

# Entrepreneurial Marketing Strategies in the Tourism Industry

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine how entrepreneurial digital marketing through YouTube travel influencers influences visit intention among Generation Z and Millennial tourists in Indonesia, with trust acting as an underlying psychological mechanism. The study addressed the growing role of influencers as digital entrepreneurs who create value and shape tourism-related decision-making. A quantitative research method was employed using survey data collected from 138 Generation Z and Millennial respondents in Indonesia who had prior travel experience and exposure to YouTube travel influencer content. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the relationships among homophily, perceived expertise, trust, and visit intention. The results indicated that homophily and perceived expertise significantly influence trust toward YouTube travel influencers. Homophily emerged as the strongest direct determinant of visit intention, while trust did not exert a significant direct effect. These results demonstrate that social similarity and emotional identification function as key entrepreneurial mechanisms in influencer-based tourism marketing, rather than purely rational or informational factors. The study characterizes YouTube travel influencers as digital entrepreneurs who generate marketing value through social similarity and perceived knowledge from an entrepreneurial marketing viewpoint.

**Keywords:** digital marketing, sustainable tourism, travel influencer, visit intention

## INTRODUCTION

A strong trend in the evolution of digitized Indonesia has been observed. The emergence of social media as a primary platform for product/service/tourist destination marketing is also supported by recent worldwide studies that document its role in shaping tourists' perceptions of attractiveness and travel decisions (Bonilla-Quijada, Ripoll-i-Alcon & del Olmo 2025). Influencer marketing on platforms such as YouTube positively impacts how tourists perceive and travel to destinations by producing authentic, captivating content that resonates with what consumers relate to & associate with. As has

been shown in previous research, by virtue of their credibility, authenticity & ability to inspire interactions with potential tourists, influencer-generated content is positively associated with tourist intent to travel to & selected destinations, thereby establishing influencer marketing as a superior means of increasing tourism interest and visitation intent versus traditional forms of advertisement (Luo, Wang & Liu 2025).

The credibility of influencer communication influences a person's awareness of travel and motivates them to make travel-related decisions in tourism (Babu et al., 2025). As consumer cynicism towards marketing strategies and businesses

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rises, it's important to build your audience's trust to achieve persuasion (Babu et al., 2025). In Indonesia, there are 212 million internet users, equating to a 74.6% penetration rate. There are 143 million social media users in Indonesia, representing 50.2% of the population, which affects how modern tourists make travel choices across multiple digital touchpoints (Riyanto, 2025). YouTube (139 million users) is Indonesia's largest video-sharing site, surpassing TikTok, and is used by about 75% of the country's Internet users. Indonesians spend an average of 29 hours and 4 minutes per month on YouTube. Therefore, YouTube is an extremely valuable part of digital marketing (Slice, 2024). Multiple prior studies have shown that social media influencers build trust with travelers through virtual interactions and can substantially influence their decision-making about travel (Faisal & Dhusia, 2022).

Individuals who wield significant influence through their personal travel experiences are known as travel influencers. Travel influencers advocate for or endorse attractions to help others decide where they want to go (Saepulloh et al., 2022). To advance successful destination marketing, travel influencers play a critical strategic role by becoming part of the entrepreneurial process, integrating their influence into the marketing process, and working together to create value and wealth for each destination. By developing content and actively connecting with audiences, travel influencers reduce uncertainty in destination marketing and increase destinations' visibility for tourism businesses.

For an audience to use an influencer's travel recommendation, an influencer must be known for their expertise and knowledge of travel. If there is no correlation between an influencer's representation of a destination and the actual experience of being there, it can risk the influencer's brand image. Thus, employing

authentic, credible marketing strategies is necessary to establish trust with an audience, which directly affects their willingness to visit. As such, the credibility of YouTube influencers has a positive and significant effect on the quality of the information, the destination's image, and the young traveler's intention to visit the destination (Laurance et al., 2023). Establishing trust plays a critical role in building intent to visit by approaching influencers' recommendations with credibility and grounded in their own experiences. Despite the significant benefits of influencer marketing, caution is warranted, as it can also negatively affect followers' perceptions, particularly when recommendations fall short of their expectations or desires. In addition, Generation Z tends to prefer "untouched" travel destinations. Over 82% of Indonesians in Generation Z are interested in pursuing lesser-known travel locations. Unique experiences are the major reason for traveling to less unique locations at 52%, while wanting to travel off the beaten path is the second-highest reason at 26% (IDN Research Institute, 2024).

