Article

The Influence of Influencer Marketing on the Consumers' Desire to Travel in the Post-Pandemic Era: The Mediation Effect of Influencer Fitness of Destination

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Abstract: Social media has become an important part of most people's lives since the pandemic and lockdowns. With little to do during lockdowns, some people created and managed social media accounts and became influencers. Following this trend, companies, governments, and individuals related to the leisure and hospitality industry turned to social media and influencer marketing to promote tourism in specific destinations in hopes of spurring an economic recovering. Since the pandemic, consumers have turned to social media to gather information and ideas for travel plans. To better understand the connection between what consumers read online and their desire to travel, this study aims to analyse the impacts of influencers, including their content and the fitness of destination, on consumers, who have their own perceived value and desire for the destination. A total of 332 Taiwanese respondents aged 18 to 55 were sampled to conduct a data analysis using the structural equation model (SEM). The results showed that content has a positive impact on the fitness of destination and the desire to travel, with no significant impact on perceived value, and the fitness of destination has a positive impact on perceived value and the desire to travel; in contrast, perceived value has a negative impact on the desire to travel. The mediation effect of influencer fitness of destination was also investigated through the bootstrap method. Fitness of destination acts as a full mediator between content and perceived value. Finally, the findings and managerial implications are further discussed to examine how the desire to travel among consumers can be affected by influencer marketing in the post-pandemic era. Practical suggestions for applying influencer marketing strategies based on the results are also proposed to help the tourism industry boost tourism revenue and achieve sustainable development goals after the pandemic.

Keywords: influencer marketing; content; fitness of destination; perceived value; desire to travel

1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan was one of the first countries to impose a travel lockdown, which lasted at least a year. No one was allowed to leave or enter Taiwan for non-essential purposes, and the people were advised to stay at home unless necessary. According to Figure 1, inbound visitors did not surpass 25 k people from April 2020 until April 2022, and outbound travellers did not surpass 40 k people until February 2022 [1]. The tourism and hospitality industry was severely affected. Many hotels and tourist attractions closed as sales plummeted and personnel and facility maintenance costs remained high. Taiwan, as an island country, relies partially on tourism for its economy, and the pandemic devastated its tourism sector. According to the data about Taiwan's tourism industry from 2019 to 2022 shown in Figure 2, total tourism revenues (including inbound visitor tourism and domestic tourism) and total outbound tourism expenditures declined significantly due to the impact of the pandemic [2]. In addition, the number of people engaged in travel-related employment dropped from 43,158 in 2019 to 32,629 in

2022, resulting in a decrease of 24.4% [3]. From 2019 to 2022, the total sales of travel-related services and air transportation services also declined by 71.0% and 31.0% respectively [4].
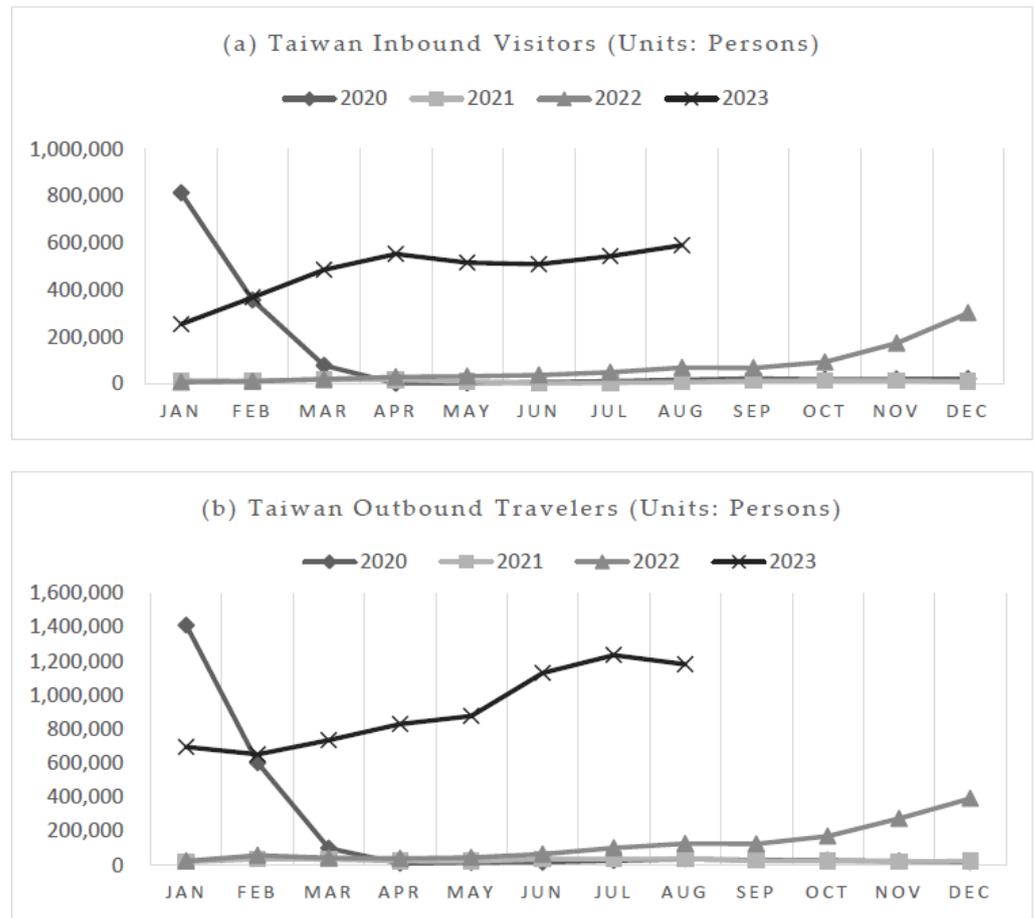
Figure 1. Taiwan (**a**) inbound visitors and (**b**) outbound travellers statistics [1].
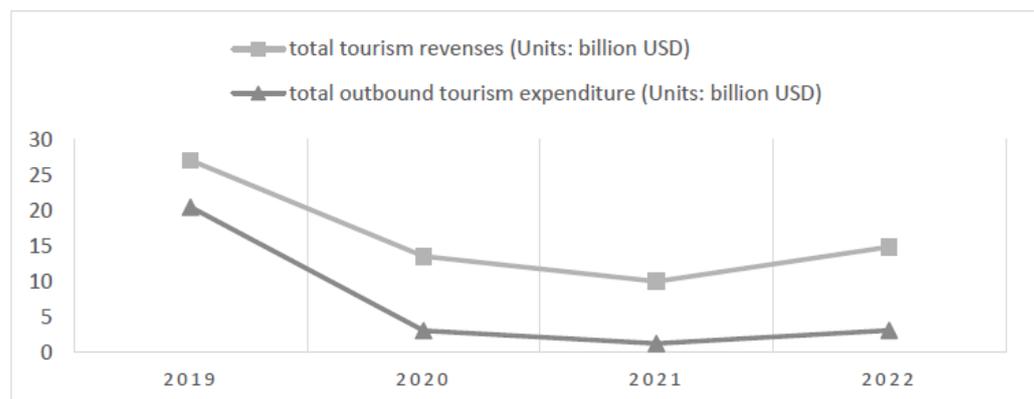
Figure 2. Revenue and expenditure statistics of Taiwan tourism industry [2].

