



Audience Perceptions of Social Media Influencers' Role in Tourism Promotion in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates: A Comparative Survey Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This study examines self-reported following of social media influencers for tourism related information among surveyed respondents in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates and explores respondents' perceptions of influencers' promotional role across four tourism categories: desert tourism, coastal tourism, medical tourism, and event based tourism. **Methodology:** The study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to a purposive sample of 2,400 social media users, with 1,200 respondents from Jordan and 1,200 respondents from the United Arab Emirates. The study does not claim national representativeness. Instead, it analyzes patterns within the surveyed sample. **Results:** The findings show clear differences between the two country subsamples in the degree of following social media influencers for tourism related information. Respondents in the United Arab Emirates reported higher levels of following, while respondents in Jordan were more likely to report moderate engagement. The results also indicate that respondents perceived influencers as having a notable

promotional role in several tourism domains, particularly event based tourism and desert tourism, while coastal tourism and medical tourism showed greater variation across the two national contexts. **Conclusion:** Statistically significant differences were found in respondents' degree of following social media influencers according to gender, age, educational level, and nationality. The findings also indicate statistically significant positive associations between the degree of following influencers and respondents' perceptions of influencers' role in promoting desert, coastal, medical, and event based tourism. Because the study is cross sectional and based on self-reported perceptions, the findings should be interpreted as associations rather than evidence of causal effects or verified offline travel behavior.

Keywords: social media influencers; tourism promotion; audience perceptions; Jordan; United Arab Emirates; destination image.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Social media platforms have become integral to daily life in Arab societies, changing how people search for information, perceive the world, and make travel-related decisions (Taha et al., 2023). With the growing use of digital communication technology, the tourism industry and tourism marketers are beginning to realise the importance of using social media to reach a broader audience and present tourism products in a more interactive, personalised manner than traditional media channels (Ahmad, 2026; Al-Hazmi, 2021). Tourism marketers are now able to use both visual and narrative methods to promote destinations on these platforms, while users are exposed to many different types of content both through UGC and influencer-generated content that will impact their awareness of the attractions, sites, and travel options available to them.

Digital technologies have changed how tourism information is produced and distributed as well as consumed. Instead of only relying on official marketing campaigns and traditional forms of advertising, many tourists now use social media to research potential travel destinations, compare different experiences, and make decisions about which travel options to pursue. Therefore, social media has developed into a primary source for circulating tourism-related images, providing recommendations, and telling personal stories, thus influencing tourists' awareness of leisure destinations and the level of engagement created between users and these destinations (Ahmad et al., 2025a; Tahat, 2025). The shift toward using social media in tourism marketing has resulted in the promotion of tourism products being more immediate, visual, and participatory, as well as increasing the role that non-institutional digital actors play in influencing and shaping public perceptions about destinations.

Social media influencers have become one of the most significant types of actors in the digital tourism landscape, and their content is becoming an increasingly significant part of the overall tourism marketing strategy. Influencers have the ability to connect with a large population of different demographics, allowing them to showcase different types of destinations and experiences through a mix of visual stimulation, storytelling, and personal experiences. Through their documentation of the places they visit, their feelings toward those places, and what they feel a prospective visitor should do or see while there, influencers create the visual image of a destination as well as its perceived attractiveness to their followers (Al-Qutaitat, 2025). The ability of influencers to communicate this message to their followers comes from two basic principles: their level of visibility (of the influencer) and the perception of the authenticity and relatability of the material (content created by the influencer). As a result, influencer marketing (via social media) has become a major source of intermediating contemporary tourism marketing and destination branding in today's world (Al-Qutaitat, 2025; Skordoulis et al., 2025), and this becomes a critical part of the tourism marketing in the Arab tourism market.

With the rapid growth of social media in Arab countries and the fact that (social media) influences the ways that potential tourists view themselves and the destinations they want to visit, as such, social media influencers play a very important role as intermediary (between an influencer and a potential visitor) role in the tourism marketing in the Arab countries (Hussain et al., 2024; Suryana et al., 2024; Susanto et al., 2023). For example, an examination of Jordan and the UAE as both countries have a variety of similar tourism resources, and both have become increasingly effective at using digital tools to promote their destinations. However, Jordanian and Emirati tourism environments are markedly different in terms of geographic regions, cultural heritage, levels of development, and types of tourism offerings; Jordan is known for desert landscapes, beaches, and health and wellness tourism (Ahmad, Alderei et al., 2025; Alrahman, 2025), while the UAE is characterized by event tourism, luxury tourism, beaches, and high levels of digitality (in their branding of their tourism offerings). Two distinct nations have been presented here as a comparative overview of the modern use(s) of influencer/marketing to create further tourism growth potential within the Arab Region, along with how social media platforms have introduced new and innovative methods for society to interactively, participatively, and de-centrally engage with each other as well as through public channels. As a result, the participatory characteristics provided by these platforms have caused audiences to evolve from previously being passive consumers of material into fully participating contributors within these digital environments; therefore, they are now able to create and share their own opinions about experiences and promote themselves as a form of persuasion (Al-Jalabneh et al., 2023). In the context of tourism communication, this is especially critical because of how the way that potential tourists can obtain information on prospective tourism destinations has changed; they now receive information from sources beyond just the official promotional discourse (e.g. peer style narratives, and experience based content generated through social media influencers).

In addition, how media messages are created and presented has also changed with the advent of digital media, thus making visual immediacy, personalization, and emotional appeal more central to the communication effectiveness of media messages (Sharadga et al., 2023). These changes will help to provide reason for the significant impact that influencer generated tourism content has on the audience's attention level, destination image formation, and travel interest.

Recent academic research supports that through social media influencers play a key role in influencing travel intentions, enhancing awareness of travel destinations, and influencing the overall attitude toward tourism experiences. Social media influencer generated content contributes cognitively by providing information about tourist sites and activities available, affectively by generating curiosity and generating positive impressions of the destinations referenced, and behaviorally, as it motivates individuals to consider visiting the travel destinations referenced in social media influencer generated content (Ahmad, Abojodeh et al., 2025). Nonetheless, there is no homogenous response from the audience to the social media influencer as there are many different types of travel and travel will elicit different responses to different types of communications (i.e. visually rich, experience based, etc.) therefore it will be important to examine how audiences perceive the role of social media influencers for the various categories of travel rather than just treating all categories of tourism promotions as the same.