As much as 78% of individuals in Generation Z choose travel destinations based on their availability and accessibility. Interestingly, while almost half of those in this demographic use social media to decide where to travel, over half do not. Therefore, social media influencers play a large role in the purchasing decision process of Generation Z, but there are also multiple outside influences (IDN Research Institute, 2024). According to a report by CNBC Indonesia (2025), Indonesia saw an increase in overseas tourist arrivals, from 7.5 million in the previous year to 8.94 million, reflecting a strong return of interest in tourism and growing international travel by Indonesians.

Existing studies have generally focused on general types of user-generated content and have

not examined in depth the individual role of YouTube influencers or how each influencer's unique attributes—such as homophily and perceived expertise—can significantly impact the viewing population. A lot of research on influencer marketing focuses on Instagram (e.g., Carvalho, 2024; Cao et al., 2025) or live commerce on platforms like Taobao Live. As a result, little understanding exists of how YouTube-specific strategies operate in tourism entrepreneurship in Indonesia, creating a large gap in our understanding of the dynamics of the impact of influencers and, therefore, the function of the YouTube platform in affecting a visitor's intent (Carvalho, 2024; Yamagishi et al., 2024).

There is agreement about the importance of trust; however, further research is needed to fully explicate the complex mediational paths between homophily, or expertise, and a visitor's intention to visit based on trust (Carvalho, 2024; Cao et al., 2025). The study utilizes the S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) theory. Understanding an influencer's attributes as strategic stimuli is critical for illuminating how digital value creation is associated with influencing customer actions from an entrepreneurial marketing perspective. In this model, YouTube influencers' recommendations (Homophily and Perceived Expertise) are viewed as the Stimulus. This stimulus is evaluated by prospective tourists (Generation Z and Millennials), forming Trust as the internal attitude (Organism). This trust then triggers the Intention to Visit as the Response. Thus, this study examines how stimuli, directly and indirectly through Trust, affect travel decisions.

Recent literature reviews show that influencer attributes play a key role in influencing travel intentions (Bulumulla, Epa & Gamage, 2024). Using VOSviewer analysis of Scopus data extracted from 266 studies, an SOR-based

model from 2018 to 2025, it is apparent that consumption and marketing behaviors at tourist destinations remain highly pertinent topics (e.g., Oni, 2004). This study provides destination managers/tourist industry collaborators with a valuable and strategic resource for developing combination digital marketing initiatives with YouTube influencers. Furthermore, this study enables influencers to have a thorough understanding of the types of content that best persuade or impact their followers to travel. This study also helps raise awareness and interest in domestic/international travel for Generation Z and Millennials in Indonesia.

In the realm of tourism driven by influencer marketing, homophily is characterized by the audience's and the influencer's perceptions of their shared characteristics, such as interests, values, and lifestyle. This perception of homophily leads the audience to perceive the information conveyed by the influencer as more relevant and credible, as they are more likely to trust a source they feel connected to (Taillon et al., 2020). Homophily in social media environments fosters psychological intimacy and, thus, creates a sense of trust in the influencer's recommendations, particularly for ambiguous, knowledge-limited decisions. The perceived homophily between the influencer and the audience creates an environment that enhances the relevance of the influencer's information and increases the credibility of the location, thereby positively affecting potential tourists' travel intentions and decision-making (Wei et al., 2025). As perceived homophily increases, the audience is more likely to accept/rely on recommendations from the influencer, suggesting that the concept of homophily in influencing pre-behavioral evaluations of individuals is a significant determinant of homophily (Abdulaziz et al., 2024).

H<sub>1</sub>: Homophily has a significant positive influence on Trust.

Perceived skill (or expertise) and trust are interdependent variables that strongly influence consumer behavior in digital marketing tourism (e.g., eWOM, social media, influencer marketing). Trust is an important predictor of how many travelers will use various digital platforms (i.e., eWOM, influencer marketing, social media). This is supported by a body of literature indicating that expert influencer credibility is a strong predictor of tourists' travel intentions (Faisal & Dhusia, 2022). Therefore, influencer credibility—primarily through perceived skill and attractiveness—acts as a mediator between trust and consumers' actual behavior (Almohammed, Ahamed, & Obeidat, 2025). Additionally, having high-quality eWOM information builds consumers' trust in how the brand will perform, including through celebrity endorsements, when buying from that brand. This is especially true for Tech-Savvy Generation Z (Prihatna et al., 2024). Therefore, for stakeholders to achieve their goals of improving brand image and fostering customer engagement, they must create effective digital communication grounded in transparency and develop interactive dialogue to build trust within the tourism sector (Ahmadi & Sudahri, 2025).

