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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON DESTINATION PREFERENCES: A CROSS-GENERATION COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

Social media has gradually transformed into a tool for tourism marketing because of its widespread use and its sales-oriented reflections on purchasing decisions. Hence, almost all tourism businesses and destination management organizations (DMOs) have initiated to attract potential tourists via social media or social media influencers (SMIs). Though more and more publications have emerged to draw attention to the significance of SMI on purchase decisions, the number of research focusing on SMIs effect on destination choice still needs to be furthered. From this point of view, this study aims to evaluate how social media influencers affect travellers' preference for destinations across generations. The data was gathered from 137 followers who follow social media influencers and are over 18. In the study, percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation values were employed in the descriptive data analysis, while correlation analysis was used in the relationship measurement tests, and regression analysis was conducted in the hypothesis tests. As a result, it has been inferred that the perception levels of participants towards social media influencers vary across generations and that social media influencers are an essential determinant for destination preference. It has also been concluded that the effect of social media influencers on destination preference differs in the context of X, Y, and Z generations. Thus, this study makes considerably advances the literature by revealing the importance of generation-based social media marketing and emphasizing how SMIs could impact destination preferences.

1. INTRODUCTION

The social media term was first used in literature by McLuhan with the terms of electronic data gathering and global access in 1953 (Peters, 2009). Social media enables and facilitates the interaction between users and informants as a communication technology (Enli, 2017). With the increasing rate of social media usage, individuals have begun to spend more and more time on virtual platforms provided by social media tools. They contentedly state their ideas, opinions, or judgments in this new communication and interaction environment without hesitation. Emerging social media tools and apps like Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, Whatsapp, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and Pinterest are fundamentally altering global communication patterns. Manovich (2001) presents five fundamental differences between traditional media and social media as follows:

• Numerical presentation: All social media objects are composed of digital codes. Thus, they can be described formally, while algorithmic designs can also manipulate them.

• Modularity: Each social media object (image, sound, shape, etc.) has its own identity on a micro-scale. Each maintains its identity even if micro-scale social media objects are brought together and used.

• Automation: Social media objects can be digitally coded and have a modular structure, allowing many functions to be implemented automatically while creating and distributing media.

• Variability: The most distinctive feature of traditional media objects is that they are created and distributed by one or more people. A social media object is not fixed for everyone but can exist in different, potentially endless versions. This is another consequence of the medium's numeric encoding and the medium object's modular nature.

• Transcoding: Combining computerization with media has turned media objects into computer data. Accordingly, computers organize the media objects that become data depending on the search results and present them according to a specific ratio.

Social media provides users a wide range of the possibilities for easily accessible communication and interaction because of its multifunctional nature. It also has certain distinguishing features. First of all, it is substantially free and low-cost for users. It allows access to significant communities in a short period. Social media is easy to use, and users can update whenever they want (Korkmaz, 2012). Moreover, social media has a unique dissemination

environment through social media applications. Social media applications are web-based platforms that gather and integrate various user information, set up a user profile and page, and allow users to connect (Fuchs, 2011). Meanwhile, as the power of web-based communication and interaction augments, the rate of social media usage boosts and social media applications become more and more prevailing (Kara, 2013). In consequence, social media applications have become diversified day by day. Additionally, those programs influence the user characteristics. Previously, social media's strong interaction enabled passive users to become active content producers. Each user creates their own content and publishes it on social media without boundaries, and through comments and feedback on shared content, a strong engagement unfolds (Yaylagül, 2017). Some users become prominent on social media with thousands of followers and thus are called SMIs.

SMIs are individuals who are regularly in interaction on social media and they have high follower rates on social media applications. Their followers mind SMI's opinions and take their posts into consideration. Moreover, followers perceive SMIs as reliable sources that provide true and accurate information (Brown & Hayes, 2008). More importantly, nowadays, SMIs could be used as efficient tools for creating demand for any destination. Hence, companies and suppliers make product placements on the posts of SMIs to market their products, and this product placement could affect followers' purchasing decision process (Yaylagül, 2017).

