Effects of Influencer Content Characteristics and Credibility on Travel Decision among Thai Generation Z Tourists

Patteera Pantaratorn*, Benyapa Ruadrew, Naphatsorn Khanitda, and Areeya Tinnakornonsaeng

College of Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Rangsit University, Pathum Thani 12000, Thailand

*Corresponding author; E-mail: patteera.p@rsu.ac.th

Abstract

The rising influence of social media has significantly transformed travel behavior, particularly among Generation Z, who rely heavily on digital content for travel planning and decision-making. While influencer marketing research exists in various contexts, there remains a limited amount of specific investigation into the integrated effects of both content characteristics and influencer attributes on travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists. This study investigates how influencer content characteristics namely content quality, content appeal, and content usefulness and influencer attributes influence the travel decision-making of Thai Generation Z tourists. A structured questionnaire was distributed to Thai Gen Z respondents, and the data were analyzed using multivariate regression techniques to assess the predictive power of both content and source factors. The results reveal that all three content characteristics significantly and positively influence travel decisions, with content usefulness emerging as the strongest predictor. These findings contribute to the understanding of digital marketing dynamics in the tourism sector and provide actionable insights for marketers seeking to target Gen Z audiences more effectively. The study also addresses a critical gap in the literature by focusing on an underrepresented demographic and geographic context using a robust analytical approach.

Keywords: *social media influencers; generation Z; travel decision; content characteristics; influencers attributes*

1. Introduction

Social media influencers play a pivotal role in shaping trends, consumer choices, and public opinion across diverse fields (Le & Nguyen, 2024). Their authenticity, relatability, and targeted reach make them indispensable partners for brands, educators, activists, and even political movements. As digital platforms continue to evolve, the influence of these individuals is set to grow even further, transforming industries and societies worldwide.

The tourism industry is an area where influencers are especially powerful (Huwae et al., 2020). Influencers inspire people to travel by sharing beautiful photos, personal stories, and reviews about destinations, hotels, and experiences. Their content introduces followers to new places, promotes local businesses, and often sets new travel trends. Nowadays, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube have become essential tools for promoting destinations, services, and experiences. For example, 44.4% of Thai consumers use social media to research brands, and Facebook remains the dominant platform with over 52 million monthly users (Benjamin, 2025). The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has further amplified these efforts through initiatives like TAT Connex, a dedicated influencer marketing platform.

Tourists now engage in rational pre-trip planning, relying on a variety of information sources to support their decisions. The availability and credibility of destination information are key factors influencing tourism purchases. The travel decision process is commonly divided into three stages: information search, evaluation of alternatives, and planning or purchase decisions (Babu & Philip, 2025). In this process, visually rich and clearly articulated online reviews play a crucial role. Influencers, in particular, contribute significantly by providing informative content that shapes perceptions and guides behavior at each stage (Cholprasertsuk et al., 2020).

Distinct generational cohorts display unique travel behaviors shaped by their socio-cultural and technological environments. Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) is the first group to grow entirely within the digital era and is emerging as a significant force in the global tourism market (Le & Nguyen, 2024). In Thailand, Generation Z travelers are characterized by their deep-rooted connection with digital connectivity, preference for authentic and meaningful experiences, and reliance on social media for travel inspiration and decision. Recent industry findings indicate that Generation Z is the only age group to report an increase in travel expenditures year-over-year, with an average annual travel expenditure of approximately USD 11,000 (Kadence, n.d.). With their spending power projected to grow, targeting this demographic has become a strategic priority for tourism businesses (Peek Pro, n.d.). Unlike previous generations, Generation Z travelers do not rely solely on traditional travel websites; instead, they discover destinations through social media platforms (Dinc, 2024). These platforms serve as primary tools for travel research, making influencer marketing and digital engagement critical strategies for tourism brands (Xu et al., 2025). Their dependence on influencer-driven content not only informs their travel choices but also shapes their expectations and purchasing behaviors, positioning influencers as key decision-makers within the contemporary tourism landscape (Saini et al., 2023).

This study is theoretically grounded in Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953), which posits that message effectiveness depends on the perceived credibility of the source, encompassing credibility, expertise, and attractiveness. In the digital tourism context, this theory helps explain why certain influencers are more persuasive in shaping travel decisions than others. Additionally, we draw upon Perceived Risk Theory (Bauer, 1967), which suggests that consumers actively seek information to reduce uncertainty in decision-making processes. This is particularly relevant for travel decisions, where perceived risks regarding unfamiliar destinations, cultural differences, and service quality can be mitigated through credible influencer content.

However, the literature reveals ongoing debates about what constitutes effective influencer content. While some studies emphasize the importance of aesthetic quality and professional production values, arguing that polished content signals reliability and expertise, others contend that authenticity and relatability are more crucial for Gen Z audiences, who demonstrate increasing skepticism toward overly commercialized content (Baghel & Baghel, 2023). This tension between professionalism and authenticity, particularly in the context of travel influence, represents a critical area requiring empirical investigation within specific cultural contexts.

Previous research has emphasized the persuasive power of influencers in travel marketing, focusing on attributes such as credibility, attractiveness, and expertise (Leite et al., 2024). However, much of the literature is Western-centric (Yao et al., 2025; Marques et al., 2025). While some research exists in Asian contexts, there remains limited empirical investigation specifically examining how these dynamics unfold among Thai Generation Z tourists, particularly using integrated approaches that examine both content characteristics and influencer attributes simultaneously (Ismail et al., 2025). Existing models often treat content appeal and influencer attributes in isolation, lacking an integrated approach to understanding their joint impact on decisions. Furthermore, most prior studies tend to focus narrowly on either the characteristics of influencer content characteristics of the influencer as a source. Few have integrated both dimensions to assess their joint impact on travel decisions. Additionally, much of the current research relies on simple correlational analysis, lacking multivariate approaches that can reveal the predictive power of each factor.

Critical examination of existing literature reveals several areas of scholarly debate that inform this study. First, there is ongoing disagreement about the relative importance of aesthetic quality versus authenticity in influencer content. While traditional marketing wisdom suggests that professional presentation enhances credibility (Ampornklinkaew, 2025), emerging research indicates that Generation Z consumers may actually prefer more authentic, less polished content that feels genuine rather than commercialized (Baghel & Baghel, 2023; Chiu & Ho, 2023). Second, the relationship between influencer fame and persuasiveness remains contested, with some studies finding positive correlations between follower count and influence, while others suggest that micro-influencers with smaller, more engaged audiences may be more effective (Guo et al., 2024). These debates highlight the need for context-specific research that examines how different cultural and demographic factors moderate these relationships.

To address these gaps, this study investigates the influence of both content characteristics (quality, appeal, and usefulness) and influencer attributes (credibility, expertise, and fame) on the travel decisions of Thai Generation Z tourists. By integrating descriptive statistics, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and regression modeling, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of what truly drives Generation Z tourists' engagement and conversion in the digital tourism landscape. Moreover, gender was tested as a

moderator based on literature suggesting possible differences in digital content processing and decision-making between males and females in tourism and marketing contexts.

2. Research Objectives

This study aims to examine how social media influencer content characteristics (quality, appeal, and usefulness) and influencer attributes (credibility, expertise, and fame) affect travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists. By exploring both perceptual and behavioral dimensions, the research seeks to identify the most impactful factors guiding tourism choices in a digital context.