H<sub>2</sub>: Perceived Expertise has a significant positive influence on Trust.

The relationship between digital marketing, consumer intent to visit tourism destinations, and trust in influencers is an important and complex topic. In Indonesia, YouTube influencers play a significant role in creating and supporting that relationship. When audiences trust an influencer, the information they share becomes more credible, helping build a tourism destination's image and ultimately increasing intent to visit. The results of those two connections are supported by additional evi-

dence that influencer credibility and social engagement are significant factors in audience trust. They ultimately increase brand recognition and purchase intent (Armielia, Triutama, & Nindita, 2023; Najar, Wani, & Rather, 2024). The creation of high-quality content with engaging visuals and informative narratives is crucial because it builds credibility for the destination by creating a positive impression, thus increasing trust and intentions to visit (Sutrisno et al., 2024; Laurance, Wijaya, & Thio, 2023).

H<sub>3</sub>: Trust has a significant positive effect on Intention to Visit.

The influence of homophily, not just on the level of trust between an influencer and their audience, but also creating relevance to the influencer's communications and therefore increasing the attractiveness of the influencer's communications, will influence the audience member's intention to visit the recommended destination. The perceived similarity between a travel influencer and their audience may also enhance the audience's adherence to the influencer's location recommendations and reaffirm their travel aspirations (Rahjasa, Prasasti, & Apriliani, 2024). The level of affective engagement between an influencer and their audience contributes to the level of commitment an audience member has to visiting the recommended destination (Purwandari et al., 2022). The ease with which an audience member can envision themselves following through on an influencer's recommendation increases when the audience member feels connected to the influencer (Shan, Chen, & Lin, 2019). There is also evidence that emotional enjoyment from influencer-generated content may further increase an audience member's likelihood of visiting a location (Yusra et al., 2023).

H<sub>4</sub>: Homophily has a significant positive effect on Intention to Visit.

Influencers who are considered credible can positively influence a traveler's intention to visit a particular destination by fostering trust in their travel recommendations and reducing uncertainty about travel. Previous study indicated that a credible influencer positively influences their audiences' travel intentions by lending credibility to destination content and inspiring followers to consider the destination for travel (Az Zahra & Isa, 2025). Credible influencers are important drivers of trust and authenticity, thereby shaping tourism interest and travel intention in the context of digital tourism (Thio & Palumian, 2025).

H<sub>5</sub>: Perceived Expertise has a significant positive effect on Intention to Visit.

The presence of trust and source credibility can amplify the relationship between homophily and visit intention (Dzakiyya & Hati, 2024). A study by Listiawardany and Astuti (2025) concluded that perceived similarity to an influencer was associated with a higher level of visit intention when the influencer was deemed authentic and trustworthy. Trust will strengthen the relationship between marketing exposure and visit intention, indicating that perceived similarity alone is insufficient to increase visit intention without an authentic source of information (Dzakiyya & Hati, 2024).

H<sub>6</sub>: Trust mediates/moderates the relationship between Homophily and Intention to Visit.

There is a significant increase in perceived knowledge, leading to intent to travel, when combined with trust, since competency enhances the provider's credibility and reduces the risk associated with travel choice. The study suggests that competency alone does not lead to intent through trust development, meaning that competency alone is insufficient unless the influencer is perceived as a reliable source (Almohammed, Ahamed, and Obeidat, 2025;

Az Zahra and Isa, 2025). According to Santos, Ferreira, & Vasconcelos (2024), trust enhances an individual's credibility; therefore, more audience members are likely to consider traveling to the promoted destination.

H<sub>7</sub>: Trust mediates/moderates the relationship between Perceived Expertise and Intention to Visit.

## METHOD

The research used a quantitative methodology to investigate how Homophily and Perceived Expertise can determine Trust and Intention to visit among social media users who have been exposed to YouTube travel influencers in Indonesia. Para-quantitative approaches allow researchers to objectively measure variables and test their relationships in a statistically valid manner. To be included as subjects of the research, participants had to fit into one of two specified groups of participants, Generation Z (aged 13-28) and Millennials (aged 29-44), who have traveled in the past 3 years (before the research began) and have consumed content about YouTube travel influencers. The study focuses on four independent (exogenous) variables (Homophily which comprised of attitude, background similarity, and value similarity) and Perceived Expertise which comprised of knowledge, experience, and competence) and two dependent (endogenous) variables (Trust as mediator and Intention to Visit).