With this in mind, the current study examines the degree to which surveyed respondents in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates report following and consulting social media influencers for tourism related information and explores respondents' perceptions of influencers' promotional role across four tourism categories: desert tourism, coastal tourism, medical tourism, and event based tourism. Comparing the two Arab contexts provides further insight into digital tourism promotion and helps identify whether perceptions of influencer generated tourism content vary according to tourism category and national context. The study therefore contributes to understanding the communicative role of influencers in shaping tourism awareness, destination image, and audience engagement in Arab digital environments, while avoiding claims about actual travel behavior that were not directly measured.

Beyond the comparative country design, the present study contributes to the digital tourism communication literature along three theoretically meaningful lines. First, the study differentiates the influencer tourism relationship by tourism category rather than treating it as a single cognitive or affective construct, allowing the literature to locate where influencer mediated destination image formation operates strongly (visual-symbolic categories such as desert and event-based tourism) and where it operates more weakly (information-intensive categories such as medical tourism). Second, the comparative design across two Arab countries is also looked at in the present study in terms of a platform ecology, enabling a separation of country level platform effects from tourism-category effects that single-country studies cannot disambiguate. Third, by combining perceptual data with demographic stratification, the study identifies the cohort segments most receptive to influencer-generated tourism communication, supplying an empirical basis for the segmentation logic that prior descriptive scholarship in the region has not provided.

1.1. Literature review

Recently, academic scholars have gained more interest in the growing role of social media in communicating about tourism than ever before, especially in regard to how digital platforms (such as Instagram and YouTube) and influencers shape people's awareness of a destination, their desire to visit that destination, and their opinion(s) about a destination. Social media has become a primary way to visually represent, evaluate, and share destinations with an audience, all of which create new avenues for non-institutional actors (like influencers) to share information/advertise a destination using a combination of their own personal experiences, visually persuasive content and recommendations related to that destination.

In addition to these aspects, the literature suggests that social media-based influencer communication is increasingly important to promote tourism in Arab countries. However, the current body of literature in this area lacks uniformity in regard to the types of studies and the issues being investigated by researchers. One of the most relevant studies conducted in Jordan was conducted by Al-Qutaitat (2025), which found that approximately 50% of respondents used social media influencers to identify sources of information regarding Jordanian tourism. Additionally, they found that influencers have played a substantial role in promoting Jordanian tourism by introducing and providing symbolic and experiential values of various destinations. The findings from the study offer great value to this research because they show how the content created by influencers can serve as an important source of both information and persuasion among audiences according to Skordoulis et al (2025), how influential marketers (i.e., tourism influencers) were at promoting destinations depended, in part, upon their credibility and their ability to create a strong connection with their target audience (i.e., potential visitors). This point is particularly important in tourism marketing because most audiences will respond positively to content they perceive as authentic, experiential and socially relevant.

Other research conducted with other Arab countries has also demonstrated similar findings, as illustrated by the work of Tahat (2025), who revealed that social media platforms play an important role in promoting tourism while creating interest in the destination and prompting tourists to explore using digital content. In another study, Jahmi and Zuaimn (2022) found that respondents felt that social media platforms affect tourists' attitudes toward tourism-related services and assist them in utilising the experiences of others. This evidence is vital as it establishes that the digital aspect of destination marketing contributes to cognitive changes by providing information (e.g., knowledge) about places and things; affective changes through the creation of curiosity and emotional attachments; and behavioural changes by prompting audiences to make what might be considered a unique travel-related decision. Also, studies have shown that the impact of social media on tourism marketing goes far beyond the mere dissemination of information and instead reflects a broader form and structure of communication patterns and media influences. Al-Jalabneh et al. (2023) have argued that the advent of digital platforms has created a new form of audience activity associated with the distribution of

opinions, experiences and public discourse about travel. Particularly for influencers to promote tourism, their content is dependent on active audience participation through interaction, sharing, commenting and symbolic endorsement from their followers. Similarly, Sharadga et al. (2023) found that the advent of digital media has changed both the form and structure of modern media messages, creating a greater emphasis on the emotional, immediate, visual and audience-driven presentation of media content, which explains the effectiveness of influencer content for tourism promotion, as the attractiveness of a destination can often be depicted through imagery, narrative immersion and the framing of the experience.

In spite of this helpful contribution to literature, there remain significant limitations. Most studies conducted to date have been based on single-case country examples or focused on tourism sector-specific cases with no comparison across Arab countries. Additionally, prior studies have generalised about tourism promotional efforts without delineating specific types of tourism (i.e., desert, coastal, medical, or event-driven tourism). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to contribute to existing literature by comparing audiences' reliance on influencers and identifying how followers in Jordan and the UAE view influencers' role in promoting a distinct type of tourism.

Independent international scholarship further indicates that tourism influencer communication should be understood through credibility, perceived authenticity, parasocial interaction, endorser congruence, destination image, and the tourism decision process. Xu and Pratt (2018) show that social media influencers can function as endorsers in destination promotion, while Yilmazdoğan et al. (2021) demonstrate the relevance of source credibility and parasocial interaction for travel intention. Femenia-Serra and Gretzel (2020) further emphasize that destination management organizations increasingly use influencers as part of tourism communication strategies, and Pourazad et al. (2025) conceptualize travel social media influencers across different stages of the customer journey. These studies support the need to treat influencer tourism communication as a perception based and process oriented phenomenon rather than as direct evidence of verified travel behavior.

The contribution of the present manuscript therefore rests on three main areas that go beyond the comparative-country design alone: (a) the examination of the influencer tourism relationship into four differentiated tourism categories rather than treating the construct as a single variable across all tourism types; (b) the operationalisation of the comparative design as a platform-ecology contrast, enabling the separation of country-level platform effects from tourism-category effects; and (c) the documentation of demographic cohort segments whose perceptual patterns diverge systematically across the four tourism categories, supplying the segmentation evidence that prior single-country work has not provided.