3. Method and Instrument
3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

Ethical approval for conducting this study was granted by the Rangsit University Human Research Ethics Committee, as documented in the "Documentary Proof of Exemption" (Certificate No. DPE. No. RSUERB2025-017) on 24 April 2025, with approval valid for one year. All procedures adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki and institutional guidelines. The reason for the exemption was that the study involved minimal risk, utilized an anonymous online questionnaire, and did not include any vulnerable populations or sensitive topics. Therefore, based on the university's ethical guidelines, it qualified for exemption from full ethical review.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with strict confidentiality and anonymity maintained throughout the process. All participants received a digital participant information sheet explaining the study's objectives, procedures, confidentiality terms, and their rights as participants. Written informed consent was obtained electronically before access to the questionnaire. For participants aged 18 and above, consent was provided via a standard consent form. For participants under 18, parental or legal guardian consent was obtained along with written assent from the minor.

A screening question ensured that only members of Generation Z who had followed social media influencers on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, or YouTube were included. The survey was distributed through a QR code posted in relevant online communities (including Facebook travel groups such as 'Thai Backpackers,' 'Travel Thailand Community,' 'University Student Travel Groups,' and travel-focused LINE communities) and the researchers' verified social media networks (personal Instagram, Facebook, and LINE accounts with travel-interested followers established over two or more years). Participation was entirely voluntary, with no coercion, pressure, or incentives involved. All responses were anonymous, and participants' privacy was strictly protected throughout the research process.

The target population for this study comprised Thai Generation Z individuals aged 18 to 30 who had previously followed at least one travel influencer on social media. Due to the unknown size of this population, a non-probability approach was used: purposive sampling ensured participants were actively exposed to influencer content, while convenience sampling enabled broader reach via online channels. While this approach may limit generalizability to the broader Thai Gen Z population, it was deemed appropriate for this exploratory study as it ensured the relevance of participants' experiences with influencer content. To mitigate potential urban and education biases, we sought demographic diversity across different regions of Thailand and education levels within our sampling frame. The minimum sample size was determined using Cochran's formula (1977) at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, resulting in a required sample of 385 respondents.

Before the main data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts to ensure content validity and clarity. It was then pilot-tested with 30 participants from the target demographic. Feedback from this process was used to refine the wording of items and the response scale. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha produced a coefficient of 0.964, indicating excellent internal consistency. The finalized questionnaire was administered over a four-week period, with efforts made to achieve demographic diversity and enhance the generalizability of the findings.

The survey was distributed electronically between May and July 2025, primarily via social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, and LINE) and university networks. Participants accessed the online questionnaire through a QR code link. A total of 385 valid responses were collected, meeting the requirements for multivariate analysis and ensuring sufficient statistical power.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in digital consumer behavior theories, particularly focusing on the role of social media content and influencer attributes in shaping travel-related decisions among Generation Z. The conceptual framework integrates two main independent constructs influencer content characteristics and influencer attributes and one dependent construct, travel decisions.
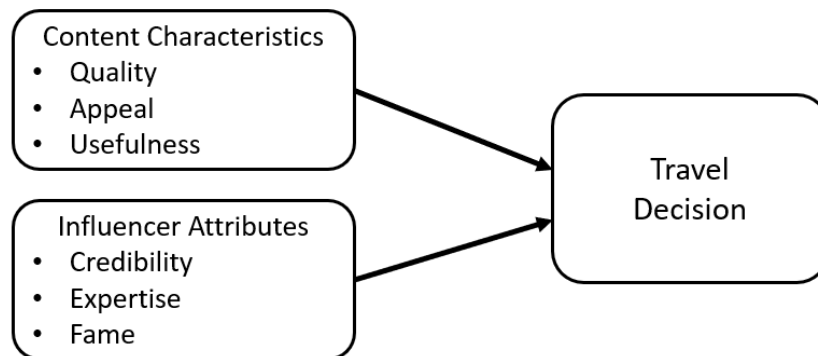

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the study: The influence of influencer content characteristics (content quality, content appeal, content usefulness) and influencer attributes (credibility, expertise, fame) on travel decision among Thai Generation Z tourists

As illustrated in Figure 1, the model posits that both content-driven factors (quality, appeal, usefulness) and influencer-driven factors (credibility, expertise, fame) have direct effects on travel decision behavior.

- **Independent Variable 1: Influencer Content Characteristics** (Gretzel, 2018)
  - *Content Quality:* The clarity, completeness, and perceived credibility of the information.
  - *Content Appeal:* The visual and emotional attractiveness of the content.
  - *Content Usefulness:* The practical utility of the content for planning, including reviews, tips, or itineraries.
- **Independent Variable 2: Influencer Attributes** (Saini et al., 2023)
  - *Credibility:* The extent to which influencers are perceived as honest and authentic.
  - *Expertise:* The influencer's demonstrated knowledge, experience, or authority in the travel domain.
  - *Fame:* The influencer's social visibility, typically measured by follower count and public recognition.
- **Dependent Variable: Travel Decisions** (Le & Nguyen, 2024)
  - Refers to the intention and actions of Thai Generation Z tourists in selecting destinations, itineraries, or travel services based on influencer-generated content.

This model assumes a direct influence of both content attributes and influencer credibility on the travel decisions of Thai Generation Z individuals. The structure enables multivariate regression analysis to explore not only correlations but predictive power among variables, addressing gaps in previous literature, which often treated these variables in isolation.

3.3 Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework and existing literature on social media influence, the study proposed two primary hypotheses to examine the effects of content characteristics and influencer attributes on the travel decision behavior of Thai Generation Z tourists:

Hypothesis 1 (H1):

Influencer content characteristics, specifically content quality, content appeal, and content usefulness, significantly influence travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists.

H1.1: Content quality positively influences travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists.
H1.2: Content appeal positively influences travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists.
H1.3: Content usefulness positively influences travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists.

Hypothesis 2 (H2):
Influencer attributes, specifically credibility, expertise, and fame, significantly influence travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists.

H2.1: Influencer credibility positively influences travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists.
H2.2: Influencer expertise positively influences travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists.
H2.3: Influencer fame positively influences travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists.

3.4 Research Instrument

The research employed a structured questionnaire designed to measure Thai Generation Z tourists' perceptions of social media influencer content characteristics and attributes, as well as their influence on travel decisions. The instrument was divided into three main sections:

1. Demographic Information: Captured age, gender, education, travel frequency, and social media usage behavior.
2. Influencer Content Characteristics: Measured using nine items across three subdimensions, content quality, content appeal, and content usefulness, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).
3. Influencer Attributes: Comprised nine items covering credibility, expertise, and fame, also rated on the same 5-point scale.
4. Travel Decision: Assessed using three items measuring the extent to which influencer content characteristics affect respondents' travel intentions and choices.

The questionnaire was adapted from validated prior studies (Mahajan et al., 2024) and translated into Thai using a back-translation method to ensure linguistic equivalence. A pilot test with 30 participants confirmed the reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.80$ for all scales) and clarity of the instrument.

3.5 Data Analysis

Prior to all inferential analyses, data distribution was assessed using skewness and kurtosis. All variables showed values within acceptable thresholds ($|SK| < 2$, $|KU| < 7$), supporting the use of parametric statistical techniques. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS for Windows and AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) software. The following statistical procedures were employed:

- Descriptive Statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to summarize central tendencies and variability across all measured variables.
- Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify the underlying structure and factor loadings of the measurement items at the early stage of scale validation.
- Reliability Analysis using Cronbach's alpha assessed the internal consistency of each construct.
- Pearson Correlation Coefficients were computed to examine bivariate relationships among influencer content characteristics, influencer attributes, and travel decisions.
- Multiple Linear Regression was applied to test the predictive strength of influencer content characteristics and attributes on travel decisions (Hypotheses 1 and 2).
- Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed by introducing interaction terms between gender and the main independent variables. The change in explained variance (ΔR^2) and the significance of the interaction terms were examined to determine moderation.
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS to validate the measurement models of latent constructs. Model fit was evaluated using standard indices such as χ^2/df, RMSEA, CFI, GFI, and TLI.
- Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships among constructs in the conceptual framework, using maximum likelihood estimation. This allowed simultaneous assessment of direct and indirect effects, supporting both correlational and causal interpretations.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile of Thai Generation Z Tourists

The study surveyed a total of 385 Thai tourists from Generation Z. The demographic data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and descriptive statistics. Key findings are summarized in Table 1.