The online structured questionnaire was the research instrument. The overall purpose of the survey was to combine an online sample with a structured observational study due to limited access to actual subjects. The survey included 35 measurement items derived from multiple established studies (Go, Kang, & Nam, 2020) or developed specifically for this area.

The items were evaluated for clarity and face validity and were operationalized on a five (5) point Likert-type scale. The minimum effective sample size was computed prior to the main survey data collection, using an appropriate statistical software program, using a linear multiple regression F-test to establish the minimum sample size required to obtain a 0.15 effect size, alpha 0.05, and 0.95 power levels required a minimum of 138 respondents for the aforementioned statistical power, for the proposed regression test.

Participants were identified through purposive sampling based on specified criteria related to the research objectives. The questionnaire was sent through a survey platform to reach participants in Indonesia who had traveled within the past 3 years and had interacted with travel influencers on YouTube. Electronic collection of responses enabled participants to complete the questionnaire efficiently and effectively. All data obtained during the research were subjected to a comprehensive error screening. Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM to determine whether statistically significant relationships existed among the variables and/or whether the proposed hypotheses were supported. The analytical process followed a rigorous two-stage PLS-SEM approach.

The first of two phases focused on validating the outer model, or the measurement model, of the study. The purpose of this phase was to validate that each indicator accurately measured the intended construct. Using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability scores greater than 0.70 established internal consistency among the indicators measuring the same construct. Other means of establishing the "truth" of the measures involved providing evidence of convergent validity (AVE greater than 0.50) and discriminant validity through the use of the

Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio, which provided confidence that each construct was statistically different from all others measured in the study; therefore, establishing the reasons for the variance in the results of the study.

Once the reliability of the measures was established, the research transitioned to the second phase, the Inner Model (Structural Model) of the study. This transition from looking at the metrics and how they compare to each other to examining how the metrics relate to one another, including testing the hypotheses proposed in this study and assessing the mediating influence of trust. A bootstrapping approach was then used with 5.000 samples to provide evidence that the results obtained were not due to chance. This method provided a means to obtain stable path coefficients (B), predictive power ( $R^2$ ), and effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) for the influencers of travel intentions.

## RESULTS

The research collected demographic specifications from 138 participants that inform the characteristics of this study and support the literature's verification of its results. The collected data include gender percentages, age ranges, socio-economic status, and respondents' geographic origin (province) (Table 1). The specific characteristics of the respondents will allow for a better description of participants while placing them within the context of their histories. Characteristics of respondents include that females were 58% and males were 42%. They consisted primarily of young people aged 18–28; 18% of the respondents (over 1 in 3) were aged 23–28 (31.88%), and 27% were aged 18–22 (27.54%). As much as 40.58% of respondents were aged 29–44. Of those respon-

Table 1 Respondets' Profile

Classification	Category	Percentage
Gender	Man	42%
	Women	58%
Age	18–22	27.54%
	23–28	31.88%
	29–34	21.74%
	35–44	18.84%
Social Economic Status	Upper-Income	43,5%
	Middle-Income	56,5%
Province	West Java	25.36%
	DKI Jakarta	20.29%
	East Java	19.57%
	Central Java	14.49%
	Banten	11.59%
	DI Yogyakarta	8.70%

dents, 56.50% were considered middle-income and 43.50% were considered upper-income in terms of socio-economic status. The sample

was almost entirely from the island of Java, i.e., West Java (25.36%), DKI Jakarta (20.29%), East Java (19.57%), and Central Java (14.49%).

Table 2 Outer Model

Construct	Variable	Item	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Homophily	X <sub>1</sub>	X <sub>1.1.1</sub>	0.754	0.933	0.943	0.600
		X <sub>1.4.1</sub>	0.785			
		X <sub>1.4.2</sub>	0.736			
		X <sub>1.4.3</sub>	0.728			
		X <sub>1.5.1</sub>	0.848			
		X <sub>1.5.2</sub>	0.778			
		X <sub>1.5.3</sub>	0.819			
		X <sub>1.5.4</sub>	0.760			
		X <sub>1.6.1</sub>	0.748			
		X <sub>1.6.3</sub>	0.814			
		X <sub>1.6.4</sub>	0.741			
Perceived Expertise	X <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>2.1</sub>	0.824	0.832	0.888	0.664
		X <sub>2.2</sub>	0.815			
		X <sub>2.3</sub>	0.820			
		X <sub>2.4</sub>	0.801			
Trust	M	M <sub>1</sub>	0.821	0.879	0.912	0.676
		M <sub>2</sub>	0.775			
		M <sub>3</sub>	0.772			
		M <sub>4</sub>	0.867			
		M <sub>5</sub>	0.871			
Intention to Visit	Y	Y <sub>1</sub>	0.879	0.867	0.909	0.715
		Y <sub>2</sub>	0.837			
		Y <sub>3</sub>	0.844			
		Y <sub>4</sub>	0.821			

Therefore, the overwhelming characteristics of respondents were that they are young (18–28 years old), predominantly female (58%), of middle-income class (56.5%), and heavily located in populated areas of West Java.