Today, social media platforms host SMIs in fields including engineering, mathematics, rural life, cuisine, religion, etc. The travel/vacation segment is one of the most popular fields in which SMIs are observed. These SMIs provide engaging content to their followers about travel, sightseeing, tourism, and local cuisine. They constitute a reliable information source for potential tourists and followers by sharing their previous experiments about destinations, entertainment centres, hotels, restaurants, or various touristic activities. Their followers and other potential tourists read comments and review pictures or videos attached to the posts of SMIs. therefore, followers can plan their travel based on those posts or enhance their travel planning due to comments, pictures, or videos (Koç, 2019). In this regard, it is assumed that SMIs are the critical determinants for purchasing decision process and destination choice, primarily when the destination choice is majorly based on internet searches. It is also assumed that social media usage and information channels for travel planning differ regarding age groups and generations. Thus, this study focuses on the effects of SMIs on destination preferences and reveals that the effect of SMIs on destination choice could be diversified in terms of different generations. In the literature, there are some similar studies discussing the effects of SMIs on destination choice in different countries/destinations (Guerreiro et al., 2019; Jaya & Prianthara, 2018; Praničević, 2020; Pop et al., 2022; Xu & Pratt, 2018) and in Türkiye (Avcı & Bilgili, 2020; Bayın & Akoğlan Kozak, 2023; Gürkan, 2021; Ergan & Eru, 2022; Karadeniz, 2019). In contrast to those studies, this study investigates as to how SMIs affect travelers' choices of destinations across generations. Since the results of this study emphasize the role of generation, it is of utmost importance. It also

becomes essential with its results mentioning the role of generation.

2. LİTERATURE REVİEW

2.1. Social Media Influencers and Purchasing Decision

SMIs, replacing traditional information sources in the same way as the advice of acquaintances, can influence individuals' purchasing decisions, feelings, and thoughts (Armağan & Doğaner, 2018; Mert, 2018). As stated before, they are accepted as reliable sources of accurate information. SMIs are generally classified into two categories based on their degree of influence on social media platforms. SMIs with more followers are called mega-influencers, and those with fewer followers are called micro-influencers (Armağan & Doğaner, 2018). Micro-influencers' effect on followers is more than mega-influencers. Thus, it is thought that the interaction and sincerity of micro-influencers with their followers have a greater sense of trust than mega-influencers (Avcı & Bilgili, 2020). Micro-influencers develop a wide-follower group with their liked posts on social media. Besides, adopting micro-influencer approaches has gained popularity with the expansion of content generation and distribution possibilities.. Hence, micro-influencers have frequent interactions with qualified and pertinent followers on social media. Shares of any kind intended for advertisement or sales towards these followers circulate quickly and have a lasting effect. (Sarıtaş, 2018). The experiences, opinions, and daily routine activities shared by SMIs are thoroughly followed by their followers (Arora et al., 2019). Thus, SMIs can influence their followers' emotions, thoughts, and purchasing decisions through social media applications similar to Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, and Facebook. Furthermore, SMIs have an above-average effect on their ability to persuade people (Avcı & Bilgili, 2020).

Anyone who makes use of social media platforms is able to express their emotions, ideas, and opinions. By posting images, videos, or live broadcasts, social media users can showcase their unique identities. At this point, some content or people are much more preferred by the followers. This allows SMIs to gain more followers and increase their effect on followers (Ki & Kim, 2019). Previous studies revealed that SMIs create this effect thanks to their specific characteristics, presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Specific Characteristics of SMIs

