention after cognitively processing and affectively evaluating the SMI destination marketing campaign. Hence, with the above, this study would like to examine the following hypotheses:

H4c: Source credibility positively affects the post-COVID-19 travel intention of the marketed destination.

H5c: Argument quality positively affects the post-COVID-19 travel intention of the marketed destination.

Moreover, the more positive the campaign experience, the more positive the consumer would have an attitude toward the campaign, which would result in a more positive attitude or image toward the destination formed. Consequently, the positive attitude formed would result in a positive marketing outcome. That is, with a more positive destination image being marketed to the audience through an SMI destination marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers are more likely to have a stronger travel intention to the marketed destination once travel restrictions are cleared, or in the post-COVID-19 context. Such results have been supported by existing effectiveness studies of SMI destination marketing (Ong & Ito, 2019; Xu & Pratt, 2018). Hence, the study would like to propose:

H7: Consumers' destination image of the marketed destination positively affects the post-COVID-19 travel intention of the marketed destination.

Moderators – Persuasion Knowledge from Advertising Disclosure and Generational Comparison

This study would also like to introduce advertising disclosure as moderators of the model. SMIs are often paid or sponsored to travel the destination or experience the tourism product to co-create the SMI marketing campaign with DMOs or tourism marketers (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel, 2020). Under legal regulations, SMIs are required to disclose certain content as sponsored or an advertisement (Boerman et al., 2017; Breves et al., 2021). Such disclosure has been said proven to stimulate consumers' recognition of an advertisement, and therefore, mitigates the persuasion effectiveness of an advertisement, based on the persuasion knowledge model by Friestad and Wright (1994). Prior studies have examined advertisement disclosure on the effects of the consumer's information processing. Evans et al. (2017) elucidated that the moderating effect of disclosure has a negative effect on brand attitude and behavioral intentions. Additionally, Weismueller et al. (2020) have also illustrated that different types of disclosure have differing impacts on the source credibility of the SMI. Therefore, the study would like to suggest that:

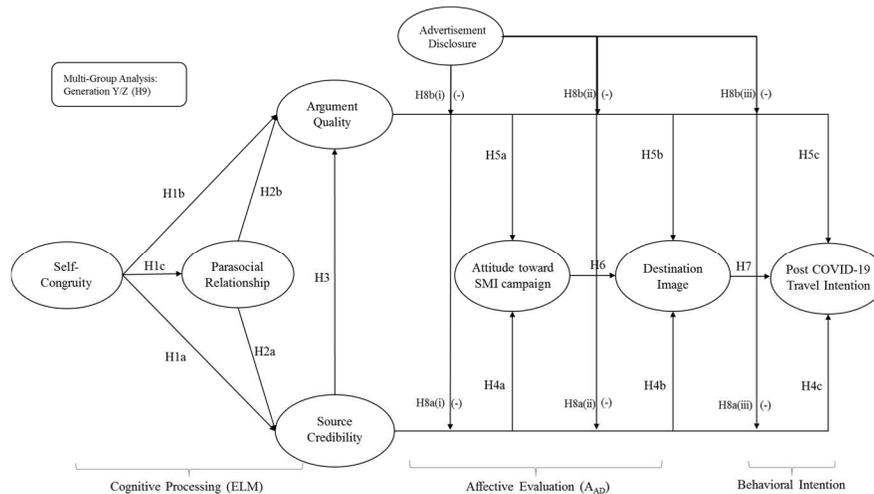
H8a: Advertising disclosure, through the persuasion knowledge negatively moderates the respective relationship between argument quality and (i) attitude-toward-SMI Campaign, (ii) destination image, and (iii) post-COVID-19 travel intention.

H8b: Advertising disclosure, through the persuasion knowledge negatively moderates the respective relationship between source credibility and (i) attitude-toward-SMI Campaign, (ii) destination image, and (iii) post-COVID-19 travel intention.