1.2. Relationship with previous work and original contribution

This manuscript is part of a broader research agenda investigating social media influencers and their role in communicating tourism experiences within Arab contexts. It builds on Ahmad's (2026) research which focused exclusively on how social media influencers can promote tourism to Jordan, using a purposive sample of 400 respondents, and was limited to four types of tourism: cultural tourism, medical tourism, religious tourism, and recreational tourism.

While Ahmad's (2026) research established the foundation for the concept of influencer-mediated tourism communication and served to underscore the relevance of further investigating perceived promotional roles, the current study distinguishes itself from Ahmad's (2026) study in terms of design and approach. Specifically, while Ahmad's (2026) work focused on a single country (Jordan) and had a relatively small sample size (400 respondents) and limited comparisons of different countries, the current study will provide a detailed comparative study of two (2) countries (Jordan and the United Arab Emirates); a much larger sample size (2,400

respondents) from both countries; and a comparison of four (4) different types of tourism that are comparable between both countries: i.e., desert-based tourism; coastal-based tourism; medical tourism; and event-based tourism.

The current manuscript builds upon Ahmad's (2026) research by providing cross-country comparison using a new comparative country design (UAE and Jordan) using a large dataset; providing additional analysis of social media platforms that were not used in Ahmad's (2026) research; and providing different typologies of tourism compared to those used in Ahmad (2026) research. Furthermore, while Ahmad (2026) did not consider nationality as a significant comparative factor in their research, the current research design does take nationality into account and examines influencer-generated tourism communication within the context of the respective tourism environments of both Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. As such, while this study does not replicate Ahmad's (2026) research in terms of its previous research, it does add to Ahmad (2026) by comparing the results of both studies across different Arab countries to determine if the patterns observed in the previous study regarding the perceived promotional role of influencers vary across countries and types of tourism.

Although the present questionnaire was conceptually informed by earlier work on influencer mediated tourism communication, it was prepared for the comparative Jordanian and Emirati design and revised to reflect the tourism categories examined in this study. Desert tourism, coastal tourism, medical tourism, and event-based tourism were selected because they provide a more comparable cross-national typology for Jordan and the United Arab Emirates than the earlier Jordan only categories. These categories reflect tourism domains that are meaningfully present in both contexts, including desert landscapes, coastal destinations, health and wellness related tourism, and event-oriented tourism.

2. OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to examine how surveyed respondents in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates perceive the role of social media influencers in the promotion of tourism, and to determine whether these perceptions vary systematically across four selected tourism categories (desert tourism, coastal tourism, medical tourism, and event-based tourism) and across the two national subsamples.

The specific objectives of the study, derived directly from the two research hypotheses, are to :

- Measure the self-reported degree to which surveyed respondents in Jordan and the UAE follow social media influencers for tourism-related information and identify statistically significant variations of this degree according to gender, age, educational level, and nationality (mapped to H1).
- Assess and compare respondents' perceptions of the promotional role of social media influencers in each of the four selected tourism categories (desert, coastal, medical, and event-based) within and between the Jordanian and Emirati subsamples (mapped to H2, comparative dimension).
- Examine the statistical associations between the degree of following social media influencers and respondents' perceived promotional role of influencers in each of the four tourism categories, computed separately for each national subsample (mapped to H2, association dimension).

These objectives are operationalised through the four-point Likert instrument and because the design is descriptive and cross-sectional, the objectives concern perceptual and associational evidence rather than causal effects on verified travel behaviour.

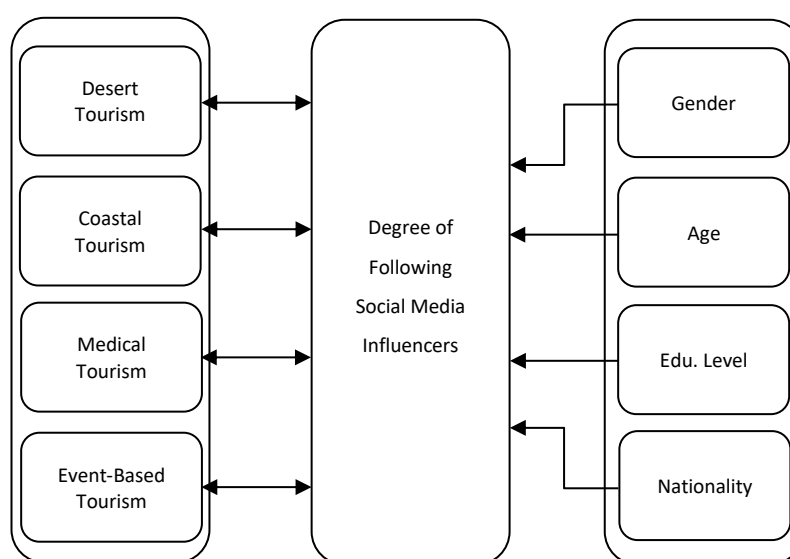
2.1. Hypotheses

H1. There are statistically significant differences in the degree of following social media influencers for tourism related information among surveyed respondents, according to gender, age, educational level, and nationality.

H2. There is a statistically significant association between the degree of following social media influencers and respondents' perceived role of influencers in promoting desert tourism, coastal tourism, medical tourism, and event based tourism in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates.

The following research model was constructed based on the above hypotheses (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research model



Source: Own elaboration.

2.2. Conceptual clarification

For the purposes of this study, the term “following” refers to respondents’ self-reported engagement with social media influencers who publish tourism related content. “Reliance” refers more specifically to the extent to which respondents consult such content as a source of tourism information. “Perceived promotional role” refers to respondents’ assessment of how influencer content contributes to awareness, interest, destination image, and perceived attractiveness of tourism categories. The study does not measure actual travel behavior, bookings, tourism expenditure, or verified conversion from online exposure to offline travel. Therefore, terms such as “effectiveness,” “impact,” and “influence” are used cautiously and only in relation to respondents’ perceptions or statistically observed associations.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive design, which is commonly used to achieve a precise understanding of events, phenomena, and observable patterns by examining their variables, components, elements, and characteristics (Ahmad et al., 2023). This may enable researchers to develop appropriate actions and recommendations in ways that enhance their positive outcomes or anticipate future development (Al Olaimat et al., 2021; Safori et al., 2025).