- **Gender**: Most respondents were female (60.26%), followed by male (35.58%), and those identifying as another gender (4.16%).
- **Marital Status**: Most participants were single (74.03%), while 23.12% were married, 2.60% were divorced or separated, and 0.25% were widowed.
- **Education Level**: A significant majority held a bachelor's degree (75.32%), while 20.26% had an education below a bachelor's degree, and 4.42% had attained a degree higher than a bachelor's degree.
- **Region of Residence**: The highest proportion of respondents resided in Bangkok and its vicinity (31.43%), followed by the eastern region (27.79%), the central region (20.52%), and others, including the northeast, south, north, and west.

These demographic insights provide a foundational understanding of the background characteristics of the participants, which are essential for interpreting the influence of social media on their travel decisions.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of Thai Generation Z tourists (n = 385)

Demographic Variable	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
Male	137	35.58
Female	232	60.26
Other	16	4.16
Marital Status:		
Single	285	74.03
Married	89	23.12
Divorced/Separated	10	2.6
Widowed	1	0.25
Education:		
Below Bachelor's	78	20.26
Bachelor's	290	75.32
Above Bachelor's	17	4.42
Region:		
Bangkok & Vicinity	121	31.43
Central	79	20.52
East	107	27.79
West	13	3.38
Northeast	25	6.49
South	21	5.45
North	19	4.94

4.2 Descriptive and Factor Analysis

This section presents the perceptions of Thai Generation Z tourists toward both influencer content and travel-related social media influencer attributes. Three content characteristics quality, appeal, and usefulness and three influencer attributes credibility, expertise, and fame were used to assess these perceptions. The evaluation was conducted using multiple items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize overall perceptions, and EFA was performed to verify internal consistency and construct validity. The resulting means, standard deviations, and factor loadings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Means, standard deviations, and factor loadings for all measured items, influencer content characteristics, attributes, and travel decisions (n = 385)

Dimension	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Loading Factor
Content Quality	Clarity and ease of understanding	4.05	1.23	.909
	Credibility and influence on travel decisions	3.97	1.21	.916
	Overall	**4.01**	**1.16**	**.913**
Content Appeal	Follow influencers whose content matches interests	3.96	1.21	.901
	Visual content attracts more attention than text	3.90	1.14	.903
	Overall	**3.93**	**1.11**	**.902**
Content Usefulness	Travel reviews are useful for making travel decisions	4.02	1.23	.921
	Prefer informative content over promotional	3.97	1.21	.917
	Always review Influencer Content Characteristics before traveling	3.79	1.15	.892
	Overall	**3.93**	**1.12**	**.91**
Overall Content Evaluation	Aggregate score across all content characteristics	3.95	1.09	.908
Credibility	Influencer is trustworthy	3.98	1.17	.888
	Provides honest travel information	3.83	1.11	.888
	More followers = more credibility	3.78	1.30	.807
	Overall	**3.86**	**1.06**	**.861**
Expertise	Reviews stimulate interest in travel	3.94	1.19	.890
	Experience influences the decision to follow recommendations	3.79	1.11	.891
	No travel concerns due to the influencer's expertise	3.75	1.25	.880
	Overall	**3.83**	**1.09**	**.887**
Fame	Influencer has >10,000 followers	4.00	1.17	.897
	Influencer is widely known	3.84	1.13	.895
	Overall	**3.92**	**1.09**	**.941**
Overall Influencer Evaluation	Aggregate score across influencer Attributes	3.87	1.03	.952
Travel Decision	Decide to travel based on influencer reviews	3.92	1.19	.940
	Recommended destinations match preferences	3.84	1.15	.940
Overall Travel Decision	Aggregate score on travel decision influence	3.88	1.12	.983

Table 2 shows that item means ranged from 3.75 to 4.05, with standard deviations (SD) ranging from 1.14 to 1.23, reflecting generally positive attitudes across all dimensions.

Among the content characteristics, content quality received the highest average score (M = 4.05, SD = 1.23), particularly in terms of clarity and credibility. Content usefulness also scored highly, especially for items related to travel reviews and a preference for informative over promotional content. These results suggest that participants value both the clarity and usefulness of influencer content when making travel decisions.

The EFA yielded factor loadings ranging from .807 to .921, all exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.70. This supports the reliability of the measurement model, indicating that each survey item is strongly associated with its underlying construct and serves as a robust indicator of its respective factors. These results also confirm the convergent validity of the measurement scale, meaning that items intended to measure the same concept are indeed closely related. Notably, the item "*Travel reviews are useful for making travel decisions*" had the highest loading (.921), highlighting its particular importance in shaping perceptions of content usefulness.

Influencer attributes were also rated positively by participants, with mean scores ranging from 3.83 to 4.00 and standard deviations from 1.03 to 1.17. Credibility, as measured by items such as "*The influencer is trustworthy*" (M = 3.98, loading = .888), emerged as a central dimension, indicating that credibility is highly valued among Thai Generation Z tourists. Expertise also received favorable ratings, while fame, assessed through follower count and

public recognition, showed similarly high loadings (.897 and .895) and strong mean perceptions (M = 4.00 and 3.84; SD = 1.17 and 1.13). These results suggest that all three attributes are important and are jointly considered by participants when forming their evaluations.

Participants reported generally positive agreement that influencers affected their travel decisions, as reflected in an overall mean score of 3.88 (SD = 1.12). The item "Decide to travel based on influencer reviews" received a mean score of 3.92, highlighting the tangible impact of influencer-generated content on the travel choices of Thai Generation Z tourists. These findings underscore the influential role of social media in shaping travel behavior within this demographic.

While the high factor loadings reported in Table 2 indicate robust item reliability and internal consistency, it is important to note that exploratory factor analysis (EFA) serves primarily as an initial validation step. To determine the relative importance and predictive power of each dimension, CFA was subsequently conducted, which rigorously tests the theoretical structure and interrelationships among constructs. The results of the CFA are presented in the later section of the findings.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing Results

This section presents the results of hypothesis testing regarding the influence of content characteristics on travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists. Analytical methods were employed namely regression analysis and Pearson correlations.

Hypothesis 1: Influence of influencer content characteristics on travel decisions

Based on the overall means and standard deviations shown in Table 2, respondents demonstrated high levels of agreement with the three content characteristics (M = 3.95, SD = 1.09). Among these, content quality received the highest mean score (M = 4.01, SD = 1.16), indicating that participants perceived clear and understandable content as essential for enhancing credibility and supporting travel-related decisions. Content appeal was rated similarly (M = 3.93, SD = 1.11), particularly in relation to content that matched personal interests and featured visually engaging formats. Likewise, content usefulness (M = 3.93, SD = 1.12) was valued for its practical relevance, with participants emphasizing the importance of informative reviews and actionable recommendations. These strong levels of agreement indicate the influence of content characteristics on travel decisions.

Multiple regression was used to confirm the above results as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Model summary and ANOVA for regression predicting travel decisions by content characteristics

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error	F	df	p-value
Content Characteristics	0.837	0.700	0.698	0.615	296.632	(3, 381)	<0.001

Note: Significant at the 0.05 level

Regarding the multiple regression model in Table 3, this analysis indicates that 70% of the variance in travel decisions can be explained by the combined effects of the three content characteristics.