Reestablishing inbound and domestic tourism on a sound financial footing is essential to Taiwan's post-pandemic economic sustainability. Indeed, the sustainable development of the tourism industry has profound effects on economic benefits for each country and social responsibility, including increasing cash flows and economic revenues, providing employment opportunities, equitably distributing these economic benefits, promoting cultural exchanges, and encouraging people to engage in environmental and social issues worldwide. In recent years, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), and WeChat have become increasingly popular. Since the advent

of the technological era, social media has attracted roughly three billion users and millions of daily users worldwide, acting as the primary platform for people to share and gather information [5]. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this shift even further. During the pandemic, people primarily relied on social media for communication, especially when most countries experienced lockdowns, and in-person conversations were almost impossible. The number of influencers has also grown, as people choose social media as an outlet for their thoughts, opinions, and interactions with people. Following this trend, influencers of all kinds—"fit-influencers", "travel bloggers", or "beauty vloggers"—emerged, creating extensive networks of followers on various platforms such as YouTube or Instagram [5]. After the pandemic, a time when travel is popular, people, due to the habit of doing everything online during the pandemic, rely on social media and influencers to gain the necessary information or opinions to plan trips. The pandemic has significantly changed communication about tourism destinations in terms of consumer social media engagement [6]. Scenic photos shared by tourists or influencers on their social media platforms are creating new opportunities for tourism destinations [7]. The bandwagon effect on people's tourism decisions has also become more significant. Both tourism participation and the choice of outbound tourism reveal the bandwagon effect: people's engagement on social media through likes, shares, and comments has increased significantly [6,8]. Many YouTubers dedicated to introducing tourist attractions have also received a large number of subscriptions from their followers. While some influencers only began to gain popularity recently, their influence on their fans and even the general public has increased significantly in this time. Their sentiments or preferences hold immense power over the public, who believe influencers to be credible and readily accept their opinions without much question. To focus more on the effect of influencers on consumer behaviour, the subjects of this study are those who purely want to travel. No matter where people want to travel or the motivation and purpose behind their travels, they can still find recommendations on tourist attractions from different influencers. Therefore, in addition to traditional, personal, psychological, or purposeful concerns, content spread by social media influencers will also spark people's considerations of tourist attractions. Moreover, we also found that many government units and social media influencers have started to collaborate to launch new promotional methods, using the content of famous influencers to introduce destinations to a wider variety of audiences in order to revitalize urban tourism. Different from the previous marketing methods, these influencers usually tend to introduce more history, culture, and customs of the tourist site from their viewpoints, thereby arousing more people's interest. Such practical solutions can facilitate achieving the goal of sustainable development in the tourism industry.

Influencers and their comments or opinions, a form of online word-of-mouth, have massive effects on their audiences [9]. Since influencers can seamlessly corroborate advertisements or personal recommendations, including travel destinations, into their daily narrative, the public often perceives them as highly reliable [10,11]. While opinions or calls to action vary, influencers can significantly affect their viewers. Travel bloggers, who post their travel experiences on social media, have positive effects on consumers' desire to travel to or buy products at a location [12]. Influencers communicate, interact, and influence the public through their content, their primary channel to portray their lifestyle and voice their thoughts [10,13]. Their content is more accessible and more casual or informal compared to longer posts in the comments section of Google Earth, for example. They are also more understandable in comparison with professional opinions or comments, as those often include technical vocabulary the public is not familiar with. Content is also the medium by which influencers can make connections with their followers, whether based on opinions or similarities. Followers often have positive responses towards influencers who share similarities, are more attractive, connect emotionally or intellectually, or express positive emotions and are more charismatic [14–16]. The match of the influencer to the destination is another factor that contributes to the success of influencing the public's opinion [5,10]. Like product–influencer fit, high influencer–destination fit lets the influencer better showcase

characteristics of the destination, atmosphere, and other unique aspects. A high influencer–destination fit creates positive responses, increasing the number of visitors and products purchased [11,17,18]. While influencers play an important role in affecting consumers, the perceived value of a destination also affects their desire to travel. If consumers believe travelling to a destination is worth their money, the chances of their visits and consumption of goods and services will increase [19]. Their perceived value also depends on their knowledge, attitude, and perceived risk of the destination, which will sway their desire to travel [20]. Influencers can change the perceived value of a place by focusing on specific details or critical points that highlight its uniqueness [21,22]. Through an influencer's content, their fitness of destination, and the changed perceived value of the location, consumers are more likely to visit sites that influencers recommend.