3.1. Sample and recruitment procedure

The study used a purposive nonprobability sample of 2,400 respondents, distributed equally between Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, with 1,200 valid responses from each country. Jordanian respondents were recruited from Jordan only, and Emirati respondents were recruited from the United Arab Emirates only. Nationality was self-reported by participants. Participants were eligible to take part if they were adults aged 18 years or above, active social media users, and individuals who follow or encounter tourism related content produced by social media influencers. The use of purposive sampling was appropriate because the study targeted respondents with direct exposure to influencer generated tourism content rather than the general population.

Data was obtained from a unique anonymous electronic questionnaire between 12 March 2026 and 25 April 2026. The online questionnaire URL was disseminated via WhatsApp groups, university student networks and contacts, personal connections and groups related to tourism, resulting in 50% of respondents from Jordan and 50% from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which is a percentage that was purposefully reached to support comparative analysis of the two-country subsamples. Participation was on a voluntary basis and no information about the subjects personally identifiable information was collected.

The non-probability purposive recruitment-based nature of the study precludes any interpretations concerning nationally representative estimates of all residents, tourists, or social media users within Jordan and the UAE. Rather, the findings provide information describing patterns in the respondents surveyed sample. Samples to achieve a pre-established target quota of 1,200 valid usable respondents from each country were collected until reached. Before producing the final dataset, the research team reviewed the responses for completeness, eligibility, duplication, carelessness, and response consistency patterns; any unusable response was excluded from the dataset. Thus, the final analyzable dataset included 2,400 valid usable responses. Because of the open access method of distributing the electronic survey URL and the inability to ascertain the total number of people who viewed the URL, it was impossible to calculate a conventional survey response rate.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1 below

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	51.1%
	Female	48.9%
Age	18 – 29 years	39.7%
	30 – 39 years	30.2%
	40 – 49 years	19.8%
	50 years and above	10.3%
Educational Level	High School or Less	18.6%
	Diploma Degree	24.9%
	Bachelor's Degree	41.3%
	Postgraduate Studies	15.2%
Nationality	Jordanian	50%
	Emirati	50%

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2. Measurement scales

The selection of a Likert scale with an even number of points (4) enables respondents to clearly present a position for each statement by requiring that they select one of four possible response categories (so that there is no treatment of responses as a neutral midpoint), and may allow for more sensitive data collection through converting responses to an interval scale for later statistical analysis (Joshi et al., 2015; Koo & Yang, 2025; Kusmaryono et al., 2022; Lozano et al., 2008). Coding of this interval response scale ranged from 0 to 3, with 0 being the lowest mark of agreement and 3 being the highest mark of agreement (Ahmad et al., 2026; Rokeman, 2024). To establish the level of each assessment/response, the maximum should be subtracted from the minimum value of the coding interval and then divided by the number of interpretative categories, resulting in the calculation of the interval length (e.g., $(3 - 0) / 3 = 1$). Therefore, mean scores would be classified as 0.00 - 1.00 (low), 1.01 - 2.00 (medium), and 2.01 - 3.00 (high).

3.3. Informed consent statement

The research project complied with the ethical standards and research integrity guidelines of Al Ain University. Data were collected using a structured anonymous online questionnaire on a voluntary basis from purposively sampled adult social media users in both Jordan and the UAE. The online questionnaire included a statement providing information about the research study purpose; an explanation regarding the voluntary nature of the respondent's participation; an explanation of confidentiality (anonymity); and a statement indicating that a respondent has the right to withdraw from the research project prior to submitting his or her research questionnaire response. The research design did not include collecting any personally identifiable information or sensitive personal data during any stage of the research study. The act of completing and submitting the online questionnaire was defined as implied knowledgeable consent. The research adhered to the institutional policies and ethical frameworks that provide an exemption from guaranteed formal review by an ethics committee for research studies that involve minimal risk of harm and do not include collection of sensitive personal data.

3.4. Validity and reliability

The study involved a group of professional panel members, who were employed as academics in Al Ain University's and Zarqa University's Media Faculty, in order to establish the validity of the instrument used in the study. The Instrument was compared to the research and the four tourism categories included in the survey to determine if the instrument appropriately addressed the overall study research problems and objectives, and that all dimensions of the study research problem were included in the measurements by the instrument. A thorough review of previous studies has also taken place to extract the research construct and items as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Development of the Questionnaire Instrument

Variable	Items	References
Desert tourism	Assisting in selecting desert tourist sites.	Nixon, 2024; Orranti-Ortega et al., 2025; Wong et al., 2026; Yusup et al., 2025.
	Contributing to improving the image of desert tourist sites.	
	Discovering unique experiences related to desert tourism.	
	Encouraging visits to desert destinations.	
	Presenting content that highlights the beauty of desert landscapes.	
	Providing accurate information about desert activities (e.g., prices, operating hours, etc.).	
	Raising awareness about desert tourism.	
	Showcasing distinctive experiences in desert tourism.	
Coastal Tourism	Guiding followers to discover lesser-known coastal tourist sites.	Adam, 2025; AS et al., 2025; Asath, 2026; Dzitse & Amoah, 2024; Suhud et al., 2025.
	Highlighting marine and water sports activities.	
	Identifying the best times to visit coastal areas.	
	Introducing coastal tourist destinations.	
	Presenting diverse content reflecting the beauty of beaches and coastal zones.	
	Promoting the beauty of nature in coastal regions.	
	Showcasing unique beach experiences that encourage visitation.	
Medical Tourism	Contributing to the discovery of therapeutic options that offer integrated treatment and wellness experiences.	Ahmad, 2026; Collins et al., 2019; Medhekar, 2018; Nikbin et al., 2019.
	Encouraging audiences to choose medical tourism destinations.	
	Enhancing public trust in the quality of available healthcare.	
	Highlighting the competence of doctors and medical specialists.	
	Introducing treatment centers and wellness resorts.	
	Presenting the features of treatment places and the cost of treatment.	
	Providing updated information about the latest available medical treatments.	
	Raising awareness of the health benefits of medical tourism.	
Event-based Tourism	Highlighting the diversity of entertainment options available.	Al-Khaldy et al., 2022; Chen & Lei, 2021; Fryer, 2020; Mariani & Giorgio, 2017.
	Introducing diverse entertainment activities and events.	
	Introducing entertainment venues and how to reach them.	
	Presenting content that encourages participation in entertainment activities.	
	Promoting entertainment events.	
	Providing information about activities and events (e.g., concerts, festivals).	
	Providing information about participation costs in entertainment activities.	
	Spreading awareness about entertainment culture and leisure destinations.	