This multiple regression analysis in Table 3 was statistically significant (F (3, 381) = 296.632, $p < .001$), with a high explanatory power (R² = 0.700). These results confirm that the characteristics of influencer content on social media significantly influence the travel decisions of Thai Generation Z tourists.

In addition, hypotheses H1.1, H1.2, and H1.3 were tested for their relationships among the sub-dimensions using Pearson's correlation analysis with respect to travel decisions. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Pearson correlation between content characteristics and travel decisions

	Content Quality	Content Appeal	Content Usefulness	Travel Decisions
Content Quality	1.000	.878**	.893**	.774**
Content Appeal		1.000	.886**	.787**
Content Usefulness			1.000	.828**
Travel Decision				1.000

Note: ** indicates statistically significant $p < 0.01$

The results of Pearson's correlation analysis confirm that all relationships were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Among them, content usefulness had the strongest correlation with travel decisions (r = .828), followed by content appeal (r = .787) and content quality (r = .774).

The regression coefficients were used to confirm the influence of variables on travel decisions. The results, summarized in Table 5, effectively present the relative strength of influencer content characteristics, aiding in the interpretation and comparison of path effects.

Table 5 Regression coefficients – predictor influence on travel decisions

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-statistic	Sig.
(Constant)	0.507	0.118		4.280	0.000*
Content Quality	0.078	0.066	0.081	1.188	0.236
Content Appeal	0.213	0.067	0.212	3.187	0.002*
Content Usefulness	0.567	0.071	0.568	8.033	0.000*

Note: * indicates statistically significant *p* < 0.05

Table 5 confirms content usefulness as the strongest predictor (β = 0.568, p < .001), followed by content appeal (β = 0.212, p = .002). Practical information—reviews, tips, and recommendations—proves crucial for Generation Z travel intentions. Content quality, while perceived positively, showed no significant influence (β = 0.081, p = .236), suggesting clarity and presentation alone are insufficient without meaningful content.

This aligns with recent research emphasizing utility-focused content as key to digital tourism decisions (Ayad & Hasanein, 2024; Ranga et al., 2023).

Hypothesis 1 therefore receives strong support: practical and engaging content significantly influences Thai Generation Z travel decisions, with usefulness demonstrating the greatest predictive power over aesthetic or structural presentation.

Hypothesis 2: Influence of influencer attributes on travel decisions

The second hypothesis proposes that the personal attributes of social media travel influencers, specifically credibility, expertise, and fame, significantly influence the travel decisions of Thai Generation Z tourists.

The descriptive results showed that participants rated influencer attributes positively. The highest agreement was found for influencer credibility (M = 3.87, SD = 1.03), followed closely by expertise (M = 3.83, SD = 1.09) and fame (M = 3.92, SD = 1.09). These ratings suggest that credibility, experience, and popularity are all perceived as relevant attributes when considering travel content shared on social media platforms.

A multiple linear regression analysis also yielded a high explanatory power, with an R value of 0.899 and R^2 = 0.808, indicating that approximately 80.8% of the variance in travel decision could be explained by the three influencer attributes (Table 6). The model was statistically significant (F (3, 381) = 534.319, p < .001). Hence, it can be concluded that Hypothesis 2 is supported, as influencer attributes significantly influence travel decisions.

Table 6 Model summary and ANOVA for regression predicting travel decision by influencer attributes

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error	F	df	p-value
Influencer Attributes	0.899	0.808	0.806	0.492	534.319	(3, 381)	< 0.001

Note: Significant at the 0.05 level

Regarding the sub-dimensions listed as H2.1, H2.2, and H2.3, they were assessed using both Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses (Table 7).

Table 7 Pearson correlation matrix – influencer attributes and travel decisions

	Influencer Credibility	Influencer Expertise	Influencer Fame	Travel Decision
Influencer credibility	1.000	.878**	.872**	.860**
Influencer Expertise		1.000	.860**	.878**
Influencer Fame			1.000	.821**
Travel Decisions	.860**	.878**	.821**	1.000

Note: ** indicates statistically significant *p* < .01

As shown in Table 7, all three influencer attributes were significantly and positively correlated with travel decisions ($p < .01$). The strongest correlation was observed between influencer expertise and travel decisions (r = .878), followed by credibility (r = .860), and fame (r = .821). These findings suggest that perceived expertise of influencers and their credibility are more influential than mere popularity in shaping Generation Z's travel intentions.

Table 8 Regression coefficients – influencer attributes and travel decisions

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-statistic	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	0.160	0.097		1.644	0.101
Influencer credibility	0.353	0.056	0.336	6.280	0.000*
Influencer Expertise	0.508	0.053	0.494	9.637	0.000*
Influencer Fame	0.106	0.051	0.103	2.070	0.039*

Note: * indicates statistically significant $p < 0.05$

Table 8 presents the standardized regression coefficients, both the unstandardized coefficient (B) and the standardized coefficient (β), with t-statistic and p-value. All three attributes had significant effects on travel decisions. Influencer expertise had the strongest standardized effect (B = 0.508, β = 0.494, $p < .001$), followed by credibility (B = 0.353, β = 0.336, $p < .001$), and fame (B = 0.106, β = 0.103, $p = .039$). This suggests that while visibility and recognition matter, Thai Generation Z tourists are more strongly influenced by influencers' expertise and credibility.

In summary, the findings strongly support hypothesis 2: influencer attributes significantly influence travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists. Among the three attributes, influencer expertise demonstrated the greatest predictive power, followed by credibility and fame, respectively.

4.4 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

This section presents the measurement model analysis using CFA to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs: influencer content characteristics and influencer attributes. The analysis evaluates item correlations, evaluating the significance of the path coefficients (β), Standardized β, t-values, and standard errors to test the hypotheses, sampling adequacy, and model fit. Then, SEM was employed to test the hypothesized relationships between content characteristics, influencer attributes, and travel decisions.

Table 9 Hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Path/Relationship	Coefficient (B)	Standardized Beta	t-statistic	p-value	95% Confidence Interval	Supported?
H1.1	Content Quality → Travel Decision	0.744	0.774	23.946	0.000	[0.683, 0.805]	Yes
H1.2	Content Appeal → Travel Decision	0.789	0.787	24.931	0.000	[0.727, 0.852]	Yes
H1.3	Content Usefulness → Travel Decision	0.827	0.828	28.942	0.000	[0.771, 0.883]	Yes
H2.1	Influencer Credibility → Travel Decision	0.905	0.860	33.011	0.000	[0.851, 0.958]	Yes
H2.2	Influencer Expertise → Travel Decision	0.902	0.878	35.947	0.000	[0.852, 0.951]	Yes
H2.3	Influencer Fame → Travel Decision	0.840	0.821	28.155	0.000	[0.781, 0.898]	Yes

Table 9 outlines the supported hypotheses by presenting standardized regression coefficients (β), confirming the strength and significance of influencer content characteristics and credibility on travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists. Among content characteristics, content usefulness shows the strongest effect (β = 0.828, $p < 0.001$), indicating that when influencer content is perceived as practical and relevant, it significantly enhances Generation Z tourists' intention to travel. Content appeal also demonstrates a high positive influence (β = 0.787, $p < 0.001$), reflecting the power of emotionally engaging or visually attractive content. Content quality follows closely (β = 0.774, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that well-structured and credible information is also critical in shaping travel behavior.