Thus, this study would like to examine the relationship between the opinions of influencers and the subsequent behaviour of consumers. Recently, Breves et al. [17], Kapitan et al. [23], and Barta et al. [24] have conducted similar studies from different perspectives on influencer marketing. Breves et al. [17] focused on how influencers' fitness for a brand or product affects consumer desire to purchase, while Barta et al. [24] focused on how the influencers' content and the perceived value of influencers affect the behaviour of their followers. Similarly, Kapitan et al. [23] focused on how different types of content can affect the consumers' desire to purchase the product endorsed. This study aims to simultaneously combine three constructs—content, fitness of destination, and perceived value—to investigate the comprehensive impact and paint a more holistic picture of influencers' actions and the related effects on consumers' reactions, namely the desire to travel. It is hoped that the conclusions of this study will bridge the gap between previous research and provide a solution to boost a country's tourism income and overall economic production in this post-pandemic era. The pandemic brought many changes to society, including the rise of all types of influencers, people's increased use and reliance on social media, and people's considerations regarding their lives. Therefore, we would also like to extend the findings of this study to how this can help the tourism industries recover from the effects of lockdowns.

The structure of this study is as follows: Section 2 discusses four constructs, content, fitness of destination, perceived value, and desire to travel, detailed in the literature review and their relationships to this study. We also discuss the strengths and limitations of previous studies to reveal the innovative contributions of our proposed framework. Section 3 presents hypotheses regarding the research framework of this study. Section 4 illustrates the methodology used in the data collection and statistical analysis methods. Section 5 indicates the responses gathered from the questionnaire and the analysis results. Section 6 discusses the findings and managerial implications of the study. Section 7, lastly, denotes a comprehensive conclusion and discusses limitations and possible future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Content

Content, the primary way influencers connect to viewers, includes videos or postings of influencers on different social media platforms, which will be related to travel information in this case [6,7]. Influencers can make their videos or content more attractive to the target audience through various factors, including content style, persuasiveness, and overall feelings [22,25]. Content style, or how an influencer portrays their visiting experience and unique points on a destination, affects how well an influencer can describe the place. With the current generation viewing influencers as more relatable and credible, content that reflects an influencer's style can increase the number of visitors [14,17,21]. Persuasiveness will influence how an influencer shows a place to make it attractive to viewers. The persuasiveness of an influencer is a crucial factor, as the key to increasing visitors is to display the location as appealing, thus increasing the consumers' desire to travel [8,21,22]. Overall "feelings", or the emotion conveyed by an influencer, contribute to changing the consumers' perceived value of a destination. Visiting a place is not only about the products

or services they offer but mainly about the experience and feelings [19,26]. Therefore, portraying the right emotions will create a positive change towards the perceived value of a place and experience, increasing consumers' desire to travel to the site [25]. These are important factors to consider when exploring this topic as they correlate to other constructs and can be areas to focus on when creating a questionnaire.

2.2. Fitness of Destination

In the case of this study, fitness of destination is defined as how well an influencer's content style matches a destination's atmosphere, which is a major factor that is less studied. A high influencer–destination fit is essential to creating the right atmosphere for a video [27]. Harmony, or the match between an influencer and a destination, can heighten the atmosphere and appeal of a place. As different influencers have different styles, each influencer's choice of promotion will differ [12]. Finding the right place to advertise can increase the number of visitors and the influencer's credibility [28]. Energy is the energy level of the influencer while filming or introducing the destination. If the influencer is overexcited or too controlled, it can show awkwardness and a mismatch with the energy of the place. Using Disneyland as an example, an influencer with a higher level of energy and excitement can represent Disneyland better than an influencer who is calm and collected, as the visitors of Disneyland are generally quite excited and upbeat. A mismatch will cause the content's effectiveness to drop, decreasing the audience's willingness to visit and creating a negative impression and effect [29]. Like the fitness of products in the research examined above, the fitness of destination shares multiple attributes and factors, and it will be beneficial for the research to reference these factors.

2.3. Perceived Value

Different from cost, the perceived value of a destination is the consumer's perception of gains from this experience [19]. Perceived value as a whole is a deciding factor for travel, which is the topic of this study. Perceived value includes benefits, such as happiness, satisfaction, or financial gain [30,31]. These benefits should outweigh the drawbacks for consumers to purchase a product or service [16]. For travelling, consumers focus more on happiness and satisfaction as benefits from the money spent on a visit [32]. Studies have shown a positive correlation between perceived value and the desire to travel or make purchases [19]. Part of a consumer's perceived value is also rooted in their previous knowledge regarding a destination [33]. A destination's stereotype can affect how the consumer views the destination. Common stereotypes include safety, weather, culture, etc. Previous experiences and what consumers hear from family or friends can also influence how they view the destination [34]. A positive view will raise the perceived value and increase a consumer's willingness to travel. However, as the studies mentioned above mostly focus on material products, it is therefore not clear whether the same logic will apply to a destination as above, which is what we will examine in this study.

2.4. Desire to Travel

As the main goal of this study, the desire to travel to a destination is measured by how willing the consumer is to plan a trip to a certain destination. The desire to travel includes different aspects, such as the location, atmosphere, and consumers' perception [35]. The location aspect depends on the country's perceived risk [20,36]. The atmosphere aspect involves what emotions the visitors feel when they visit the place. Feelings about a destination will affect the consumers' desire to travel, depending on their emotions, whether relaxed or calm, and subsequently add to their satisfaction [37,38]. If the destination's atmosphere matches the consumers' desired emotion, then their desire to travel will increase [9,35,38]. The consumer's perception, understanding of, and attitude toward a destination is the main driver of their desire to travel, as a positive perception can lead to an increase in the consumer's desire to travel [20]. Influencers, however, can emphasise the atmosphere and uniqueness of a destination to increase the consumer's desire to travel [14].