As representatives of the main audience of SMI marketing campaigns, consumers of Generation Y and Generation Z have been in the spotlight of marketing and consumer behavior literature. However, quantitative research to compare the generational differences in consumer perceptions and consumer behavior between these two aforementioned generations have been minimal. In the few existing studies that utilized generation theory in SMI marketing research, Childers and Boatwright (2020) compared the perceptions of SMI amongst Generations X, Y and Z, highlighting that Generation Z consumers have an aversion toward social media advertisements, and are more likely to consider social media advertising as authentic content. On the other hand, Generation X and Y consumers tend to realize advertisements as those with celebrity or SMI endorsers. Additionally, Generation Z consumers tend to be more indifferent to SMIs (Childers & Boatwright, 2020), which tend to focus more on the content, making them more likely to undergo the central route of persuasion. On the other hand, Millennials, or Generation Y consumers, are more likely to undergo the peripheral route of persuasion. This could be caused due to social media envy of consumers to the SMI who shared their travel experience (as a form of a destination marketing campaign) (Liu et al., 2019), or as a need to achieve ideal self-congruity, social self-congruity, and ideal social self-congruity (Xu & Pratt, 2018). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that:

H9: Generations Y and Z have different cognitive processing, affective evaluation, and behavioral intention toward the SMI marketing campaign.

With the above discussion in Chapter 3, this study would like to propose a total of 9 hypotheses and the following hypothesized model (below), to test the causal and dynamic paths in processing and perceptions toward the SMI destination marketing campaign.



Methodology

Chapter Four outlines the methodology of the research, starting from building the stimulus of SMI destination marketing campaign on Instagram based on Singapore's top travel SMI, Xin Lin Khaw (@xinlinn) travelling to Japan. A web-based questionnaire was distributed in May 2021 to followers of SMIs with the help of a local market research firm in Singapore. Instruments were developed from

instruments of existing literature with the use of a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Items measuring self-congruity and perceived source credibility of SMI were adapted from Yoon and Kim (2016), while items for perceived argument quality were derived from Filieri and McLeay (2013). The affective evaluation scale and measures for behavioral intention were adapted from Ong and Ito (2019), and Xu and Pratt (2018). Measurement item for parasocial relationship and advertising disclosure were developed from existing literature (Boerman et al., 2012; Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Kim et al., 2015; Yuan & Lou, 2020). After one month, a total of 501 complete responses were collected, with 251 Generation Y respondents and 248 Generation Z respondents. SPSS v24.0 was first used for descriptive analysis, then partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), was applied to test the measurement model and structural model. PLS-SEM was selected given its flexibility in handling predictive research with complex models, small sample sizes, and nonnormal data (Hair et al., 2016). Given this study is predictive and the research model being relatively complicated, PLS-SEM is a more appropriate analytical tool. Also, multi-group analysis (MGA) was performed to compare the proposed structural model between Generations Y and Z consumers.

Discussion and Implications

Chapter Six discusses based on the results from the data analyses stated in Chapter Five. Based on the findings from the overall sample elucidated that hypotheses 1b and 4 b were rejected. These results indicated three main findings: two-step route cognitive processes through the direct and mediating effects of parasocial relationship in heightening involvement towards the SMI destination marketing campaign, as well as the mediating effects of source credibility as a filter. Second, the importance of argument quality illuminated based on the ELM brought us insights into how consumers assess the content and the SMI based on argument quality and source credibility, respectively. Especially when SMIs are no longer just an endorser, but also a content creator who is proactive in the co-creation of the storytelling (Leite & Baptista, 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Nyangwe & Buhalis, 2018), the visual and textual presentation of the destination in the SMI's content could elicit engagement with the campaign more effectively, inducing a positive image of the marketed destination, as compared to attributes of SC of the SMI (Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021). Thirdly, the rejection of hypotheses 8 illustrates a lack of moderating effect of persuasion knowledge from advertising disclosure. This result highlights the possible positive feedback through the honesty and transparency of advertising disclosure. This would enhance credibility and trust for the SMI, evaluating the campaign more positively (Breves et al., 2021; Childers & Boatwright, 2021).

Findings from the multi-group analysis highlights the different cognitive processing routes that Generation Z consumers (n = 248) tend to undergo the central route of persuasion directly after establishing congruence with the campaign, whereas Generation Y consumers (n = 251) has a higher tendency than Generation Z consumers, undertaking a two-step process to argument quality after establishing parasocial relationship with the SMI. This generational difference brings managerial implications to practitioners, with SMI content and parasocial relationship as a vital criteria in selecting SMIs for future campaigns.