For influencer attributes, influencer expertise exhibits the highest effect (β = 0.878, p < 0.001), emphasizing the crucial role of influencers' knowledge and perceived authority. Influencer credibility also significantly influences travel decisions (β = 0.860, p < 0.001), highlighting the importance of trust and authenticity. Interestingly, even influencer fame presents a strong positive impact (β = 0.821, p < 0.001), indicating that social recognition and popularity still play a role in shaping the travel intentions of Generation Z, contrary to previous assumptions.

Overall, the data show that all six hypothesized relationships are statistically significant, with very high standardized β values, demonstrating that both the substance of influencer content and the personal attributes of influencers critically shape travel decisions among Thai Generation Z.

The construct validity of influencer content characteristics on social media was initially explored using Pearson correlation analysis to assess inter-item relationships (ensuring coefficients > 0.3), followed by CFA to test to ensure that observed variables were sufficiently correlated to justify factor analysis. The measurement model's reliability and validity are shown in Tables 10-11.

Table 10 The Pearson correlation coefficients among the observed variables measuring the characteristics of influencer content on social media

	CA2	CA1	CU3	CU2	CU1	CQ2	CQ1
CA2	1.000						
CA1	.795	1.000					
CU3	.749	.779	1.000				
CU2	.797	.804	.793	1.000			
CU1	.795	.785	.822	.817	1.000		
CQ2	.818	.799	.762	.814	.804	1.000	
CQ1	.790	.768	.767	.802	.828	.821	1.000
Bartlett's test = 3013.766 Sig = .000, KMO = .953, MSA Between .942 to .958							

Note: Significant at the 0.05 level

Pearson correlation coefficients among the observed variables measuring influencer content characteristics demonstrated strong and significant relationships, as shown in Table 10. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.953, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (p < .001), confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis. These results indicate that the items are sufficiently interrelated, and the sample is adequate for CFA.

Table 11 Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of influencer content characteristics on social media

Observed variables	Latent Construct (Factors)									r^2
	Content Quality			Content Appeal			Content Usefulness			
	β	b	S.E.	β	b	S.E.	β	b	S.E.	
CQ1	1.000*	1.000*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.000
CQ2	.979*	.963*	.029	-	-	-	-	-	-	.959
CA1	-	-	-	1.000*	1.000*	-	-	-	-	1.000
CA2	-	-	-	.794*	.747*	.033	-	-	-	.630
CU1	-	-	-	-	-	-	.925*	1.000*	-	.856
CU2	-	-	-	-	-	-	.905*	.913*	.035	.818
CU3	-	-	-	-	-	-	.877*	.929*	.036	.769

Latent Constructs (Factors)	Content			R^2
	β	b	S.E.	
Content Quality	.902*	.989*	.039	.814
Content Appeal	.904*	.977*	.041	.818
Content Usefulness	.983*	1.000*	-	.966
x^2 = .012, df = 1, x^2/df = .012, p = .914, RMSEA = .000, RMR = .000, GFI = 1.000, AGFI = 1.000, CFI = 1.000				

Note. β = standardized factor loading; b = unstandardized loading; S.E. = standard error. r^2 denotes the squared multiple correlation (SMC) for each observed variable (indicator). R^2 denotes the explained variance for each first-order construct in the second-order model.
*p < .05

CFA results for influencer content characteristics (Table 11) confirmed a three-factor structure: Content Quality, Content Appeal, and Content Usefulness. All standardized factor loadings exceeded recommended thresholds ($\beta > .79$), supporting convergent validity. Model fit indices indicated an excellent fit ($\chi^2/df = .012$, RMSEA = .000, CFI = 1.000, GFI = 1.000), validating the measurement model. Among the three dimensions, Content Usefulness exhibited the highest standardized loading ($\beta = .983$), highlighting its central role in the construct. This result confirms that influencer content characteristics comprise three components: Content Quality (measured by CQ1, CQ2), Content Appeal (CA1, CA2), and Content Usefulness (CU1, CU2, CU3), as illustrated in Figure 2. Considering the factor loadings (standardized path coefficients) of the three latent variables, it was found that Content Usefulness, a dimension of influencer content characteristics on social media, was the most significant. This was followed by Content Appeal, and then Content Quality, with standardized coefficients of .983, .904, and .902, respectively.

After confirming the suitability of the data through KMO and Bartlett's test, CFA was applied to validate the measurement model of influencer credibility.

The CFA of influencer attributes involved Pearson correlation analysis and model fit evaluation, as shown in Tables 12-13.

Table 12 The Pearson correlation coefficients among the observed variables of influencer attributes

	FM2	FM1	EP3	EP2	EP1	CD3	CD2	CD1
FM2	1.000							
FM1	.810	1.000						
EP3	.750	.705	1.000					
EP2	.750	.739	.766	1.000				
EP1	.758	.796	.758	.795	1.000			
CD3	.709	.711	.723	.622	.615	1.000		
CD2	.781	.762	.736	.772	.764	.651	1.000	
CD1	.739	.764	.738	.774	.766	.653	.810	1.000
Bartlett's test = 3098.336 Sig = .000, KMO = .938, MSA Between .924 to .957								

Note: Significant at the 0.05 level

Table 13 Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of influencer attributes

Observed Variables	Latent Constructs (Factors)									r^2
	Influencer Credibility			Influencer Expertise			Influencer Fame			
	β	b	S.E.	β	b	S.E.	β	b	S.E.	
CD1	.902*	1.000*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.813
CD2	.899*	.944*	.035	-	-	-	-	-	-	.808
CD3	.724	.892*	.051	-	-	-	-	-	-	.524
EP1	-	-	-	.887*	.988*	.043	-	-	-	.787
EP2	-	-	-	.896*	.930*	.039	-	-	-	.802
EP3	-	-	-	.855*	1.000*	-	-	-	-	.730
FM1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.000*	1.000*	-	1.000
FM2							.808*	.774*	.032	.652

Latent Constructs (Factors)	Influencer Attributes			R^2
	β	b	S.E.	
Influencer credibility	.992*	1.000*	-	.984
Influencer expertise	.966*	.987*	.046	.933
Influencer fame	.854*	.961*	.042	.730
$x^2 = 13.111$, $df = 9$, $x^2/df = 1.457$, p = .158, RMSEA = .034, RMR = .013, GFI = .992, AGFI = .967, CFI = .999				

Note. β = standardized factor loading; b = unstandardized loading; S.E. = standard error. r^2 denotes the squared multiple correlation (SMC) for each observed variable (indicator). R^2 denotes the explained variance for each first-order construct in the second-order model.
*p < .05

For influencer attributes, Table 12 shows strong and significant inter-item correlations. The overall KMO value was 0.938, with individual measures above 0.92, and Bartlett's test was significant ($p < .001$). These results confirm the appropriateness of the data for CFA and support the adequacy of sample and item relationships.

CFA for influencer attributes (Table 13) validated a three-factor model comprising Credibility, Expertise, and Fame. All standardized factor loadings were above .72, indicating strong associations with their respective latent constructs. The model demonstrated good fit (χ^2/df = 1.457, RMSEA = .034, CFI = .999, GFI = .992). Among these, Credibility had the highest standardized loading ($\beta = .992$), followed by Expertise ($\beta = .966$) and Fame ($\beta = .854$), suggesting that creditbility is the most salient attribute for Thai Generation Z tourists. The results confirm that influencer attributes consist of three dimensions: Credibility (measured by CD1, CD2, CD3), Expertise (EP1, EP2, EP3), and Fame (FM1, FM2).

The standardized factor loadings from the CFA indicate that each observed variable is a strong indicator of its respective influencer attribute. Among the three dimensions, credibility demonstrated the highest loading ($\beta = .992$), followed by expertise ($\beta = .966$), and fame ($\beta = .854$). These results confirm that the measurement items reliably represent their intended constructs, with all loading exceeding recommended thresholds for convergent validity.