The factors detailed above are common for everyone to consider when planning for travel and, thus, are highly applicable to this study.

2.5. Theoretical Foundations

Currently, research carried out regarding the topic of influencer marketing primarily focuses on the endorsement of a product and the influencer's effect on the consumer's desire to purchase [17,23,24]. Other research carried out on social media's effect on consumer desire to travel focuses on content and postings on social media, without the involvement of influencers [7,8]. In addition, there are few studies investigating consumer behavioural changes on the topic of travelling due to the pandemic [6,36]. Pachucki et al. [6] presented changes in people's thoughts towards their travel decisions through social media engagement in consumers' reactions to destination preference by examining terms of likes, comments, and shares as the pandemic unfolded. Additional factors, such as type of content, posting presentation mode, and consumer characteristics, were not addressed in their model. Boto-García and Baños-Pino [8] highlight how social influence, namely the bandwagon effect, affects travel decisions in the context of influencer marketing. However, the causal mechanism of the bandwagon effect was not determined as it seems to be the result of an interaction of various factors. Plank et al. [36] include those who travelled internationally in the past five years as subjects to demonstrate changes in people's mind-sets on perceived risks since the outbreak of COVID-19 and how the pandemic affected tourism. Consumers may consider the perceived risk of travelling under the influence of the pandemic. As the pandemic gradually ends, perceived value has started to become an important factor affecting consumers' desire to travel. Leung et al. [39] discussed the impact of gender on influencer marketing and the consumer's desire to visit the restaurant since gender affects the trustworthiness and attractiveness of a destination. However, the paper also notes that their research is only carried out on a single influencer on a single platform, yet restaurants usually employ a multitude of influencers and platforms. Seyfi et al. [40] presented the importance of media exposure and the influencer marketing of destinations during crises, such as COVID-19, to attract future visitations and keep the industry running. Additional factors, such as news and exposure, are confounding factors that are not included in their study but may affect the travel intentions of consumers.

Similarities can be drawn between a consumer buying a certain product and deciding to visit a certain destination since both would require a consumer to consider a multitude of factors before actually spending money. Travel influencers often showcase content—including destination pictures or videos, personal anecdotes or experiences, and lifestyles—on their social media platforms to create demand among consumers to experience those adventures. When consumers are interested in enjoying a specific travel experience, they may be more inclined to obtain that experience themselves. Moreover, travel influencers also engage with their followers through comments, Q&A sessions, and direct messages. Sometimes, they collaborate with travel brands and may share exclusive discounts with their followers. Such interactions also enable influencer marketing to further stimulate consumers' desire to travel. Thus, this study would like to combine constructs related to influencer marketing in the context of post-pandemic travel decisions, further examining the role of influencer marketing on consumer desire to travel. The impact of perceived value behind influencer marketing will also be considered in the research framework.

This study aims to combine the pre-existing knowledge of influencer marketing and the effects of social media on travelling and extend this knowledge to the realms of the tourism industry in the post-pandemic era, bringing more insights into the impact that COVID-19 has had on society. Furthermore, this study focuses on the four main constructs mentioned above and examines the relationship between each, with the desire to travel as the final indicator of the overall causal framework. The theoretical contributions and practical feasibility of our proposed framework can be revealed by bridging the research gaps shown in the previous studies.

3. Research Framework and Hypothesis Development

3.1. Content and Fitness of Destination

Content that reflects an influencer's style is how an influencer communicates with their followers [11]. According to various studies, an influencer's content, especially style, affects the fitness of destination [18,22,27]. When an influencer shares certain positive characteristics or deeply connects with the surroundings, the fitness of destination is very high [16]. Furthermore, a well-established concept and the portrayal of emotions in the content can increase the fitness between the influencer and the destination [11]. Thus, the first hypothesis suggests the following:

H1. *Content of influencers positively influences fitness of destination.*

3.2. Content and Perceived Value

The content of influencers is the primary channel whereby influencers share their opinions and thoughts [14]. The persuasiveness of influencers has positive effects on the perceived value of a place [14]. Positive comments that reflect the truth can increase the persuasiveness of influencers. [14,22]. Insincere compliments, however, can cause the influencer to seem unprofessional, fake, and inauthentic, decreasing the influencer's credibility and the consumer's desire to travel [11]. Since perceived value relates to consumer opinion and cognition of the place, an influencer's opinion can effectively change the consumer's thoughts and thus change the perceived value. Consequently, the second hypothesis states the following:

H2. *Content of influencers positively influences perceived value.*

3.3. Content and Desire to Travel

Content includes the videos and posts of an influencer and has a great influence on consumers' desire to travel. Specifically, content with a more positive attitude makes content more enjoyable, thus attracting more viewers and spreading the power of their words [14]. Positive connotations and emotions from an influencer show a positive correlation with the increased desire to travel to a destination [11]. Persuasiveness, or how to credibly portray the place in an appealing light, also affects the desire to travel positively [11,17]. Various studies have proven that the persuasiveness of an influencer can greatly increase their credibility, thus increasing the effectiveness of their words [14,18,22]. Therefore, the third hypothesis states the following:

H3. *Content of influencers positively influences consumers' desire to travel.*

3.4. Fitness of Destination and Perceived Value

As consumer sentiments sway perceived values, the consumers' desire to travel will also be swayed as a result. The higher the fitness of a destination, the more appealing a destination becomes [17]. Since the attractiveness of a destination is a determining factor of the place's perceived value, a high fitness level contributes to a higher perceived value [18,22,27]. Other than attractiveness, both matching the energy and portrayal of the destination also affect the perceived value positively [17]. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis states the following:

H4. *Fitness of destination positively influences perceived value.*

3.5. Fitness of Destination and Desire to Travel

Fitness of destination is described as the match between the influencer and destination. A high fitness score correlates with a high consumer desire to travel [18,22,27]. Furthermore, the more harmonious an influencer is with a destination, the higher the fitness score, thus driving the consumers' desires higher [11]. The appropriate amount of energy the influencer shows while filming is another factor that contributes to an increased desire to travel [14,18]. Thus, the fifth hypothesis suggests the following:

H5. *Fitness of destination positively influences desire to travel.*

3.6. Perceived Value and Desire to Travel

The desire to travel is dependent on various factors; one is perceived value. Perceived value is crucial as most consumers base their desire to travel largely on this factor [16]. The higher the perceived value, or the consumer's opinion of the place, the more likely they are to visit the destination [20]. According to various studies, consumers focus on positive and constructive comments, which can increase their desire to travel [14]. Consequently, the sixth hypothesis suggests the following:

H6. *Perceived value positively influences consumer's desire to travel.*

Finally, the research framework and six proposed hypotheses are shown in Figure 3.
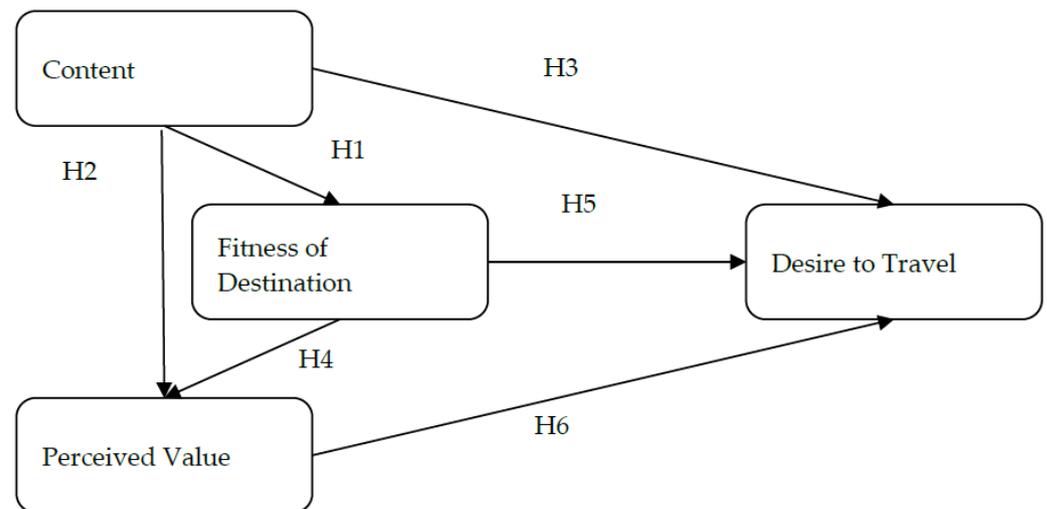
Figure 3. Research framework.

4. Methodology

This study used convenience sampling to collect data. The target population was those aged 18 to 55 living in Taiwan, as they have substantial experience in planning travel and conducting research on social media. Generally, individuals older than 18 will have experience planning travel for themselves, and those younger than 55 are more likely to search for travel information on social media, viewing content from various influencers. The respondents must also have travelled in the past year or planned to travel within this year for their answer to be more relevant regarding aspects of an influencer's content, fitness of destination, perceived value, and desire to travel. The data for this study were collected through an online questionnaire in April 2023. This study also coincided with the period when Taiwanese people were preparing to embark on so-called revenge tourism in the post-pandemic era.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was the respondents' demographic information, including age, gender, travel frequency in the post-pandemic era, frequency of using social media for travel information, average days per trip, and cost per trip. The second part investigated the impact of the four constructs on the respondents: an influencer's content, fitness of destination, perceived value, and desire to travel. The five items for content (CT01–CT05) were adapted from [9,33]. The five items for fitness of destination (FD01–FD05) were adapted from [9]. The three items for perceived value (PV01–PV03) were adapted from [9,15]. The two items for desire to travel (DT01–DT02) were adapted from [7,12,15]. All the items on the questionnaire were designed according to the Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

This study used a variety of methodologies to analyse the data collected. First, Cronbach's alpha tested the reliability of the four constructs, and the recommended threshold for the result is ≥ 0.7. Next, the average variance extracted (AVE) assessed the convergent validity with a threshold of 0.5, and the construct reliability (CR) determined the internal

consistency with a threshold of 0.7. In addition, comparisons of Pearson correlation coefficients and the square root of AVE demonstrated discriminant validity. Then, the structural equation model (SEM) verified the proposed research framework for testing the hypotheses. The following indexes evaluate the Goodness of Fit of the proposed model: Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Residual (RMR), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Finally, the bootstrap method was used to analyse the mediation effect of fitness of destination.

5. Results

5.1. Demographics of Respondents

This study received 332 valid responses for the data collection. First, the age group 18–30 has the highest percentage of respondents (42.5%), followed by the 43–55 group (35.5%) and the 31–42 group (22.0%). Second, the majority of respondents are female (59.0%). Third, the majority of respondents travel once to twice per year (76.5%), followed by three to four times at 16.6% and more than four times at 6.9%. Fourth, 36.4% of the respondents always use social media for travel information, followed by often at 29.2%, sometimes at 22.9%, occasionally at 9.9%, and rarely at 1.6%. Fifth, the primary social media platform that the respondents use for travel information is YouTube (32.8%), followed by Instagram (22.3%), blog and others (22.3%), Facebook (21.1%), and TikTok (1.5%). Sixth, the majority of respondents travel 4–7 days on average (59.9%), followed by 1–3 days (29.2%), 8–10 days (4.8%), 14+ (3.3%) days, and 11–14 days (2.7%). Seventh, a slight majority of respondents have a travel budget of TWD 30,001 to 60,000 per trip per person (52.4%), followed by less than TWD 30,000 (35.2%), TWD 60,001 to 100,000 (9%), and more than TWD 100,001 (3.4%). Lastly, the respondents would most likely travel to Northeast Asia (43.4%) and Southeast Asia (26.8%), followed by other areas (16%), Europe (7.5%), the United States/Canada (4.2%), and, finally, Australia/New Zealand (2.1%). Such demographic information also reflects the social media preferences and consumption characteristics of Taiwanese people travelling abroad in the post-pandemic era.