A 5-point Likert scale was used in this study, with the data being analyzed using PLS-SEM (Christian et al., 2025). The findings of the outer loading analysis are contained in Table 2. Convergent validity is established when each indicator has an external loading value greater than 0.70. The results of the analysis demonstrated that each reflective indicator comprising the model had an outer loading between 0.728 ( $X_{1.4.3}$ ) and 0.879 ( $Y_1$ ). These outer loading scores exceed the 0.70 minimum threshold, suggesting that all reflective indicators have convergent validity and can effectively measure the latent variable(s) in question.

Reliability testing helps assess how consistent measurements are across similar items within an approach to measuring a construct (e.g., Cronbach’s Alpha). A measurement is considered reliable if its Cronbach’s Alpha (0.60) and Composite Reliability (0.70) exceed the recommended limits established by Hair et al. (2021). As shown in Table 2, each measurement indicated a value of at least 0.832 for its Cronbach’s Alpha and at least 0.888 for its Composite Reliability. Based on the criteria, the results provide strong evidence of internal consistency, so all indicator measures can be confidently considered reliable measures of the research constructs in the present study. The

Fornell-Larcker criterion was employed to evaluate discriminant validity among the research constructs, and the results are presented in Table 3. The purpose of the Fornell-Larcker criterion is to evaluate whether the construct is indeed different than the other constructs in the overall model through the examination of the correlations among constructs and the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct.

The AVE values for all constructs, as shown in Table 2, are above the requisite threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2021). The findings indicate that AVE values range from 0.600 to 1.000, confirming convergent validity for all constructs in the model. According to the findings in Table 3, all diagonal values—representing the square root of the AVE (ranging from 0.774 to 0.846)—consistently exceed the corresponding horizontal and vertical correlation values. As a result, the model’s constructs exhibit discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) further assesses the discriminant validity of the constructs. The validity criteria are met if the HTMT value is below 0.90 (Hair et al., 2021). The HTMT test findings indicate that all values satisfy this criterion, with a minimum value of 0.723 (Perceived Expertise to Intention to Visit) and a maximum of 0.874 (Trust to Perceived Expertise). Figure 1 illustrates the structural diagram, depicting the complex connections within the model, including direct pathways and the mediating role of Trust. The model specifi-

Table 3 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6
Homophily	0.774					
Intention to Visit	0.770	0.846				
Perceived Expertise	0.692	0.617	0.815			
Trust	0.776	0.653	0.752	0.822		