The combined measurement model demonstrated satisfactory fit and construct validity for both influencer content characteristics and attributes. Table 14 presents the correlation coefficients among the main constructs: influencer content characteristics, influencer attributes, and travel decision. These validated measurement models provide a solid basis for subsequent SEM test hypothesized relationships.

Table 14 Correlation matrix among influencer content characteristics, influencer attributes, and travel decisions, with Bartlett's test of sphericity and KMO sampling adequacy statistics for Thai Generation Z tourists
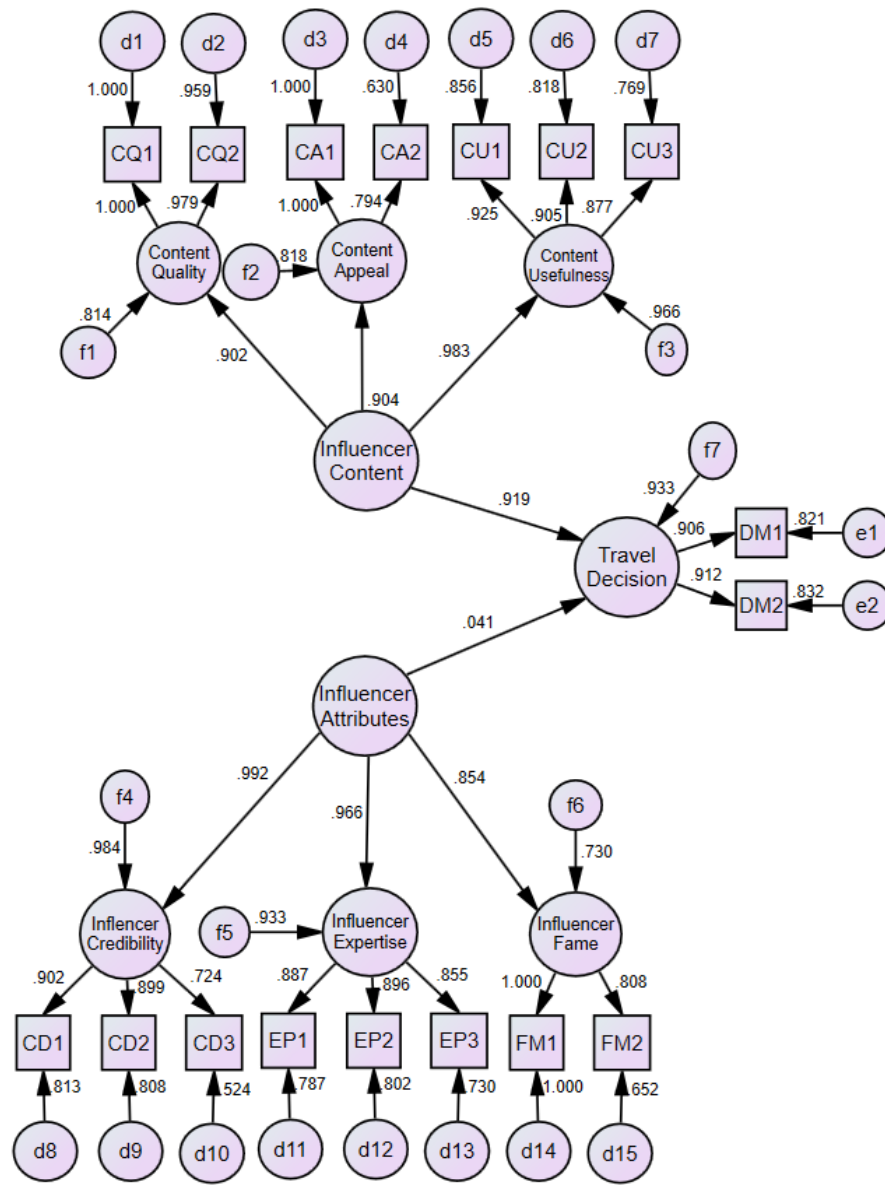
Variable	Influencer Content Characteristics	Influencer Attributes	Travel Decision
Influencer content	1.000		
Influencer attributes	.934	1.000	
Travel Decision	.900	.966	1.000
Bartlett's test = 1220.144 Sig = .000, KMO = .751, MSA Between .687 to .707			

Note: Significant at the 0.05 level

Table 14 shows that all correlations are strong and statistically significant, with the highest observed between influencer attributes and travel decision (r = 0.966), followed by influencer content characteristics and travel decision (r = 0.900), and influencer content characteristics and attributes (r = 0.934). Bartlett's test of sphericity (χ^2 = 1220.144, $p < .001$) and the KMO value (0.751) confirm the adequacy of the data for CFA.

SEM was employed to test the hypothesized relationships among influencer content characteristics, influencer attributes, and travel decision, as depicted in Figure 2. This analysis provides a comprehensive assessment of the direct effects of both content-driven and source-driven factors on travel choices among Thai Generation Z tourists.

While both content and attribute constructs significantly influenced travel decisions, content characteristics ($\beta = 0.919$, $p < 0.05$) had a much stronger effect than influencer attributes ($\beta = 0.041$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that Thai Generation Z tourists prioritize content value over source credibility in their decisions.

Chi-square (df) = 124.499 (79); P value = .001; CMIN/df = 1.576
;AGFI = .933; GFI = .965; CFI = .994; IFI= .994; TLI = .990
;RMSEA = .039; RMR = .026

Figure 2 SEM analysis based on the conceptual framework

4.5 Moderating Role of Gender

Previous research in tourism and digital marketing has sometimes suggested that gender may influence how individuals process information and respond to online content, including influencer marketing. Gender differences in decision-making, risk perception, and media consumption have been noted in various contexts, which justifies examining whether these differences extend to the influence of social media influencers on travel decisions among Generation Z tourists. For example, some studies have found that males and females may prioritize different aspects of influencer content characteristics or may be differently persuaded by certain influencer attributes, such as credibility or fame.

To test the moderating effect of gender, hierarchical multiple regression was conducted by introducing interaction terms between gender and both influencer content characteristics and influencer attributes. The results in Table 15 indicated that the inclusion of these interaction terms did not significantly increase the explained variance in travel decisions. Specifically, the change in R^2 was minimal and not statistically significant for both models (content × gender: $\Delta R^2 = .001$, $p = .280$; attributes × gender: $\Delta R^2 = .000$, $p = .875$). Neither the main effect of gender nor the interaction terms reached statistical significance.

Table 15 Testing gender as a moderator of the relationship between influencer characteristics and travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists (N = 385)

Moderation Test	Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Sig. ΔR^2
Content × Gender	Model 1	.829	.687	.685	–
	Model 2	.829	.688	.685	.280
Influencer × Gender	Model 1	.898	.807	.806	–
	Model 2	.899	.807	.805	.875

In addition, the interaction term (Content × Gender) led to only a marginal increase in R^2 from .687 to .688, with a non-significant p-value for the interaction term ($p = .280$) and the main effect of gender was not significant ($p = .222$). These results indicate that neither gender nor the interaction between content and gender significantly predicts travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists.

Similarly, when testing for moderation between influencer attributes and travel decisions, the inclusion of the Influencer × Gender interaction term resulted in no change in explanatory power (R^2 remained at .807), and the interaction was not significant ($p = .875$).

These findings suggest that, within this sample of Thai Generation Z tourists, gender does not significantly moderate the relationships between influencer content characteristics/attributes and travel decisions. In practical terms, this means that both male and female Generation Z tourists respond similarly to influencer content characteristics and attributes when making travel decisions. This result may reflect the increasing convergence of digital behaviors and preferences among young people in Thailand, regardless of gender, as well as the highly individualized and personalized nature of social media engagement in this demographic.