Chen, Shang and Li (2014)	The authors investigated the impact of blog content's novelty, reliability, comprehensibility, and attractiveness on blog usage and intention to visit the destination. They have concluded that the blog's novelty, reliability, comprehensibility, and attractiveness positively affect the use of the blog and the intention to visit the destination.
Lisichkova and Othman (2017)	It has been found that the honesty, reliability, originality, accuracy, and expertise characteristics of SMIs are effective in online purchases of consumers.
Rebolo (2017)	The study investigated the effect of the reliability phenomenon created by Instagram influencers on purchase intention. As a result, it was determined that honesty and attractiveness, which are reliability dimensions, positively affect purchase intention.
Avcılar, Demirgüneş and Açar (2018)	Researchers have determined that including SMIs in Instagram advertisements positively affects consumers' attitudes toward ads. In addition, it has been concluded that promotions made by SMIs are more effective than word-of-mouth advertisements.
Armağan and Doğaner (2018)	In the study, the attitudes of consumers towards vloggers in line with their socio-demographic characteristics and the effect of vloggers on their purchase intention were investigated. As a result, it has been seen those consumers under the age of 25 are more interested in influencers who make video shooting. In addition, it has been determined that the attitude toward Vloggers significantly affects purchase intention.
Eru et al. (2018)	The authors investigated the trust of young people in Youtubers and the effect of confidence in the brand they promote on purchase intention. It has been determined that the participants between the ages of 10-19 have increased their trust in the brand promoted by Youtubers, and trust in Youtubers positively affects their purchasing behavior.
Magno and Cassia (2018)	It has been determined that the honesty and the sharing of correct information of SMIs affect their followers' intention to travel.
Lou and Yuan (2019)	It was concluded that the knowledge quality of the content produced by SMIs and the reliability, attractiveness, and proximity of SMIs positively affect brand awareness and purchase intention.

As seen in Table 1, SMIs' various characteristics affect purchasing decisions positively. Based on the findings of previous studies, it can be assumed that honesty, reliability, originality, accuracy, expertise, knowledge quality, and novelty of created content are the primary factors that affect purchasing decision process. The purchase of touristic products and, consequently, destination selection, is a prominent domain where SMIs offer assistance in the purchasing process. Therefore, using marketing channels, advertisements and their content have an enormous effect on consumer purchase decisions (Garashov, 2016). As is well-known, the production and distribution of information in social media take place very quickly. Opinions, personal experiences, and travel comments on social media constitute a knowledge source for tourists. Since they also use social media networks, they increasingly mediate the tourism experience by describing and reliving their trips (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Thus, each user, especially SMIs, impacts potential tourists' touristic purchasing decision process.

2.2. Social Media and Generations

Just now, generation classification is carried out by creating age groups depending on the economic, social, and environmental factors of the period in which individuals live. According to this classification, each age group's period and characteristics alter. It is not smooth to draw sharp boundaries about the nature of human beings as social beings. However, classifications like these give us helpful information about the general structure of that community (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). This viewpoint suggests that in order to forecast, comprehend, and categorize the behavior of the future generation, it must be undertaken to look into the a variety of viewpoints that allow for change. Although there are multiple distinct categories, the American-type, which splits generations according to a person's year of birth, is almost universally accepted.   To that, it is possible to classify generations as the silent generation, baby-boomers generation, generation X, generation Y, generation Z, and alpha generation (Bağçı & İçöz, 2019; Danışman & Gündüz, 2018; Fox, 2011; Kapoor & Solomon, 2011; McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009; Williams et al., 2010). When generations are considered in terms of the development of technology, it is seen that X generation constitutes the transition generation to technology (Kuyucu, 2017). By the way, generation Y, who generally prefers individual activities and is liberal (Kavalcı & Ünal, 2016), consists of individuals who spend most of their time online (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016).

Unlike other generations, the generation Z consists of individuals born into technology and actively use technology in every aspect of their lives (Williams & Page, 2011; Turner, 2015). They spend their entire lives intertwined with computers, video games, smartphones, and all other tools of the digital age (Prensky, 2001). Generation Z, which is always in contact with the world thanks to technology, is accustomed to interacting and communicating on social media (Turner, 2015). Generation Z tends towards platforms that are easy to use in their technology preferences, will solve their problems, help coordinate their activities, or allow them to access relevant people or information quickly (Ardıç & Altun, 2017). In this regard, the social media platforms actively used by generation Z generally refer to web applications allowing users to publish and share content, convey their feelings, thoughts, and lifestyle, and publish their touristic activities (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). Although the American-type classification is generally dominant, it is necessary to re-examine generations in terms of individuals' approaches to social media and their use. At this point, Prensky (2001) classified digital natives and digital immigrants for the generation Y and before, and this classification began to be utilized frequently in the literature later on. Wang et al. (2013: 409) defined digital natives as the new generation born in the digital age.