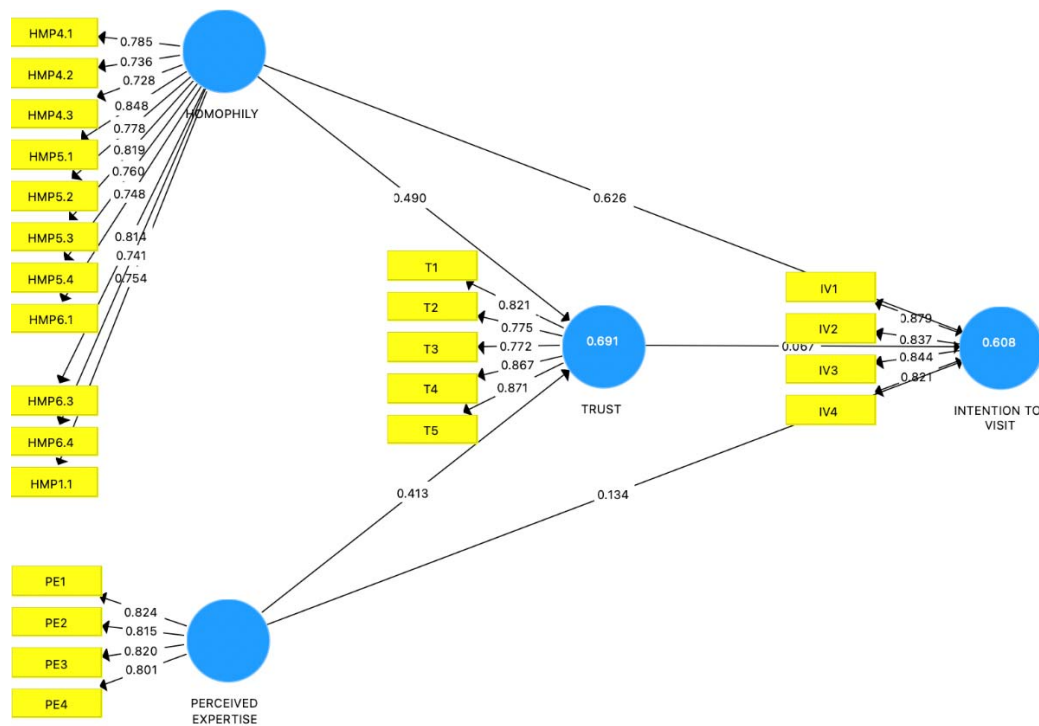


Figure 1 Empirical Model

cally examines how Trust acts as a mediator in the relationships between the exogenous variables (Homophily and Perceived Expertise) and the endogenous construct, Intention to visit.

The endogenous variable coefficients are reflected in the R<sup>2</sup> values for the endogenous variables in the model. The R<sup>2</sup> for Intention to Visit is 0.6083, which is moderate according to the R<sup>2</sup> interpretation guidelines (0.50 = moderate), indicating that 60.8 percent of Intention to Visit’s variance is accounted for by the exogenous (predictor) variables combined. The R<sup>2</sup> for the Trust variable also serves as a mediating variable and is 0.6914, which is moderate and approaches strong (0.75), indicating that 69.1 percent of Trust’s variance is explained by the model. The residual variance of both variables can be attributed to factors that were not included in the research model.

The Q<sup>2</sup> (Stone-Geisser) methodology assesses the predictive relevance of endogenous

constructs in the model. The Q<sup>2</sup> values for both Intention to Visit (0.4246) and Trust (0.4607) indicate predictive relevance, as both are greater than zero. Thus, since these values are > 0.35, it can be inferred that the structural model has strong predictive relevance. The f<sup>2</sup> effect size methodology demonstrates how much each independent (exogenous) variable contributes to the R<sup>2</sup> of the dependent variable(s) (endogenous). An f<sup>2</sup> value of > 0.35 is generally recognized as a large effect size, > 0.15 as a medium effect size, and < 0.02 as a negligible effect size. In the current model, Homophilous has a large effect on both Trust and Intention to Visit. The mediation analysis indicates that the effects of Perceived Expertise and Trust on Intention to Visit are fully explained, despite falling below the F<sup>2</sup> thresholds, because it clearly demonstrates how these constructs interact to enhance the predictive capacity of Intention to Visit. The results of the hypothesis tests are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Results of Hypotheses

Hypotheses		Original Sample	Sample Mean	t-Value	p-Value
H <sub>1</sub>	Homophily → Trust	0.4904	0.4967	6.7671	0.0000
H <sub>2</sub>	Perceived Expertise → Trust	0.4130	0.4064	4.4395	0.0000
H <sub>3</sub>	Trust → Intention to Visit	0.0669	0.0683	0.4434	0.6577
H <sub>4</sub>	Homophily → Intention to Visit	0.6256	0.6308	6.4429	0.0000
H <sub>5</sub>	Perceived Expertise → Intention to Visit	0.1341	0.1285	1.1500	0.2507
H <sub>6</sub>	Homophily → Trust → Intention to Visit	0.0328	0.0299	0.4390	0.6608
H <sub>7</sub>	Perceived Expertise → Trust → Intention to Visit	0.0276	0.0349	0.4188	0.6755

The hypothesis testing results in Table 4 provide insight into the relationship between the study variables. The first hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) was confirmed by a statistically significant positive coefficient (0.490, p = 0.000) for Homophily, indicating that Homophily affects Trust. The second hypothesis (H<sub>2</sub>) was also confirmed, with a statistically significant positive coefficient (0.413, p = 0.000) indicating that Perceived Expertise influences Trust. The third hypothesis (H<sub>3</sub>) was not confirmed, as Trust did not exert a statistically significant influence on Intention to Visit (coefficient = 0.0669; p = 0.6577).