Source: Own elaboration.

The panel was also asked to provide an assessment of the instrument's language to ensure there were no typographical or grammatical errors prior to using the instrument in the field. Upon completing these preliminary steps of the study, a reliability analysis of the instrument was conducted using SPSS. The reliability

analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which indicates the internal consistency of the instrument measurements. The reliability analysis included calculating correlation coefficients for each dimension of the instrument and the relationships among the measurement items within each dimension. The overall reliability coefficient for the study instrument was 96.4%, which is considered to be a very high reliability in the field of media research, where reliability coefficients of 70.0% or higher are typically viewed as acceptable. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for each dimension of the instrument are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. *Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for the Questionnaire Dimensions*

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
The role of social media influencers in promoting desert tourism in Jordan & the UAE.	93.1%
The role of social media influencers in promoting Coastal tourism in Jordan & the UAE.	92.8%
The role of social media influencers in promoting medical tourism in Jordan & the UAE.	90.3%
The role of social media influencers in promoting event-based tourism in Jordan & the UAE.	93.5%
Overall Instrument Reliability	96.4%

Source: Own elaboration.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Field study findings

- The Degree of Following Social Media Influencers

Table 4. *The extent to which respondents follow social media influencers*

Degree of Following	Jordan		UAE	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	312	26%	804	67%
Moderate	696	58%	222	18.5%
Low	192	16%	174	14.5%
Total	1200	100%	1200	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4 illustrate a noteworthy contrast in the prevalence that respondents in the two different nations pursue Social Media Influencers to obtain tourism information. For example, respondents from Jordan had a predominately medium-followed Pattern (58%) with few followers reporting to have a high follow rate (26%); however, only 16% of individuals reported a low level of following. In opposition, respondents residing in the UAE displayed a much greater inclination towards High Follower Rates (67% as opposed to 18.5% & 14.5%) when utilizing Social Media Influencers for tourism-related purposes.

The implications garnered from these results demonstrate that Influencer-based Tourism Communication (IBTC) is much more integrated into respondents' overall digital information-seeking behaviours within the UAE than in Jordan. Alternatively, Followers' usage of IBTC is much less frequent among those whose demonstrated behaviours were observed within Jordan rather than solely as accessories to their respective digital information-seeking behaviours. The variation may reflect differences found across each platform's respective culture, digitally-based consumption patterns, and maturity of tourism promotion through influencers within the respective nations.

- Social Media Platforms Used to Follow Influencers

Table 5. *Social media platforms used by respondents to follow influencers*

Social Media	Jordan			UAE		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
Snapchat	2.11	0.412	High	2.51	0.503	High
TikTok	0.92	0.471	Low	2.22	0.561	High
YouTube	1.24	0.436	Moderate	1.47	0.499	Moderate
X	1.08	0.496	Moderate	1.88	0.552	Moderate
Instagram	2.31	0.462	High	2.09	0.450	High
Facebook	2.47	0.499	High	0.86	0.413	Low
Telegram	1.48	0.505	Moderate	0.94	0.476	Low

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5 shows significant differences between the countries studied in what platforms are used to connect with tourism influencers. In Jordan, the three most common platforms were Facebook ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.499$), Instagram ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 0.462$), and Snapchat ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.412$), while in the UAE, the ranking was Snapchat first ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.503$), TikTok second ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 0.561$), and Instagram last ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 0.450$). Therefore, these findings suggest that influencer driven tourism promotional material may not exist as a uniformized platform ecology across Arab settings. This can be substantiated by the finding that tourism promotion within Jordan relies (at least in greater proportion) upon traditional social networking environments (such as Facebook and Instagram) than do the UAE, whose pattern demonstrates a propensity for the use of the more visual, immediate and fast moving platforms of Snapchat and TikTok. Therefore, this lends credence to the assertion of the importance of platform resources as a contributor to successful tourism communication, especially where destination marketing needs to be visual as well as spontaneous and short-term in nature.

- Desert Tourism

Table 6. *The role of social media influencers in promoting desert tourism in Jordan & the UAE*

Items	Jordan			UAE		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
Presenting content that highlights the beauty of desert landscapes.	2.38	0.502	High	2.33	0.528	High
Contributing to improving the image of desert tourist sites.	2.36	0.491	High	2.31	0.535	High
Raising awareness about desert tourism.	2.27	0.606	High	2.30	0.543	High
Showcasing distinctive experiences in desert tourism.	2.22	0.575	High	1.85	0.550	Moderate
Encouraging visits to desert destinations.	2.17	0.648	High	2.29	0.544	High
Discovering unique experiences related to desert tourism.	2.06	0.665	High	2.29	0.534	High
Assisting in selecting desert tourist sites.	1.89	0.567	Moderate	1.97	0.550	Moderate
Providing accurate information about desert activities (e.g., prices, operating hours, etc.).	1.78	0.563	Moderate	1.67	0.571	Moderate
Overall	2.14	0.577	High	2.13	0.544	High

Source: Own elaboration.

As demonstrated in Table 6, there was a strong endorsement for social media influencers as active participants in promoting tourism to the deserts of both countries; overall means were almost equal with $M=2.14$ in Jordan and $M=2.13$ in the UAE. In both countries, the highest-rated items were related to the visual and symbolic characteristics of desert environments, such as how beautiful deserts are, and how they could help create a positive perception of tourists about the areas surrounding those destinations. Conversely, functions with a more practical focus such as helping potential tourists select where to go and providing accurate logistical details regarding activities available in the desert received much lower scores than items rated as being artistic.

The data suggest that influencer marketers are perceived by respondents as most useful when they provide aesthetically inspiring representations of desert tourism through visual description and experiential storytelling. Additionally, because lower ratings were assigned to practical items, influencers appear to be viewed more as sources of inspiration than as sources of complete travel related information. This supports previous research showing that visual representations of destinations may contribute to tourism interest and destination image formation (Ahmad, Abojodeh et al., 2025).