According to Prensky, digital natives are the first generation to have grown up with new technology and spend their whole lives with the technological toys of the age, just like computers, game consoles, and mobile phones. Prensky (2001) stated that digital natives refer to the generation born after 1980 and named the previous generation as digital immigrants. According to the author, digital natives use a digital language, and their mentality functions differently from digital immigrants. Zur & Walker (2011) stated that digital natives prefer a more egalitarian and less hierarchical order in their workplaces, give importance to their satisfaction rather than loyalty to the company, and prefer remote and flexible working orders. Researchers also emphasized that not every digital native is the same and could be divided into different sections: avoiders, reluctant adopters, and enthusiastic adopters. Those who are digital natives yet have little interest in digital technologies are commonly referred to as avoiders. Reluctant adopters accept that technology is a component of life today and resolve to use it sparingly and only when required. Enthusiastic adopters make up the majority of digital natives. They enjoy technology and devices and thrive with them. In Prensky's classification, digital immigrants are those born before 1980 and who met the internet later. The main difference between digital immigrants and digital natives is that digital natives speak the digital language as their first language. Digital immigrants learn the digital language later and speak with an "accent" (Wang et al., 2013).

2.3. Development of Research Hypothesis

Social media platforms play a vital role in the sales of touristic products, especially in benefitting from experiences and making decisions. In addition, those platforms provide convenience in product promotion and consumer communications (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Since there is no opportunity to try touristic products like other products, purchasing is more complex (Dalgın & Oruç, 2015). For this reason, the effect of social media platforms on the tourism product purchasing decision is significant. Živković et al. (2014) stated that 50% of tourists are likely to download travel applications before vacation. SMIs create proof of "I have been there" by posing at the destination and sharing their travel memories on social media platforms. This proof transforms the abstract experience into concrete reality (Lo et al., 2011). Additionally, while SMIs are disseminating these travel memories via social media, many tourists strategically select the information that is useful to them and plan to have the same experience (Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013). Thus, the experiences and

comments stated in social media applications can increase or decrease the demand for the destination and provide predictions of the destination (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008).

In their study, Fotis et al. (2012) settled that social media is generally used during or after a vacation to share experiences. They also revealed that there is a significant relationship between being affected by social media and purchasing decisions. Fatanti & Suyadnya (2015) assigned that the Instagram application is essential for advertising Bali and Malang in Indonesia. Similarly, Dağıtmaç (2015) accomplished that Instagram is the most addictive application for social media users who make travel decisions. Eşitti & Işık (2015), who tested the relationship between social media usage and travel to Türkiye, determined that tourists could change their planned travel decision when they are affected by social media posts. Yazgan & Sevinç (2015) also revealed a significant relationship between social media usage and destination choice and figured out that tourists use social media to reach accurate information and to get additional knowledge. Various studies conducted in Türkiye (Başarangil, 2019; Çetinöz & Akdağ, 2015; Demiral & Gelibolu, 2019; Doğaner & Armağan, 2018; Eryılmaz & Yücetürk, 2018; Özdemir et al., 2015; Taş et al., 2019) also support the relationship between social media usage and destination choice in different samples.

Social media enables people to critically gauge the appropriate holiday and destination. Yet, because of the data overload on social media, people have trouble determining the best vacation destination or mode of transportation. Many individuals now prefer to believe what SMIs have to tell. SMIs publish whenever and wherever they want to interact with users. People can communicate with each other on social media through a variety of applications that are supported by various formats, like email, text messaging, and location. Images and location information shared by SMIs become data exchanges for social media and other networks. This data exchange arouses people's curiosity about different destinations (Memon et al., 2015). What is more, tourism enterprises collaborate with SMIs to make a difference, increase awareness and be sustainable in the market (Canöz et al., 2020). As a result of collaborations with SMIs that appeal to the target market of businesses, speak the same language as potential tourists in this market, and have similar tastes contribute positively to the purchase of tourism products or services by potential tourists (Sabuncuoğlu & Gülay, 2014). For instance, in Türkiye, due to the increase in the sharing of SMIs about the eastern express, there was a high demand for eastern express flights, and the number of flights increased fivefold (Ergun et al., 2019). Avcı and Bilgili (2020: 90) also revealed that potential tourists benefit from SMIs while planning their vacations. They concluded that the proximity, attractiveness, and innovativeness of SMIs that recommend a destination positively affect the intention of potential tourists to choose the relevant destination.