Testing the fourth hypothesis (H<sub>4</sub>), homophily was found to directly affect Intention to Visit at a highly statistically significant level, with a coefficient of 0.6256 and a p-value of 0.000. H<sub>4</sub> is accepted. H<sub>5</sub> is rejected because Perceived Expertise was positively correlated to Intention to Visit but was statistically insignificant with a coefficient of 0.1411 and a p-value of 0.2507. The mediation analysis found that the indirect effect of Homophily on Intention to Visit via Trust (H<sub>6</sub>) had an insignificant coefficient (0.0328) and p-value (0.6608); therefore, this hypothesis is rejected. H<sub>7</sub> follows the same pattern with Perceived Expertise affecting Intention to Visit indirectly through Trust, producing a coefficient of 0.0276 and a p-value of 0.6755, leading to rejection of this hypothesis

as well. Consequently, all indirect effects through the proposed mediators were determined to be statistically insignificant in this research model.

## DISCUSSION

This research describes how YouTube travel influencers operate through the lens of digital entrepreneurial marketing in the tourism industry. Results support the SOR model, in which external stimuli (influencer characteristics) induce trust through an internal psychological response. Unlike the research by Go, Kang, & Nam (2020), which identifies expertise as a key contributor to establishing credibility, in Indonesia, trust through an influencer is also derived from the ‘human’ aspect of homophily. This suggests that for Indonesian Millennials and Gen Z, the development of trust is not based solely on the influencer’s technical ability, but additionally on the creation of a shared identity and social presence consistent with Social Presence Theory. Results indicate that audience trust is significantly influenced by homophily and perceived knowledge; viewers are more likely to trust those influencers who demonstrate similar belief systems, lifestyles, and travel interests, as well as perceived competence and skill associated with tourism-specific content.

Interestingly, trust did not serve as a substantial mediator and did not have an immediate relationship with travel intention. This cre-

ates a tension with the conventional marketing perspective in Dzreke & Dzreke (2025), which posits that trust should be an indispensable pathway to behavioral intention. The lack of mediation indicates a shortcut in the consumer decision process: although consumers may classify the influencer's content as valid (cognitive trust), their true intention to travel is driven by stronger emotional/hedonic factors. Because tourism is both an experiential and a highly involved product, the cognitive assurance of trust might be overpowered by the immediate visual/hedonic appeal of a destination. Based on these findings, it appears that trust may play a limited role in tourism decision-making, serving as a prerequisite for information reception rather than a direct influencer of behavioral intention. Generally, with highly involved products, emotional attachment and social identity tend to dominate purely rational factors.

The study revealed that perceived competence and perceived similarity between influencer and audience can significantly affect the trust the influencer receives from their audience. Audiences tend to trust influencers more who share similar beliefs, lifestyles, and travel preferences than they do those influencers they do not perceive as having a high degree of competence or skill in tourism-related information. Homophily was also the most significant predictor of visit intention (intention to visit the travel destination promoted by the influencer) in this study, suggesting that perceived similarity was the most important factor in how the influencer influenced their audience's behavior. This finding supports Ladhari, Massa, and Skandrani (2020), who suggested that emotional identification with an influencer often takes precedence over the extent of their informative authority when promoting travel-related behaviors via a digital platform.

The results of this study show that, from an entrepreneurial perspective, YouTube travel influencers can be classified as digital entrepreneurs. They convert their personal identity, narratives, and social connections into economic and promotional value for tourism destinations. Influencer marketing in tourism serves as an entrepreneurial tool for creating value, and influencers' shared identities and emotional ties help shape customers' behavior. This study specifically contributes to the value co-creation process, in which influencers not only "sell" their destination but also "share" a lifestyle their followers want to experience.

Theoretically, this study expands the application of the SOR framework within entrepreneurship and tourism marketing. The research reveals that homophily serves as a primary catalyst for entrepreneurship, directly influencing behavioral intention. This direct path challenges the traditional mediation model often found in digital marketing literature—such as the work of Dzreke & Dzreke (2025)—which positions trust as an indispensable gateway to intention. In this study, however, the "Organism" (Trust) was bypassed by the "Stimulus" (Homophily) in driving behavioral outcomes. This suggests that in the Indonesian tourism context, social identification is a more potent trigger for action than cognitive trust alone. These findings contrast with previous studies that primarily highlighted trust as a key mediator. This discovery enriches the entrepreneurship literature by underscoring that social likeness and emotional identification can serve as significant indicators of entrepreneurship, especially in experience-driven sectors such as tourism. Furthermore, the findings indicate that perceived knowledge predominantly facilitates trust establishment rather than directly affecting the propensity to visit.