For tourism marketers and practitioners, the lack of gender moderation implies that influencer marketing strategies can be developed with a gender-neutral approach for Thai Generation Z audiences. Campaigns do not necessarily need to differentiate messaging or content style based on gender, potentially simplifying segmentation and creative development.

5. Discussion

Hypothesis 1: The characteristics of influencer content characteristics on social media significantly affect the travel decisions of Thai Generation Z tourists.

5.1 Content Quality

Both the multiple regression and SEM analyses consistently demonstrate that content quality exerts the weakest influence on travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists (B = .078, β = .081, p = .236). Defined by technical features such as visual clarity, editing, and production value, content quality showed only a marginal effect and failed to reach statistical significance. While it was initially hypothesized to play a pivotal role, the results offer only weak empirical support for its impact. This suggests that Generation Z participants perceive high production standards as a basic expectation, something universally accessible rather than a persuasive differentiator. In the context of abundant user-generated content and low-cost editing tools, technical excellence appears insufficient to shape travel behavior unless paired with authenticity or practical value. This finding aligns with findings by Prasanna & Priyanka (2024), who noted that Generation Z values authenticity over aesthetic perfection. Similarly, Baghel & Baghel (2023) and Chiu & Ho (2023) found that visual or technical quality alone does not significantly impact travel decisions unless the content is perceived as genuine and relevant.

5.2 Content Appeal

The findings from both multiple regression analysis and SEM consistently demonstrate that content appeal exerts a significant and positive influence on travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists (B = .213, β = .212, *p* = .002). This result robustly supports hypothesis 1.2, highlighting the central role of engaging and emotionally resonant content in shaping Generation Z's travel choices. SEM results further reinforce this conclusion, as content appeal emerged as a key dimension with strong measurement validity and a substantial standardized loading within the overall influencer content characteristics construct.

Generation Z's content consumption patterns are characterized by rapid scrolling and a preference for material that immediately captures their attention. For this demographic, content appeal is not just about visual aesthetics but also about the emotional and narrative qualities that make content feel relevant and inspiring. Storytelling, emotional imagery, and creative presentation are particularly effective in fostering engagement, as they allow Generation Z audiences to see themselves reflected in the content and to connect with the influencer's experiences on a personal level. Prior research supports this, showing that visual storytelling and emotional cues significantly enhance persuasion and decision-making among young audiences.

The SEM analysis underscores that, even when accounting for other content characteristics such as quality and usefulness, content appeal remains a distinct and influential factor. Its effect is rooted in the ability to spark inspiration and motivate active information seeking, ultimately leading to travel decisions. For Thai Generation Z, the resonance of the message, how it aligns with their identity, aspirations, and emotions, is often more important than the mere informational value of the content. Research by Xiong et al. (2022) supports this, emphasizing the power of visual storytelling and emotional cues in attracting and persuading Generation Z. Utari et al. (2025) also found that engaging visuals increase decision responses compared to plain text. Li & Liu (2020) further emphasized the role of influencer personality and sincerity in making content feel personalized and impactful.

These findings suggest that influencers and marketers should prioritize the creation of content that is emotionally engaging, visually dynamic, and grounded in authentic experiences. The effectiveness of influencer content characteristics for Generation Z travelers depends on its capacity to move beyond generic recommendations and instead offer distinctive, memorable, and emotionally charged narratives. In summary, content appeal is a powerful driver of travel decisions for Thai Generation Z, reinforcing the need for influencer strategies that emphasize creativity, emotional connection, and authentic storytelling.

5.3 Content Usefulness

Content usefulness emerges as the most influential factor (B = .567, β = .568, p < .001). This result provides robust support for Hypothesis 1.3, highlighting the critical importance of actionable and practical information, such as directions, cost breakdowns, travel tips, and first-hand experiences, in shaping Generation Z's travel choices.

Generation Z actively seeks content that helps them minimize uncertainty and perceived risks associated with travel. This aligns with Bauer (1967) Perceived Risk Theory, which suggests that consumers are motivated to gather information to reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes when making decisions. Informative and experience-based content not only builds confidence but also empowers Generation Z travelers to move from mere inspiration to concrete planning and action. Prior research by Jung & Hwang (2023) and Ghaly (2023) confirms that when influencers provide detailed, relevant, and transparent information, it significantly affects behavioral intentions among youth. Wu et al. (2025) also note that informative comparisons and safety tips enhance perceived content value, ultimately driving decision-making behavior.

For influencers and marketers, these findings underscore the necessity of producing content that is informative, applicable, and straightforward. Overly promotional or exaggerated messages are less effective with this demographic. Instead, transparency, practical guidance, and real-world insights foster trust and motivate Generation Z audiences to move beyond passive interest and actively engage in travel planning and decisions.

In summary, for Thai Generation Z, the value of influencer content characteristics lies in its ability to transform inspiration into actionable steps, reduce uncertainty, and support confident travel choices through clear, practical, and trustworthy information.

Hypothesis 2: The characteristics of travel influencers on social media influence the travel decisions of Thai Generation Z tourists.

5.4 Credibility

The analysis demonstrates that credibility exerts a significant and positive effect on travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists (B = .353, β = .336, $p < .001$), providing robust support for hypothesis 2.1. This finding is consistent with the Source Credibility Theory, which asserts that trust enhances the persuasiveness of messages (Koch, 2024). In the context of overwhelming digital advertising and information overload, Generation Z places a premium on transparency and sincerity from influencers.

Empirical evidence from this study shows that Generation Z's judgments of influencer credibility are not determined by follower counts or superficial popularity. Instead, trust is built through authentic behavior, such as openly sharing both positive and negative experiences, and disclosing sponsorships or partnerships. These practices are crucial for maintaining credibility and fostering genuine connections with the audience.

The results underscore that perceived credibility is a key driver of travel decisions for this demographic. Influencers who communicate honestly, share real experiences, and maintain consistency between their online persona and actual practices are more likely to influence Generation Z's travel choices. Building trust requires more than polished branding or curated images; it demands ongoing authenticity and transparency (Ghaly, 2023; Putri et al., 2024)

For practitioners, this means that influencer marketing strategies targeting Thai Generation Z should prioritize credibility as the foundation of persuasive influence. Influencers should engage in honest, experience-based communication, avoid exaggeration, and ensure that their content aligns with their real-life values and actions. In this environment, credibility is not just an asset; it is essential for meaningful influence and long-term audience engagement.

5.5 Expertise and Experience

The analysis reveals that expertise and experience exert the strongest influence among Influencer Attributes on the travel decisions of Thai Generation Z tourists (B = .508, β = .494, $p < .001$), providing robust support for hypothesis 2.2. This finding underscores the high value Generation Z places on practical insights and authentic, first-hand knowledge when evaluating influencer content characteristics (Ghaly, 2023).

Thai Generation Z travelers are not simply looking for inspiration or aspirational imagery; they actively seek reliable information from influencers who demonstrate genuine familiarity with the destinations they promote. Influencers who share detailed travel knowledge, insider tips, and personal experiences are perceived as more credible and trustworthy, which enhances their persuasive power. This aligns with recent research indicating that content-expertise congruence, where influencers' advice is clearly grounded in their own experience, significantly boosts perceived competence and credibility among young audiences.

Statistical evidence from this study confirms that influencers who integrate their personal travel experiences with informative, practical communication are best positioned to motivate Generation Z audiences. Unlike generic or unverified advice, authentic, experience-based recommendations foster trust and engagement, ultimately translating into concrete travel behavior (Leite et al., 2024).