- Coastal Tourism

Table 7. *The role of social media influencers in promoting coastal tourism in Jordan & the UAE*

Items	Jordan			UAE		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
Introducing coastal tourist destinations.	2.24	0.446	High	2.42	0.494	High
Identifying the best times to visit coastal areas.	2.19	0.466	High	2.33	0.470	High
Promoting the beauty of nature in coastal regions.	2.14	0.487	High	1.86	0.545	Moderate
Showcasing unique beach experiences that encourage visitation.	2.06	0.495	High	2.15	0.530	High
Presenting diverse content reflecting the beauty of beaches and coastal zones.	1.95	0.496	Moderate	2.43	0.509	High
Guiding followers to discover lesser-known coastal tourist sites.	1.70	0.499	Moderate	1.82	0.578	Moderate
Highlighting marine and water sports activities.	1.54	0.520	Moderate	1.89	0.626	Moderate
Overall	1.97	0.487	Moderate	2.13	0.536	High

Source: Own elaboration.

As reported in Table 7, influencer marketing of coastal tourism is more positively reviewed in Terms of Universal Acceptance, per ratings of high (2.13) and moderate (1.97) for the UAE and Jordan respectively. In the UAE, highest mean scores were for providing a variety of content on beach/coastal areas, promoting coastline destinations, and when the best time for visiting should be. In Jordan, the highest mean score was provided for the same three elements, while the two lowest scores were for promoting beach/coastal zone activities and lesser-known tourist destinations.

These results suggest that influencer marketing is perceived as having a more salient promotional role in coastal tourism at destinations where beaches, water based recreation, and lifestyle oriented tourism are already well established. Higher ratings for coastal tourism influencer marketing in the UAE may indicate a more developed framework of visual branding for coastal tourism through influencer generated content. Finally, the lower mean scores for lesser known coastal tourism destinations and coastal tourism activities indicate that influencer content tends to promote publicly recognized coastal locations rather than a broader variety of coastal tourism offerings.

- Medical Tourism

Table 8. *The role of social media influencers in promoting medical tourism in Jordan & the UAE*

Items	Jordan			UAE		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
Introducing treatment centers and wellness resorts.	2.26	0.438	High	2.46	0.499	High
Raising awareness of the health benefits of medical tourism.	2.11	0.541	High	2.31	0.463	High
Enhancing public trust in the quality of available healthcare.	2.08	0.480	High	2.14	0.496	High
Contributing to the discovery of therapeutic options that offer integrated treatment and wellness experiences.	1.89	0.491	Moderate	2.25	0.433	High
Encouraging audiences to choose medical tourism destinations.	1.70	0.607	Moderate	1.80	0.518	Moderate
Highlighting the competence of doctors and medical specialists.	1.47	0.577	Moderate	1.74	0.547	Moderate
Presenting the features of treatment places and the cost of treatment.	1.25	0.443	Moderate	1.60	0.492	Moderate
Providing updated information about the latest available medical treatments.	0.98	0.471	Low	1.55	0.498	Moderate
Overall	1.72	0.506	Moderate	1.98	0.493	Moderate

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 8 indicates that the evaluations of medical tourism were rated lowest of the four typologies of tourism by participants in both the UAE and Jordan, and the UAE rendered a mean above the moderate range of evaluation ($M = 1.98$), while Jordan registered a mean in the moderate range at ($M = 1.72$). The meaning of this research as a whole yielded an overall moderate range mean for this typology. All measures in both countries resulted in many items receiving a value in the moderate range although many of the same items received their strongest evaluations in both locations. These evaluation results indicate that influencer communications in the context of medical tourism, while serving a generally promoting and imagery-building role, may not use the influencer medium to effectively communicate specific, technical, or highly detailed information regarding the sector. Higher evaluation scores being recorded from UAE indicate that wellness and premium health service sectors have received greater institutionalisation of the two countries, which adds to their effectiveness in being integrated with the overall marketing/branding programs of the UAE as a destination than what continues to be found within Jordan.

- Event-Based Tourism

Table 9. *The role of social media influencers in promoting event-based tourism in Jordan & the UAE*

Items	Jordan			UAE		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
Promoting entertainment events.	2.28	0.481	High	2.43	0.495	High
Providing information about activities and events (e.g., concerts, festivals).	2.19	0.466	High	2.38	0.485	High
Introducing diverse entertainment activities and events.	2.10	0.419	High	2.37	0.483	High
Introducing entertainment venues and how to reach them.	2.07	0.476	High	2.36	0.480	High
Spreading awareness about entertainment culture and leisure destinations.	2.03	0.431	High	2.33	0.470	High
Highlighting the diversity of entertainment options available.	1.94	0.520	Moderate	2.31	0.472	High
Presenting content that encourages participation in entertainment activities.	1.87	0.573	Moderate	2.30	0.474	High
Providing information about participation costs in entertainment activities.	1.76	0.491	Moderate	2.21	0.544	High
Overall	2.03	0.482	High	2.34	0.488	High

Source: Own elaboration.

According to Table 9, event based tourism was the leading type of tourism in the UAE and among the highest areas of perceived influencer promotional role in the study. The overall mean for the UAE was higher than the mean for Jordan; therefore, UAE respondents reported higher event based tourism ratings than Jordanian respondents. The highest rated areas in both countries were entertainment events and activities such as concerts or festivals. In Jordan, most areas rated as moderate were related to participation costs and encouraging people to participate.

The results of this research are important analytically because event-based tourism is an ideal fit for influencer marketing. Events produce time-sensitive content that is visually appealing and can be shared through social media, making them a perfect fit for real-time marketing on platforms like Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok. The UAE had a higher event-based tourism rating than Jordan likely reflects the importance of the UAE's tourism strategy in promoting large-scale events as a part of its overall tourism strategy

4.2. Hypotheses Testing Results

H1. There are statistically significant differences in the degree of following social media influencers for tourism related information among surveyed respondents, according to gender, age, educational level, and nationality.