By differentiating between “logical credibility” (Expertise) and “socially driven factors” (Homophily), this study provides a nuanced understanding of how digital entrepreneurs build influence. While perceived expertise establishes trust—aligning with the credibility theory of Go, Kang, & Nam (2020)—it lacks the emotional “pull” needed to drive visitation. This comprehension enhances prior theories by distinguishing between logical credibility mechanisms and socially driven entrepreneurial factors in molding consumer choices. The findings have significant implications for tourism entrepreneurs, destination managers, and digital marketers. Stakeholders should prioritize partnerships with influencers who align closely with their target audiences, rather than focusing solely on those with extensive technical skills.

The findings underscore the significance of authenticity and identity alignment for influencers acting as entrepreneurial entities. Although sustaining perceived expertise remains crucial for establishing initial trust, content strategies must prioritize meaningful experiences, human narratives, and lifestyle alignment to effectively enhance travel intentions. By leveraging homophily as a strategic advantage, influencers and tourism enterprises can enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing initiatives and foster sustainable engagement. Leveraging these socially driven factors allows practitioners to overcome the “mediation gap” of trust identified in this study, creating a more direct and efficient path to tourism involvement.

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## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that in Indonesia’s digital tourism sector, homophily—the perceived similarity between influencers and their audience—is the primary driver of visit intention, surpassing the influence of technical expertise and trust. While perceived knowledge and trust establish credibility, they do not directly trigger travel behavior; instead, YouTube influencers function as digital entrepreneurs who convert social alignment and emotional connection into economic value. By challenging the traditional mediation role of trust, this research highlights a “shortcut” in the consumer decision-making process in which shared identity serves as a more potent entrepreneurial resource than informational authority. Consequently, the study concludes that value creation in influencer marketing relies on the capacity to forge “human” narratives, suggesting that tourism stakeholders should prioritize influencers who embody the lifestyle and beliefs of their target demographics over those who merely possess technical proficiency.

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## APPENDIX

Construct	Questionnaire Item	References
Homophily (Attitude)	X.1.1.1 I feel that YouTube influencers have a similar way of thinking to me.	(Carvalho, 2024)
Homophily (Usefulness)	X.1.4.1 The content shared by YouTube influencers helped me resolve doubts when planning my trip. X.1.4.2 The content shared by YouTube influencers helps me organize my trips more efficiently. X.1.4.3 Generally, the content shared by YouTube influencers is useful for my travel planning.	(Carvalho, 2024)
Homophily (Credibility)	X.1.5.1 The content shared by YouTube influencers provides reliable information. X.1.5.2 The content shared by YouTube influencers provides credible information. X.1.5.3 The content shared by YouTube influencers provides trustworthy information. X.1.5.4 The content shared by YouTube influencers provides accurate information.	(Carvalho, 2024)
Homophily Enjoyability	X.1.6.1 The content shared by YouTube influencers is fun. X.1.6.3 The content shared by YouTube influencers inspires me to discover something new. X.1.6.4 The content shared by YouTube influencers broadens my horizons.	(Carvalho, 2024)
Perceived Expertise	X.2.1 This YouTube influencer is an expert in promoting tourism destinations or services. X.2.2 This YouTube influencer is experienced in promoting tourism on the YouTube platform. X.2.3 Knowledgeable YouTube influencers about the promoted destinations, hotels, or tourism services. X.2.4 This YouTube influencer provides substantial information about tourist destinations or services.	Expertise (Guo, Zhang, & Wang, 2022; Cao, 2025)
Trust	M.1 I can trust the information about tourist destinations in YouTube influencer videos. M.2 Photos or videos of tourist destinations on social media (YouTube videos) that accurately reflect the real situation. M.3 After seeing the content created by influencers, I feel like I know what to expect from a destination before visiting. M.4 I believe that the information shared by YouTube influencers regarding travel destination experiences is reliable. M.5 After seeing the content created by YouTube influencers, I believe that tourism destinations or service providers will deliver what they promise.	(Kaosiri et al., 2017)
Intention to Visit	Y.1 If I have the opportunity to travel, I intend to visit the destination mentioned by the influencer. Y.2 When I plan a trip, I'm most likely to visit destinations recommended by YouTube influencers. Y.3 In the future, I will use tourism products or services recommended by YouTube influencers. Y.4 When I have to choose a tourism product or service, I will consider the recommendations of YouTube influencers.	(Carvalho, 2024)