5.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The Cronbach's alpha for the four constructs exceeds 0.7, ranging from 0.865 to 0.923. Therefore, the reliability of these results is considered acceptable [22]. After conducting the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), the construct reliability (CR) for all four constructs also exceeded 0.7, which indicates good internal consistency in this study. The convergent validity of the proposed model is acceptable, as the factor loading of all items exceeds 0.5, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct also exceeds 0.5, both shown in Table 1.

5.3. Pearson Correlation and Discriminant Validity

The results of the Pearson correlation are shown in Table 2. The square root of the AVE of each construct is demonstrated in the diagonal cell. The discriminant validity is also satisfied since the correlation with any other construct is smaller than the square root of the AVE for a particular construct.

5.4. Structural Equation Model

The SEM combines the characteristics of the factor analysis and path analysis. For complex theoretical models, the SEM can enable us to obtain a deeper understanding of the causal relationships among multiple variables, including direct and indirect effects. Since the SEM is particularly suitable for studying multivariate and complex research frameworks, numerous studies have used the SEM to achieve significant academic results and practical applications [14,15,20,24,38].

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis results.

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Content	CT01	0.839	0.92	0.69	0.918
	CT02	0.800			
	CT03	0.879			
	CT04	0.863			
	CT05	0.769			
Fitness of Destination	FD01	0.855	0.92	0.70	0.919
	FD02	0.776			
	FD03	0.886			
	FD04	0.814			
	FD05	0.836			
Perceived Value	PV01	0.914	0.93	0.81	0.923
	PV02	0.954			
	PV03	0.822			
Desire to Travel	DT01	0.889	0.87	0.76	0.865
	DT02	0.859			

Table 2. Pearson's correlation analysis and discriminant validity results.

	Content	Fitness of Destination	Perceived Value	Desire to Travel
Content	(0.831)			
Fitness of Destination	0.800 ***	(0.837)		
Perceived Value	0.634 ***	0.682 ***	(0.900)	
Desire to Travel	0.656 ***	0.652 ***	0.240 ***	(0.872)

*** $p < 0.001$.

The Goodness of Fit in the proposed model illustrates an acceptable fit between the model and the data collected, given that the indexes are GFI = 0.908, AGFI = 0.869, NFI = 0.946, CFI = 0.964, RMR = 0.038, and RMSEA = 0.074. As seen in Figure 4 and Table 3, content has a positive impact on fitness of destination and desire to travel, while having no significant impact on perceived value; fitness of destination has a positive impact on perceived value and desire to travel; and perceived value has a negative impact on desire to travel. Therefore, H1, H3, H4, H5, and H6 are well supported, while H2 is not accepted since the *p*-value is more than 0.05.

For the mediation effect of fitness of destination, the bootstrap method was used to conduct a mediation analysis. According to Table 4, fitness of destination has a full mediation effect on the relationship between content and perceived value, which means that the relationship between content and perceived value is no longer significant after adding the mediator fitness of destination to the model. Such results also demonstrated that H2 is not accepted. Moreover, fitness of destination has no mediation effect on the relationship between content and desire to travel since the *p*-value of the indirect effect is more than 0.05. Accordingly, we can infer that people tend to decide whether to travel based on influencers' content rather than the influence of fitness between influencers' characteristics and destination.
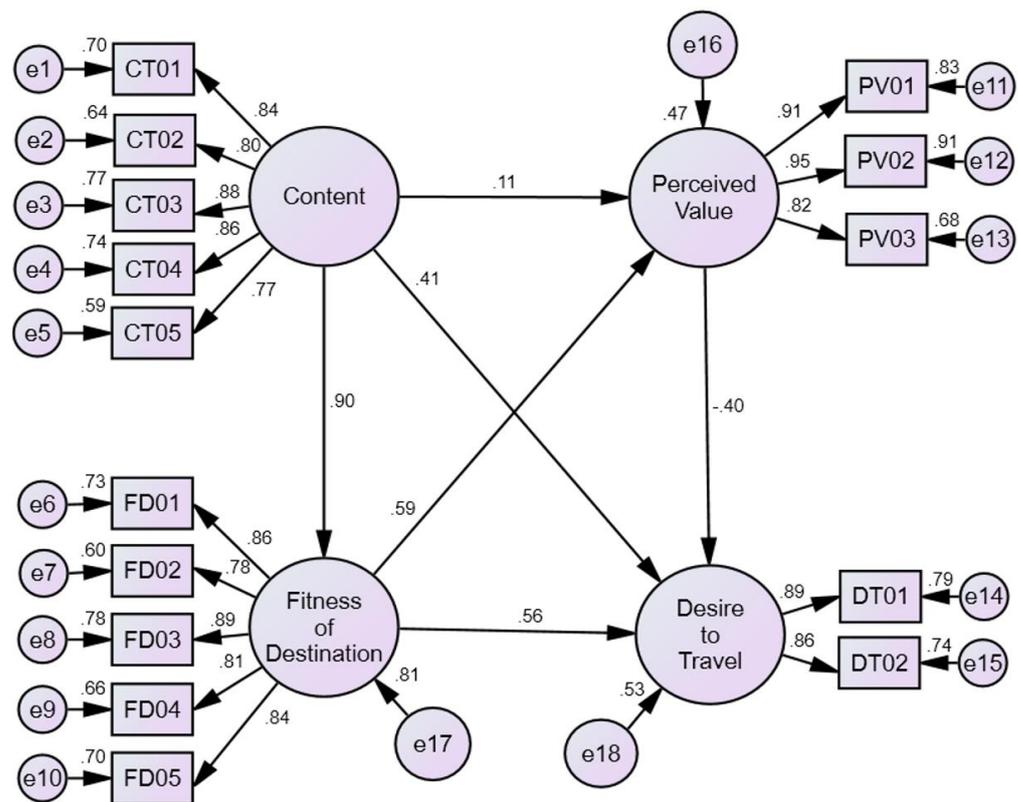
Figure 4. The structural equation model (SEM).