Considering the issues discussed so far within the scope of the research and the explanations made in this context, it is conceivable to assert that SMIs affect the choice of destination. Moreover, it is assumed that the consequence of SMIs on destination choice could range among generations within the context of the intensity of preference made by SMIs. In the

literature, there are some studies (Albayrak & Öztürk, 2013; Baran et al., 2020; Karacaoğlu, 2021; Serçek & Serçek, 2017) stressing the relationship between generations and tourism product purchasing. Although previous studies examined destination choice in the field of generations, no studies examine the effect of SMIs on destination choice within the context of generations. Accordingly, the hypotheses of the research are as follows;

H1: SMIs significantly affect tourists' destination choice decisions.

H2: The effect of SMIs on tourists' destination choice decisions differs significantly within the context of generations.

3. METHOD

In this study, the questionnaire technique was used to collect data. The questionnaire form consists of 4 parts. In the first part, demographic questions (gender, age group, marital status, educational status, occupation, income status) were included. In the second part, questions about the certain purchasing behaviours of the participants (social media usage, social media applications, vacation frequency) were included. In the third part, there are 15 expressions about the SMIs scale. SMIs scale adapted from Armağan & Doğaner (2018) based on Ohanian's (1990) study, and the scale consists of three sub-dimensions of proximity, attractiveness, and resource reliability. In the last part, the 5-item behavioral intention to destination scale, adopted from Johnson et al. (2006), was used to measure the destination choices of the participants. Before the survey application, Afyon Kocatepe University Ethics Committee approval was obtained. The survey was conducted via Google Forms between June 2021 and February 2022. The study used a snowball sampling method, and the authors shared the survey link via their WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook accounts. Within the context of snowball sampling, 145 participants contributed to the survey, but eight questionnaires were excluded from the analyses due to incorrect or incomplete filling.

The validity of the data set was measured with EFA factor analysis, and the reliability was determined based on Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Then, descriptive analyses were completed, consisting of some demographic variables of participants (gender, generation, education, marital status, etc.) and the determination of participation level for each item. The research hypotheses were measured with regression analyses, and findings were compared with the conclusions of previous studies.

3.1. Data Analyses

Validity and reliability analyses have been executed within the context of the data analyses. As shown in Table 2, the SMIs scale used in the study is valid and reliable. KMO coefficient (0,931) and Bartlett's test result (0,000) confirm that the SMIs scale is valid and consisting three factors named proximity, attractiveness, and source reliability. Additionally, the factor loadings of the items are above 0,50. Proximity, the first factor of the SMIs scale, constitutes 64,07% of the total variance, while three factors constitute approximately 77,80% of the total variance. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale is 0,959, and three factors have reliability coefficients above 0,89. As seen in Table 3, the destination choice (DC) scale is also valid (KMO:

0,895, Bartlett's test:0,000) and reliable (0,928). DC items interpret 78% of the total variance and have high reliability (sig.: 0,928). As a result, the SMIs scale and the DC scale have been accepted as valid and reliable for further analyses.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability of SMIs scale

Factors	Items	Loadings	Eigenvalue	% Variance	% Cumulative Variance	Reliability
Proximity	P1	,884	9,611	64,070	64,070	0,897
	P2	,896				
	P3	,682				
	P4	,569				
	P5	,575				
Source reliability	SR1	,895	1,273	8,488	72,558	0,929
	SR2	,884				
	SR3	,864				
	SR4	,881				
	SR5	,880				
Attractiveness	A1	,861	0,786	5,241	77,799	0,902
	A2	,834				
	A3	,819				
	A4	,596				
	A5	,894				
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy: 0,931						
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: x^2: 1891,836 Sig: 0,000						
Reliability of the scale: 0,959						