Table 10. *Results of testing the first hypothesis*

Variable	Category	M	SD	Test	df	t / F	p
Gender	Male	2.26	0.720	T-Test	2398	-3.430-	0.001
	Female	2.36	0.719		2393.563		
Age	18 - 29 years	2.76	0.429	ANOVA	3	37.618	0.000
	30 – 39 years	2.30	0.497		2396		
	40 – 49 years	2.26	0.721		Total:		
	50 years and above	2.24	0.753		2399		
Educational Level	High School or Less	2.45	0.637	ANOVA	3	36.735	0.000
	Diploma Degree	2.37	0.571		2396		
	Bachelor's Degree	2.13	0.878		Total:		
	Postgraduate Studies	2.09	0.843		2399		
Nationality	Jordanian	2.10	0.641	T-Test	2398	-15.104-	0.000
	Emirati	2.53	0.735		2354.280		

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 11. *LSD Post Hoc Test Results for the First Hypothesis by Age and Educational Level*

Variable	Variable (I)	Category (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
Age	18 - 29 years	30 – 39 years	0.453*	0.000
		40 – 49 years	0.503*	0.000
		50 years and above	0.514*	0.000
Educational Level	High School or Less	Diploma Degree	0.084*	0.000
		Bachelor's Degree	0.315*	0.022
		Postgraduate Studies	0.364*	0.000

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: Own elaboration.

Significant differences were observed in social media influencer followers, based on gender, age, educational level, and nationality (see Table 10 and Table 11). Respondents who were grouped by gender had a higher level of follower-intensity on average compared to male respondents. The highest follower-intensity level for young respondents (aged 18-29) was identified, while the lowest level of follower-intensity was observed among the oldest age group. Respondents with lower levels of education reported higher levels of follower-intensity as

compared to respondents with postgraduate education. There is also a significant difference between nationalities in that Emirati respondents had a greater level of follower-intensity than other nationalities.

The demographic/Cultural factors play a significant role in the levels of follower-intensity. Young audiences tend to be more highly integrated into platform-based communication environments than older audiences and additionally, the nationality difference is one aspect of the larger context within which the study occurred. It supports what was previously concluded in that influencer centered tourism communication appears to be more embedded in UAE than Jordan.

H2. There is a statistically significant association between the degree of following social media influencers and respondents' perceived role of influencers in promoting desert tourism, coastal tourism, medical tourism, and event based tourism in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates.

Table 12. *Results of testing the second hypothesis*

Degree of Following Social Media Influencers			
		Jordan	UAE
Desert tourism	Pearson Correlation	0.481	0.745
	<i>p</i>	0.000	0.000
Coastal tourism	Pearson Correlation	0.581	0.689
	<i>p</i>	0.000	0.000
Medical tourism	Pearson Correlation	0.671	0.418
	<i>p</i>	0.000	0.000
Event-based tourism	Pearson Correlation	0.495	0.671
	<i>p</i>	0.000	0.000

Source: Own elaboration.

The positive and statistically significant correlations presented in Table 12 between the degree of following social media influencers and their perceived role in promoting all four tourism patterns relate to each country's specific data. In the case of Jordan, the correlation coefficients of highest magnitude (the strongest) were observed for medical tourism ($r = 0.671$) and coastal tourism ($r = 0.581$). In the case of the UAE, the correlation coefficients were again highest for desert tourism ($r = 0.745$), followed by coastal tourism ($r = 0.689$) and event-based tourism ($r = 0.671$).

The results support Hypothesis 2 by suggesting that greater engagement with influencer generated content is associated with stronger perceptions of influencers' promotional role in tourism. However, these correlations should be interpreted as associations rather than causal evidence. Furthermore, the differences in the strength of correlations across countries indicate that respondents' perceptions of influencer tourism communication vary according to the type of tourism being promoted and the broader tourism ecosystem in which each country operates.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. DISCUSSION

The following discussion addresses the four hypotheses in light of the present findings, integrates them with the prior literature on influencer-mediated tourism communication, and identifies the boundary conditions under which the results should be generalised. Rather than restating the descriptive results, each sub-section interprets a single analytical pattern by triangulating the present evidence with comparable international studies, including those that yield divergent findings.

5.1.1. Tourism-category asymmetry and the visual-information divide

The present data indicate that respondents in both Jordan and the UAE ascribe a stronger perceived promotional role to social media influencers in visually driven tourism categories, desert (overall $M = 2.14$ in Jordan and $M = 2.13$ in the UAE) and event-based tourism ($M = 2.03$ in Jordan and $M = 2.34$ in the UAE), than in information-intensive categories such as medical tourism ($M = 1.72$ in Jordan, $M = 1.98$ in the UAE). This asymmetry aligns with a sizeable body of work treating influencers as destination endorsers whose persuasive reach is conditional on the fit between the format of the influencer message and the type of destination being communicated. Xu and Pratt (2018) found in a Chinese Generation Y sample that destination influencer marketing is most effective where the tourism product is visually expressive and experiential, with endorser–destination congruence acting as a multiplier; Yılmazdoğan et al. (2021) demonstrated on an Instagram sample that the trustworthiness and expertise sub-dimensions of source credibility, mediated through parasocial interaction, significantly predict travel intention, with the relationship operating through the affective bond that visual storytelling forges. Similarly, Marković et al. (2022) report that trustworthiness and expertise, the two credibility dimensions most central to medical treatment decisions, positively influence destination image only when the destination is congruent with the celebrity's domain authority, a congruence that lifestyle and travel influencers typically do not satisfy in the medical domain. The lower medical-tourism ratings observed in the present study are therefore consistent with, and illuminate, this match-up hypothesis: respondents appear to recognise that lifestyle-oriented influencer content can lift awareness of resorts and treatment centres but cannot substitute for institutional quality cues (accreditation, specialist credentials, transparent pricing) that are decisive when medical decisions are involved.

Importantly, the visual–informational divide observed here is not a uniform pattern in the literature. Omeish et al. (2024) in a Jordan-only SEM study, reported that influencer marketing content significantly enhances destination image and intention to visit across multiple categories within a single-country sample, without the cross-category differentiation that we observe. The present comparative-category design therefore refines this earlier single-country observation by showing that the promotional role of influencers is not homogeneous, but is categorically conditional: visual-symbolic categories draw on parasocial and aspirational mechanisms (Lusianingrum et al., 2024; Yuan & Lou, 2020), whereas information-intensive categories require cues that influencers alone are not credentialed to provide.