In summary, for Thai Generation Z, the expertise and real-world experience of influencers are decisive factors in shaping travel decisions. Influencers aiming to impact this demographic should prioritize sharing authentic, detailed, and actionable insights drawn from their own journeys, as this approach is most effective in driving both engagement and actual travel choices.

5.6 Fame and Popularity

The analysis reveals that influencer fame exerts a statistically significant but comparatively modest effect on travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists (B = .106, β = .103, $p = .039$), thereby supporting hypothesis 2.3. Fame, often operationalized through metrics like follower count and public recognition, serves primarily as a mechanism for attracting initial attention and providing social proof. However, the data indicate that fame alone does not guarantee persuasion or sustained influence unless it is accompanied by other critical attributes, such as expertise and credibility.

This finding aligns with previous research, which suggests that while fame can capture consumer interest and prompt content engagement, it is insufficient to generate lasting persuasion or trust in the absence of perceived competence and authenticity (Guo et al., 2024). Influencer marketing strategies, therefore, should not rely exclusively on the visibility or popularity of the influencer. Instead, they must also foster and communicate the

influencer's expertise, credibility, and authenticity to maintain meaningful engagement and effectively drive travel decisions.

Further supporting this perspective, studies have demonstrated that although fame may serve as an entry point for audience attention, the decision to act, such as choosing a travel destination, is ultimately shaped by deeper factors (Kato, 2023). These include the influencer's ability to provide actionable value, share authentic experiences, and establish trust with their audience. In the context of Thai Generation Z, expertise and credibility consistently outperformed fame in influencing travel choices, underscoring the importance of substance over superficial popularity.

In summary, while reputation and social visibility can open the door to audience engagement, it is the combination of authenticity, experiential depth, and credibility that sustains influence and drives actual behavioral outcomes. Fame may attract followers, but it is trust and real-world experience that convert that attention into meaningful travel decisions.

While our findings support the significant influence of content characteristics and influencer attributes on travel decisions, alternative explanations and critical perspectives deserve consideration. First, platform-specific differences may substantially moderate these relationships. TikTok's algorithm-driven, short-form content differs fundamentally from Instagram's curated visual feeds or YouTube's long-form, detailed travel vlogs. The way Generation Z processes and responds to influencer content may vary significantly across these platforms, suggesting that our findings may not generalize uniformly across all social media environments.

Second, critical perspectives on influencer marketing raise important questions about consumer agency and potential manipulation. The strong influence of content usefulness and influencer expertise found in this study could reflect a concerning trend toward the algorithmic commodification of travel experiences, where authentic exploration gives way to commercially-driven recommendations. This raises ethical questions about whether influencer marketing enhances genuine cultural exchange or merely promotes superficial consumption patterns.

Third, our focus on individual-level factors may overlook broader structural influences such as economic constraints, visa requirements, and geopolitical factors that significantly shape Generation Z travel decisions but are beyond the scope of influencer content. Future research should examine how influencer effects interact with these macro-level determinants.

6. Conclusion

This study provides comprehensive empirical evidence that both influencer content characteristics and source attributes significantly shape travel decisions among Thai Generation Z tourists. By integrating descriptive analysis, hypothesis testing, and structural equation modeling (SEM), the findings offer detailed insights into the mechanisms of digital influence in tourism.

Content Usefulness emerged as the most powerful and consistent predictor of travel decisions. Both regression analysis (B = .567, β = .568, $p < .001$) and SEM results confirmed that actionable, practical information, such as tips, reviews, and firsthand experiences, directly drives Generation Z's travel choices. This highlights the value Generation Z places on content that reduces uncertainty and enables confident planning.

Content Appeal also had a significant positive effect (B = .213, β = .212, $p = .002$), with SEM reinforcing its importance. Engaging storytelling, emotional imagery, and creative presentation were found to strongly resonate with Generation Z, supporting the need for content that captures attention and inspires action.

Content Quality, although perceived positively, exerts only a weak influence on travel decisions (B = .078, β = .081, $p = .236$) in either regression or SEM models. High production value is regarded as a baseline expectation, but it is authenticity and relevance that truly matter to this demographic.

Among influencer attributes, expertise and experience had the strongest influence (B = .508, β = .494, $p < .001$), followed by credibility (B = .353, β = .336, $p < .001$), and then fame (B = .106, β = .103, $p = .039$). SEM results confirmed that credibility and expertise are much more influential than fame or popularity, underscoring Generation Z's preference for reliable, authentic, and experience-based recommendations over mere social recognition. The SEM model demonstrated that the overall effect of influencer content characteristics (β = .919, $p < .05$) on travel decisions was substantially stronger than that of influencer attributes (β = .041, $p < .05$), providing robust support for the primacy of content substance and presentation in shaping travel behavior.

Additionally, the analysis found that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between influencer content characteristics or attributes and travel decisions. Both male and female Generation Z tourists

responded similarly to influencer content characteristics and attributes, suggesting that influencer marketing strategies in the Thai Generation Z context can be designed with a gender-neutral approach.

For tourism marketers and influencers, these results highlight the need to prioritize informative, authentic, and emotionally engaging content over technical perfection or superficial popularity. Effective influencers strategies for Generation Z should focus on delivering practical value, building trust through transparent communication, and sharing genuine, experience-based insights. Fame may attract initial attention, but it is credibility and real-world expertise that sustain influence and drive meaningful travel decisions.

Overall, these findings underscore the evolving nature of digital influence in tourism. Effective influencer strategies for Generation Z travelers must prioritize substance, sincerity, and experiential knowledge, rather than relying solely on technical quality or celebrity status.

7. Practical Implications and Recommendations

This study's findings suggest that Thai Generation Z tourists prioritize practical, authentic content over polished presentation when making travel decisions. Tourism marketing organizations should therefore allocate resources toward influencers who demonstrate genuine destination expertise and provide actionable information rather than focusing solely on follower counts or aesthetic appeal. Effective partnerships should emphasize detailed itineraries, honest reviews, and practical guidance that combines useful information with emotionally engaging storytelling.

Travel influencers can enhance their effectiveness by developing content that serves as genuine educational resources, including budget breakdowns, cultural etiquette, and safety considerations. Building credibility requires consistent transparency about both positive and negative experiences, clear disclosure of commercial relationships, and avoiding exaggerated portrayals of destinations or services. The emphasis should be on establishing expertise-based authority rather than relying primarily on social media metrics.

Tourism businesses and service providers should adopt gender-neutral marketing strategies, as this research found no significant differences between male and female responses to influencer content. Long-term partnerships with credible influencers are more valuable than one-off promotional campaigns, as expertise and credibility develop over time. All stakeholder collaborations should prioritize information transparency and genuine value creation for potential travelers rather than superficial promotional messaging.

These recommendations reflect the study's core finding that substance trumps style in influencing Thai Generation Z travel decisions, suggesting a shift toward more authentic, informative, and education-focused influencer marketing approaches in the tourism industry.

8. Limitations

This study's findings should be interpreted in light of several methodological and conceptual limitations.

- First, the research focused exclusively on Thai Generation Z tourists using convenience and purposive sampling methods, which may limit generalizability both to other cultural contexts and to the broader Thai Generation Z population. The predominance of university-educated, urban participants in our sample may not represent rural or less-educated segments of this demographic.
- Second, our cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time, preventing conclusions about causality or the evolution of digital behaviors over time. Longitudinal research would better capture the dynamic nature of social media influence and changing platform preferences among Generation Z users.
- Third, the study does not differentiate between social media platforms or content formats, which may influence engagement and decision-making in distinct ways. Instagram stories, TikTok videos, and YouTube vlogs may generate different types of influence despite involving the same influencers and content themes.

9. Acknowledgments

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