

EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER INVOLVEMENT ON TOURISTS' TRAVEL INTENTIONS: MEDIATING ROLE OF TRAVELER AUTHENTICITY AND DESTINATION IMAGE

Bulumulla, D. S. K.^{1*}, Epa, U. I.² and Gamage T. C.³

^{1,2,3} Department of Marketing Management, Faculty of Management Studies,
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Belihuloya, Sri Lanka

*shashinibulumulla@gmail.com

Although TikTok recently emerged as a travel marketing medium, how TikTok influences tourists' perceptions of travel experience and travel intention remains unclear. This paper addresses this void by constructing a structural model that delineates the mechanism by which the involvement of social media influencers with TikTok influences tourists' travel intention through authenticity and destination image. Following the positivism research philosophy and deductive research approach, a questionnaire survey is administered. The questionnaire was distributed among 384 tourists, and data was analyzed using partial least squares- structural equation modelling. Findings revealed that social media influencers' involvement with TikTok increases object-based and existential authenticity and cognitive and affective images of travel experience, ultimately influencing travel intention. Moreover, object-based and existential authenticity and cognitive and affective images of travel experiences mediate the link between social media influencers' involvement with TikTok and tourists' travel intentions. The results add to tourism marketing literature by blending authenticity with the cognitive-affective model in the context of TikTok travel marketing in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Affective image, cognitive image, existential authenticity, object-based authenticity, TikTok, travel intention*