Table 3. Validity and Reliability of DC scale

Factors	Items	Loadings	Eigenvalue	% Variance	% Cumulative Variance	Reliability
DC	DC1	,864	3,904	78,070	78,070	0,928
	DC2	,913				
	DC3	,845				
	DC4	,907				
	DC5	,887				
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy: 0,895						
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: x^2: 529,079 Sig: 0,000						

Analyses concerning the demographics indicate that 58,4% of respondents (n: 80) are women. Y generation aged 22 to 41 constitutes the primary group (%: 47,4, n: 65), while the Z generation follows this group with a rate of 38% (n: 52). 72,3% of the sample is single (n: 99), and the rest of them are married (%: 27,7,4, n: 38). One hundred respondents have at least a university degree (%: 73), while 32 have secondary education. On the other hand, 25 respondents use social media more than 5 hours a day, while 56 people spend 3-5 hours on social media. Similarly, 56 participants use social media less than 3 hours a day. Almost all respondents have an Instagram profile (n: 131), while 127 participants use WhatsApp and 124 people use the YouTube application. Fifty respondents make their vacation irregularly (%. 36,5), 41 participants go on holiday once a year, and 32 getaway semi-annually. Ten respondents go on holiday quarterly, and the rest make a trip once a month. In sum, respondents of this study intensively use social media and go on holiday in general.

The last data analysis phase involves evaluating participation levels for each item, as presented in Table 4. Results indicate that the source reliability factor of SMIs (x̄: 3,438) is perceived as higher than the proximity (x̄: 3,272) and attractiveness (x̄: 3,257) of SMIs. The most attended item on the SMIs scale is P1 (x̄: 3,715), indicating that "I regularly follow this social media influencer (SMI)." In contrast, the least attended item among others is A5 (x̄: 2,839), which stands for "the SMI, I follow, is my idol."

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of SMIs scale and DC scale

Factor	Item	Mean x̄	Std. Deviation	Factor	Item	Mean x̄	Std. Deviation
Proximity x̄: 3,272	P1	3,715	1,236	Source reliability x̄: 3,438	SR1	3,482	1,295
	P2	3,496	1,278		SR2	3,664	1,308
	P3	3,124	1,342		SR3	3,387	1,279
	P4	2,847	1,543		SR4	3,416	1,293
	P5	3,175	1,277		SR5	3,241	1,269
Attractiveness x̄: 3,257	A1	3,168	1,287	Destination choice x̄:3,253	DC1	3,474	1,284
	A2	3,314	1,276		DC2	3,350	1,343
	A3	3,292	1,279		DC3	2,825	1,465
	A4	3,672	1,273		DC4	3,328	1,301
	A5	2,839	1,540		DC5	3,285	1,372

*x̄: Mean, **1:** Strongly disagree, **2:** Disagree, **3:** Partially Agree, **4:** Agree, **5:** Strongly agree*

Table 4 indicates that "DC1: The destination preference of the SMI that I follow plays an effective role in my choice of holiday" is the item the participants agree with the most. Contrary to this, the "DC3: I feel incomplete when I cannot make the holiday preferences of the social media phenomena I follow" item (x̄: 2,825) is the least attended on the DC scale. The DC scale's mean is above 3,00 points, indicating partially agreeing. Thus, it can be concluded that the study's respondents consider SMI preferences in the destination choice process. However, this conclusion needs to be tested with further analyses.

4. FINDINGS

This section consists of testing the research hypothesis. Concerning the aim of the study, DC is considered the dependent variable, and the SMIs scale and its factors are considered the independent variable. The potential effects of SMIs have been measured with regression analyses to clarify the research hypothesis. A bivariate regression analysis was realized to observe whether SMIs significantly affect the DC process as a first step, and the findings are shown in Table 5. The findings in the table confirm that the regression model is convenient for the analysis (F:506,668, sig.: 0,000), and the mathematical expression of the model is "DC=0,088+ 0,889*SMIs". Additionally, SMIs perception explains approximately 79% of the total variance of respondents' DC. Each (1) unit increase in SMIs perception creates an increase of 0,889 on the respondents' DC. Therefore, the study's first hypothesis, "H1: SMIs significantly affect tourists' destination choice decisions", is accepted.