Table 3. Path results of SEM.

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	*p*
H1: Content (CT) → Fitness of Destination (FD)	0.900	0.56	16.673	***
H2: Content (CT) → Perceived Value (PV)	0.107	0.153	0.791	0.429
H3: Content (CT) → Desire to Travel (DT)	0.405	0.150	2.905	0.004 **
H4: Fitness of Destination (FD) → Perceived Value (PV)	0.586	0.149	4.288	***
H5: Fitness of Destination (FD) → Desire to Travel (DT)	0.559	0.155	3.717	***
H6: Perceived Value (PV) → Desire to Travel (DT)	−0.398	0.065	−5.819	***

** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4. The mediation effect of fitness of destination.

Effects	Estimate	*p* Value	BC 95% Confidence Interval
Content (CT) → Fitness of Destination (FD) → Perceived Value (PV)			
Indirect effect	0.527	0.001 **	0.311~0.772
Direct effect	0.107	0.541	−0.155~0.348
Total effect	0.634	0.001 **	0.534~0.715
Content (CT) → Fitness of Destination (FD) → Desire to Travel (DT)			
Indirect effect	0.250	0.089	0.013~0.491
Direct effect	0.405	0.019 *	0.149~0.663
Total effect	0.656	0.001 **	0.577~0.728

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

6. Discussion and Managerial Implications

6.1. Discussion of Findings

In line with Lee and Theokary [15] and Kapitan et al. [23], this study showed that good content increases an influencer's fitness for a product, in this case, a destination. Since content is the main medium for influencers to convey and spread their opinions, the quality and style of their content can influence how the message is received, thus affecting fitness of destination, which can sway consumers' desire to travel. Corresponding to Lin et al. [9] and Barta et al. [24], this study illustrates that content is an effective way to show a destination's highlights while influencers comment on the place. This can portray the destination as appealing and thus increase consumers' desire to travel. As seen in Table 3, the estimated values of the path "CT to FD" and the path "CT to DT" are 0.900 and 0.405, respectively, both with significant *p* values. However, the estimated value of the path "CT to PV" is only 0.107, with an insignificant *p*-value. This study discovered that content did not influence perceived value, which differs from any previous research. The possible reasons for this are the subjectivity of perceived value and its tendency to be deeply embedded in one's mind. As one's perceived value is highly subjective, it is less prone to changes due to another's opinions or persuasion. Another aspect to consider is that these perceptions of destination have been embedded in the consumer's values for a long time, which also makes their values unlikely to change. Thus, content that serves as a means of delivery for the opinions of influencers is not enough to influence the perceived value of the consumer in any way, considering the two main, unshifting factors mentioned above. While there might be no direct relationship between content and perceived value, indirect influences may occur and gradually change one's perception of a destination. While the direct effect of content on perceived value might be low, Table 4 proves how fitness of destination acted as a mediator for content and perceived value, as the indirect effect has an estimated value of 0.527 with a significant *p*-value.

Following Sokolova and Kefi [14] and Breves et al. [17], we also found that fitness of destination greatly influences a consumer's perceived value and desire to travel. The higher the fitness of the influencer to the destination, the more reliable and convincing the influencer will seem; thus, their opinion will be more widely accepted by viewers, increasing the consumer's perceived value. The statement above is proven in Table 3, where the estimated value of the path "FD to PV" is 0.586, with a significant *p*-value. Likewise, the fitness of destination can also affect the desire to travel. The more fit an influencer is to a destination, the more convincing and genuine they will be, which can improve the image of the destination, increasing the desire to travel, as the estimated value of the path "FD to DT" is 0.559 with a significant *p*-value.

Another aspect that differentiates this study from other research is that the perceived value has a significantly negative impact on the desire to travel, as shown in Table 3, where the estimated value of the path "PV to DT" is −0.398, with a significant *p*-value. As one's perceived value of a destination is based on one's knowledge of the place, it is likely that consumers think they have sufficient knowledge of the destination to analyse whether travelling there would be a valuable experience. Furthermore, if one frequently travels to one city or country, the attractiveness of the destination would decrease each time. As stated above, one's perceived value of the destination may be embedded in consumer perception for a long time; thus, if the consumer already has a negative perception of a destination, influencer marketing implemented on social media platforms cannot enhance their desire to travel. Excessive manipulation of influencer marketing may even be considered a possibility of an advertorial or sponsored post that negatively affects consumers. This phenomenon is mainly caused by misleading information, selective presentation, and the over-commercialization of influencers. Some influencers may exaggerate or embellish their travel experiences to attract attention and followers. They often present their travel experiences selectively to highlight the positive and impressive aspects while ignoring or downplaying the negative. When consumers find that the actual travel experience does not match what the influencer promoted, they may feel misled, disappointed, or even

suspicious of influencer marketing. In addition, the business model of influencer marketing is to promote specific brands, products, and services to obtain sponsorship. However, once consumers feel that the influencer's content is too commercialized and lacks authenticity and objectivity, they will think that the recommendation of the influencer is only based on commercial considerations, which reduces their trust and interest in influencers.

