Abstract

Over the last few years, influencers have become the most rising and trending marketing method. All different kinds of industries, including the tourism and hospitality industry, have taken advantage of influencers' ability to spread awareness, to sell their products and services. All involved parties - influencers, brands, and followers - create a triangle and can benefit but also suffer from each other. Hence, careful consideration before accepting a collaboration is a crucial aspect to find suitable partners that lead to success. Both, brand as well as endorser, must share similar values and matching characteristics to be seen as reliable by potential customers. Previous researchers concluded that influencers' secret to success is connected to perceived honesty and trustworthiness, as they try to attract their followers on a more personal level compared to traditional marketing tools. This thesis, therefore, aims to answer whether travel influencers are perceived more/less trustworthy when they are collaborating with many different destinations. Additionally, it is intended to identify the impact of expertise on the level of trustworthiness of travel influencers.

By using a laboratory experiment it was possible to explore the role of three important constructs of this thesis (trustworthiness, expertise, and attitude), to test all hypotheses and answer the research questions. According to the outcomes, there are strong correlations between expertise and trustworthiness as well as attitude, trust, and booking intention. However, followers perceive travel influencers as more trustworthy if they promote destinations from different regions (e.g. Rome and New York) instead of focusing on one region. Hence, a variety of well-selected cooperation partners can lead to a higher level of trust among followers, as travel influencers seem to be more experienced and expertise.