Table 5. Bivariate Regression Analyses

Gen.	Cons.	Unstandardized coefficients β	Std. error	Std. β coefficient	t value	Sig.	R	Adjusted R²	F value
All	-,088	1,005	,045	,889	22,509	,000	,889	,788	506,668
Z	-,190	1,025	,080	,876	12,839	,000	,876	,763	164,829
Y	-068	,988	,064	,890	15,511	,000	,890	,789	240,588
X	-,206	1,079	,158	,884	6,831	,000	,884	,765	46,661

Predictor: SMIs
Gen.: Generations, **Cons.:** Constant, **β:** Beta, **Std.:** Standard, **Sig.:** Significance

Table 5 also presents the results of regression analyses based on different generations. As seen in the table, a significant effect (sig.: 0,000) is observed in all generations. The effect of SMIs on DC is at the highest level (β: 0,890) in the Y generation, and it is 0.884 in the generation X and 0.876 in the generation Z. Each increment in SMIs perception contributes to DC decision at the rate of 0,890 in the generation Y, and SMIs perception explains approximately 79% of the total variance of respondents' DC. Similarly, each increment in SMIs perception contributes to DC 0,876 in the generation Z. This effect is calculated

as 0,884 in the generation X. In sum, it is clear that SMIs significantly affect DC in all generations, and this effect differs according to generation. From this point of view, the second hypothesis of the research, "H2: The effect of SMIs on tourists' destination choice decisions differs significantly within the context of generations", is accepted.

After accepting the second hypothesis of the study, multivariate regression analyses were carried out to identify which sub-dimension significantly affects DC within the context of different generations. Results in Table 6 reveal that all sub-dimensions of SMIs, without any discrimination based on generations, positively impact the DC of respondents, and the regression model is valid (F: 166,999, sig.: 0,000). According to the model, the source reliability of SMIs is the most contributed sub-dimension to DC decisions (β: 0,351). The source reliability is followed by attractiveness (β: 0,328) and proximity (β: 0,276) sub-dimensions. By the way, SMIs sub-dimensions constitute approximately %79 of the DC variance.

Table 6. Multivariate Regression Analyses

All	Cons.	-,097	,158	--	-,612	,541	,889
	P	,292	,096	,276	3,051	**,003**[*]	
	A	,346	,100	,328	3,477	**,001**[*]	
	SR	,369	,067	,351	5,538	**,000**[*]	
Z	Cons.	-,202	,314	--	-,642	,524	,876
	P	,356	,169	,324	2,102	**,041**[*]	
	A	,301	,206	,276	1,466	,149	
	SR	,370	,137	,336	2,690	**,010**[*]	
Y	Cons.	-,081	,208	--	-,387	,700	,893
	P	,182	,133	,171	1,363	,178	
	A	,397	,125	,368	3,177	**,002**[*]	
	SR	,405	,089	,425	4,537	**,000**[*]	
X	Cons.	-,021	,601	--	-,035	,972	,903
	P	-,077	,374	-,075	-,207	,840	
	A	,911	,402	,857	2,268	**,044**[*]	
	SR	,208	,197	,173	1,058	,313	

Predictors: (Constant), reliability, Proximity, Attractiveness

Table 6 also asserts that the generation Z respondents' DC decision is significantly affected by source reliability and proximity sub-dimensions of SMIs. Namely, each increment in the perception of the source reliability contributes to DC decisions at the rate of %33, and the contribution value for proximity is %32. Meanwhile, SMIs sub-dimensions reveal %75,3 of the DC decision for generation Z participants. This variance explanation rate is %78,7 for the generation Y, and the DC decision of generation Y participants is significantly affected by the source reliability (β: 0,425) and attractiveness (β: 0,368) of SMIs. Finally, the DC decision of X-generation participants is affected by only the attractiveness sub-dimension of SMIs. In other words, each unit increment in the attractiveness of SMIs contributes to DC decision %85,7. Based on the findings presented above, it can be ended that social media influencers significantly and highly affect the destination choice of respondents. Therefore, it is assumed that shared vacation/holiday posts of SMIs could significantly determine destination choice decisions for all generations. Meanwhile, their effect could differ regarding generations when it is considered by SMIs sub-dimensions. For instance, the Z-generation respondents are unaffected by the attractiveness of SMIs. At the same time, the proximity and the source reliability do not significantly contribute to the DC