6.2. Managerial Implications

The results of this study indicate that good content from an influencer will positively impact the influencer's fitness of destination and the consumer's desire to travel. Focusing on this conclusion, we should work with influencers who are a good fit for the destination if we want to promote a certain tourist attraction through influencer marketing. The destination looks more appealing to consumers when key features are highlighted through engaging content created by these suitable influencers. Therefore, as a destination's attractiveness increases, consumers' desire to travel to the destination will also increase, resulting in effective promotion of the destination and, presumably, increased tourism.

Another line of influence shown in the results is the positive impact that fitness of destination has on perceived value and consumer desire to travel. Fitness of destination has a positive impact on perceived value and is one aspect that can indirectly change one's perception. Thus, content of any type looking to increase the attractiveness and tourism of a destination should focus on increasing the fitness between the influencer and the destination. As an influencer's fitness for a destination has a positive impact on one's perceived value, the increase in fitness can lead to gradual positive changes. In addition, fitness between the influencer and destination is also a key factor in stimulating consumer desire to travel. Therefore, successful promotion of tourist attractions can be implemented when suitable influencers who align with the fitness of destination are found. Creating entertaining and engaging content and attempting to increase consumer trustworthiness vis-à-vis the destination is another key factor in increasing fitness between influencers and a destination since the mediation effect of fitness of destination exists in the relationship between content and perceived value and the relationship between content and the desire to travel, respectively.

The impact of consumer perceived value on influencer marketing in tourism depends on the authenticity of the influencer, quality of content, and presentation of the destination. When perceived value is negatively affected, whether by potential risks or other factors, consumers may become suspicious of travel intentions or lose interest in the destination. For influencer marketing, it is crucial to maintain authenticity, objectivity, and transparency to ensure consumers' opinions of the product or destination are not affected. Ensuring authenticity and objectivity prevents an over-exaggeration of the product or destination, which implies that influencers' trustworthiness and credibility can be increased to maximize the degree of persuasiveness and influence on their followers. Having transparency also increases the credibility of the influencer as it shows consumers their authenticity. Labelling advertisements or sponsor-generated content ensures followers understand that the content was created for commercial purposes. Influencers should honestly convey their feelings and opinions to increase transparency and, further, build trust with their followers.

In the post-pandemic era, tourism is rising again with the help of the popularity of social media, and people hope to explore more tourist attractions through the personal experiences of influencers. Tourism accounts for a large portion of a country's economy and is essential for the revitalization of a country after months or even years of lockdown. A recovery of the tourism sector helps countries grow their economies quickly, which allows time for governments to implement policies to revive their economies post-lockdown. Hence, the promotion of tourism through social media and influencers can greatly increase economic consumption, which is the first step towards economic recovery in a country after the pandemic.

7. Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

7.1. Conclusions

This study aims to bridge the gap between influencer marketing and consumers' subsequent behaviours regarding their desire to travel in the post-pandemic era. People will rely more on social media to gather information and articulate their viewpoints since the engagement of social media has comprehensively impacted their cognition, thinking, and lifestyle. As the pandemic is gradually ending, boosting economic development through a revitalization of the tourism industry has become one of the most important issues at this stage. This study integrates two key constructs of influencer marketing, influencers' content and their fitness, and involves a related construct of perceived value that reveals people's new perspectives on the implementation of social media in the post-pandemic era to investigate new behavioural patterns among individuals when planning overseas travel. While the topic of influencer marketing is mostly focused on the purchase of goods and services, it can be extended to topics such as travel. The SEM is used to verify the proposed theoretical framework and simultaneously explore relationships between multiple observed variables. In the context of travel, an influencer's content positively influences his/her fitness of destination. More attractive and emotive content and a higher fitness of destination can more positively increase consumers' desire to travel. However, perceived value has a negative effect on consumers' desire to travel. Fitness of destination has significant and positive effects on perceived value, while the effect of content on perceived value is not significant. When considering fitness of destination as a mediator, fitness of destination has a full mediation effect on the relationship between content and perceived value, and fitness of destination has no mediation effect on the relationship between content and the desire to travel.

In conclusion, influencer marketing has not only influenced consumers' travel decisions but also shaped their perceptions of the fitness and perceived value of destinations. Influencer content plays a pivotal role in inspiring consumer travel desires, while perceived value seems to impose constraints on their travel desires because individuals become more cautious in evaluating the costs and benefits of a journey. Furthermore, these findings also provide valuable insights for marketing professionals, aiding them in better understanding the applications of influencer marketing to drive the recovery of the tourism industry. This will contribute to shaping more attractive and value-driven travel destinations and promoting sustainable growth in the tourism industry.

7.2. Limitations and Future Research

Recently, some controversial issues have arisen in influencer marketing. Influencer marketing campaigns may raise issues of authenticity and trust. When consumers identify that the influencer's content is sponsor-generated or overly commercialized, scepticism about the authenticity of their content may harm the influencer's credibility [23,41]. As the focus of this study is on influencer marketing, other constructs, such as perceived risks and consumer satisfaction, that would paint a more holistic picture of the changes in consumer desire to travel cannot be considered here [31,32,36]. These constructs will be considered to be added to the research framework in the future. In addition, influencers typically have specific demographics, interests, or social groups as their followers. To gain the necessary data, this study collected the responses through a survey, using the convenience sampling method. A possible result of this method is that respondents will be mostly from an extended friend group with similar beliefs, restricting the degree of variety in their responses. This also results in a survey that only reflects the thoughts of people in a specific country or region without comprehensively investigating the reactions of people who live in other countries or regions of the world. Since this study is primarily based on a survey of Taiwanese people aged 18 to 55, comparative studies on people from different countries or regions and age groups can also be conducted to investigate how influencer marketing on various social media platforms affects consumers' desire to travel. For the survey data to accurately match the current situation, future research can be extended to a wider and

more diverse range of respondents. Accordingly, the results and trends extrapolated from the data would be softsoftmore applicable to governments, companies, or individuals who wish to promote a certain tourist attraction.

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