In theory, this study extends research on SMI marketing beyond the focus on the influencer, to SMI content quality. Where previous research evaluated the impact of SMI based on the source credibility model, this study has proven that content quality of SMI is crucial in evaluating SMI marketing impacts. Therefore, future studies should expound further on evaluating the marketing content of SMIs or even new measures to study the effectiveness of content. This study also extended current studies on the effects of parasocial relationship on cognitive processing (Yilmazdogan et al., 2021), enhancing involvement toward the SMI destination marketing campaign, resulting in more favorable affective evaluation and behavioral intention. Through such relationships, SMIs can bring more positive and lasting effects than celebrity endorsers when

marketing destinations. Additionally, this study has extended current research on SMI marketing in tourism, by investigating the effects of persuasion knowledge from advertising disclosure in the setting of a dual-route theory like the ELM. Despite the non-significant moderating effects, it has provided new possibilities for future research regarding the effectiveness of advertising disclosure in tourism marketing. A positive feedback loop consisting of parasocial relationship, source credibility, argument quality, and evaluative constructs of the marketing campaign may be present, which possibly mitigates the negative moderating effects of persuasion knowledge from advertising disclosure.

This research is also one of the first to quantitatively investigate the generational difference in the cognitive processing of SMI marketing campaign between Generation Y and Generation Z consumers. The integration of the self-congruity theory into the ELM has extended the possibility of information processing beyond a dual-route theory, enabling the research to shed light on the generational differences between Generation Y and Z consumers. Especially on the different processing pathways undertaken by the different generations. Generation Z consumers tend to undertake the central route of persuasion, while Generation Y consumers only undergo the central route of persuasion after establishing a parasocial relationship with the SMI. Where prior studies have applied self-congruity to examine the importance of a perceived fit between influencer image and brand image (Breves et al., 2019), this study extended research by looking at how the four facets of self-congruity are at play when motivating consumers of different generations in processing a persuasive message such as the SMI destination marketing campaign.

From the managerial perspective, this research brings contributions to destination marketers and practitioners in the current tourism landscape of marketing destinations during the COVID-19 pandemic. As evident in the results, SMI destination marketing campaigns are effective in engaging target audiences in the lack of travelling. Both the source credibility of the SMI and argument quality of SMI content presented strong positive influences on consumers' destination image and post-COVID-19 travel intention of the marketed destination. Therefore, destination marketers and practitioners can still leverage the power of SMIs: to maintain engagement with consumers during the lack of travelling, and build on future marketing strategies for post-COVID recovery through SMI destination marketing. Considering the importance of PSR, destinations should continue to engage consumers despite the lack of travelling. SMIs could still engage followers with entertaining content to maintain strong PSR (Asan, 2021; Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021; Yilmaz et al., 2020; Yilmazdogan et al., 2021). The effective use of social media through virtual tours, online Zoom meetings to share expert tips of SMIs could keep followers engaged during COVID-19, building tourist awareness and loyalty for destinations. The introduction of SMI destination marketing in the marketing mix allows audiences to be more involved, and be engaged with the story-telling of a destination. Doing so heightens the consumer experience in the campaign, which develops a positive destination image, consequently influencing visit intention to the marketed destination and positive e-WOM of the marketing campaign.

When it comes to selecting SMI for destination marketing campaigns, items of source credibility are still essential for destination marketers. This would enable consumers to have positive campaign attitudes and travel intention to the marketed destination, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the campaign. However, marketing practitioners should consider content quality as a vital criterion for choosing the appropriate SMI. Since results of the studies have illustrated that good content would not only develop positive campaign attitudes, destination image and travel intention to the marketed destination but also possibly play a stronger influence than source credibility of the SMI in the effectiveness of the SMI destination marketing campaign. Especially for marketers targeting young consumers markets, quality content should be the focal point in the selection of SMI, and the production of the campaign. Because Generation Z consumers have been proven to process the campaign based on scrutinizing the argument quality of SMI destination marketing campaigns. Moreover, with Generation Y consumers being more easily influenced due to their parasocial relationship with the SMI, active engagement and interaction between SMI and followers should also be a requirement when reaching out to Generation Y consumers.