decisions for the generation X.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Regression analyses were implemented in this study to figure out how SMIs influenced DC. As a result, it is determined that SMIs have a significant impact on tourists' decisions regarding the destinations they visit through social media applications. A few studies in the literature (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Fotis et al.; Ravindran et al., 2018) also support this finding. In addition to those studies, Erol & Hassan (2013) concluded that sharings/posts on social media affect destination image positively and negatively. Additionally, they stated that the SMIs, who visited the relevant destination before, affect potential tourists' decisions about destination choice. Eryılmaz & Zengin (2014) revealed that tourists using social media applications shape their stays according to the shares of SMIs. They also inferred that SMIs significantly impact destination preference in general and all sub-dimensions (proximity, source reliability, attractiveness). Avcı & Bilgili (2020) revealed that tourists benefit from the internet and SMIs while planning their vacations and that traditional methods are less preferred now.

Another important finding of the study is that the effects of SMIs on destination choice significantly differ based on generation. The effect of SMIs is higher in generation Y compared to the others. Although the generation Z follows their entertainment activities, identities, role models, personal relationships, and events around them through social media platforms (Kırık & Altun, 2019), most do not have economic freedom and sufficient income to plan their vacations. Therefore, the SMIs' effect on DC is the lowest in this group. Again, generation Y, grown up with numerous economic difficulties, constitutes a considerable proportion of today's workforce. Generation Y, who have limited time to take vacations (Taş et al., 2017), is also accustomed to innovations in computers and the internet (Aydemir & Şentürk, 2016). The people of generation Y must make the right decisions in their limited time, thus they need to search for reliable sources. This assumption aligns with this study's finding that the SMIs' significant effect is mainly observed in the source reliability dimension.

Despite the intensity of the use of social media by Z and Y generations, generation X has begun to use the internet after a certain age (Prensky, 2001). Therefore, they learn the digital language later as digital immigrants and are beginners to social media usage (Wang et al., 2013). Hence, they prefer to communicate by telephone or face-to-face and choose traditional ways to reach knowledge (Toledo, 2007; Zur & Walker, 2011). In other words, they use social media with specific aims based on their interests. In line with this, it can be concluded that the X-generation members are only affected by SMIs' attractiveness within the context of DC decisions.

The overall analysis of the results illustrates that, particularly in terms of social media marketing, both destinations for tourists and businesses should take into account constantly evolving consumer decisions and purchasing trends. They also need to pay more effort into increasing the efficiency of advertising and promotions on social media platforms. Meanwhile, the promotion materials need to be diversified to changing characteristics of different generations. For instance, DMOs that want to attract Z-generation members must formulate SMIs-oriented guerrilla

marketing strategies and offer various activities for adrenalin seekers or young travelers. A destination promoted by a popular SMI will attract new tourists sooner or later if SMI shares the proper and prompt posts. Thus, SMIs constitute significant knowledge sources for holiday seekers, and tourism industry suppliers should be aware of this source to increase the tourism demand. For this reason, more academic research needs to be conducted by which it may reveal the importance of SMIs in tourism marketing. Although it was conducted using a limited sample size, this study can be regarded as groundbreaking in terms of its scope and findings.

This study's findings are noteworthy, however they are also restricted to the sample. To advance the theoretical and managerial aspects of social media influencers' impact on tourism product purchase, further studies must be undertaken. Future research in this area may combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies to produce more in-depth conclusions. Additionally, control variables could be added to research models, or comparative studies could be conducted with different groups.

The use of aggressive marketing is a must for social media marketing, which is a component of digital marketing. Thus, the tourism businesses should create efficient channels of communication with social media influencers and encourage them to cooperate on a win-win basis. Tourism business managers must always keep in mind that marketing strategies are changing rapidly, and virtual applications, including social media, characterize the new century. This unique and multifunctional marketing environment will serve various opportunities for tourism enterprises if a well-planned strategy can be practiced.

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