5.1.2. Platform ecology and cross-country differences

The present results show that the tourism-influencer communication process does not operate on a single platform ecology. Jordanian respondents reported their top three platforms as Facebook ($M = 2.47$), Instagram ($M = 2.31$) and Snapchat ($M = 2.11$), while Emirati respondents reported Snapchat ($M = 2.51$), TikTok ($M = 2.22$) and Instagram ($M = 2.09$). This platform asymmetry is consistent with cross-country evidence on the differing digital ecosystems of MENA states: Livingstone et al. (2019) and Salem (2017) document that high-income Gulf states substantially outpace lower-middle-income Levant states on both internet and social media penetration, with a corresponding over-representation of short-form video consumption in the Gulf. Ghanem and Hamid (2020) corroborate this pattern at the marketing level, showing that UAE-based small and medium enterprises increasingly allocate social-media spend to visual and short-form channels, while Jordan's tourism industry, as Khalayleh and Al-Hawary (2022) note, still draws significantly on more established network-based platforms.

The theoretical implication is that the same influencer content disseminated on Facebook versus TikTok does not produce identical tourism-perception effects: short-form video platforms privilege speed, novelty and event-driven content, which aligns with the high Emirati ratings observed in event-based tourism, whereas more curated and network-based platforms privilege lifestyle scenery and destination imagery, which aligns with the relatively stronger Jordanian ratings in desert tourism where symbolic landscapes dominate the

message. These results therefore add empirical weight to the argument by Femenia-Serra and Gretzel (2020) and Pourazad et al. (2025) that destination managers must treat platform choice not as a tactical afterthought but as a structural determinant of influencer-campaign reach. However, the present study did not measure platform-specific consumption intensity as a moderating variable; nor did it assess whether respondents follow the same influencer on multiple platforms, which is the mechanism through which platform ecology actually shapes perception. The country-level platform findings reported in Table 5 should therefore be read as the observable surface of an unmeasured confound, not as a tested causal pathway.

5.1.3. Audience segmentation and demographic variation

The demographic findings of the present study indicate a monotonically decreasing gradient of influencer reliance by age (18–29: $M = 2.76$; 50+: $M = 2.24$) and a parallel, though not strictly monotonic, gradient by educational level (High School or Less: $M = 2.45$; Postgraduate: $M = 2.09$). Nationality interactions were also pronounced, with Emirati respondents showing substantially higher follower-intensity than Jordanian respondents ($M = 2.53$ vs. $M = 2.10$; $t = -15.104$, $p < 0.001$). Each of these patterns is interpretable in light of prior literature, but the interpretation is not unidirectional.

On age, the result is consistent with repeated evidence that younger cohorts display higher platform-mediated travel-decision dependency (Dinc, 2024; Saini et al., 2023). Dinc specifically shows that parasocial interaction with influencers is a substantive driver of behavioural intentions among younger travellers, with credibility of the endorser operating as the antecedent of the parasocial bond rather than as a direct predictor of intention. The age gradient we observe is consistent with this causal sequence.

On education, however, the present pattern diverges from the implicit intuition of the source-credibility literature that more educated audiences would weight influencer endorsements more heavily because they can better evaluate them. Marković et al. (2022) show that the destination-image effect of endorsers increases monotonically with the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of the source, which would predict the opposite gradient. We interpret the observed pattern, cautiously, as a consumption-structure effect rather than a credibility-evaluation effect: respondents with higher educational attainment are also more likely to be in higher income brackets and to rely more on institutional information channels (travel agencies, specialised websites, peer-reviewed reviews), so that influencer content, which is publicly and freely accessible, becomes comparatively less central in their travel-information repertoire. The cross-country education gradient is also confounded with the cross-country income gradient, which the present study did not measure (see Section Limitations).

On nationality, the gap is consistent with the platform-ecology reading advanced in 5.2 and with the SNS-maturity limitation discussed in Limitations. It is also consistent with Hussain et al. (2024), who report that Arabian Gulf destinations, including the UAE, collectively generate over 158 million views on YouTube for tourism content and attract tourist inflows in proportion to that reach. Our results suggest that this platform mediated reach translates, at the audience level, into a measurable difference in self-reported follower dependence.

5.1.4. Perceived promotional role, association, and practical implications

The correlation analysis presented in Table 12 indicates that, in each national subsample, the degree of following influencers is positively and significantly associated with respondents' perceived promotional role of influencers across all four tourism categories (Jordan correlations $r = 0.481$ – 0.671 ; UAE correlations $r = 0.418$ – 0.745 ; all $p < 0.001$). The general pattern is broadly consistent with prior literature documenting a positive

relationship between social media engagement and pro-tourism attitude formation (Hussain et al., 2024; Omeish et al., 2024; Saini et al., 2023).

Several specific features of the present correlation matrix warrant interpretation. First, the strongest correlation in the UAE subsample appears for desert tourism ($r = 0.745$), whereas in the Jordanian subsample the strongest correlation appears for medical tourism ($r = 0.671$). The UAE finding is consistent with the platform-ecology profile of the country, short-form video content that excels at conveying the symbolic-visual layers of desert landscapes and align with Shang and Luo's (2021) finding that visual-symbolic congruence between endorser and destination is a strong antecedent of place attachment in destination endorser studies. The Jordanian finding on medical tourism is more surprising and should not be over-interpreted: the cross-sectional, single-time-point design of the present study cannot distinguish whether stronger follower-intensity causes the higher perceived promotional role, or whether respondents with pre-existing medical tourism interest (e.g., family caregivers, healthcare-sector employees) seek out influencer content on that topic at a higher rate. This interpretive ambiguity is consistent with cautions raised by Zheng et al. (2022) that the parasocial-channel from influencer content to visit intention is itself mediated by destination attitude and is not exhaustively captured by a single correlation coefficient.

Second, the weakest correlation in the UAE subsample is observed for medical tourism ($r = 0.418$), which, combined with the lowest mean perception score in this category, reinforces the visual-informational reading of 5.1 at the associational level: in the UAE, even respondents who follow influencers at high rates do not translate that followership into a heightened perception of influencers as promoters of medical tourism, because institutional cues dominate their evaluation of medical destinations. By contrast, Jordanian respondents show a relatively strong correlation in medical tourism, indicating that for those who do follow influencers in this subsample, the influencer channel carries more weight. This contrast adds nuance to Femenia-Serra and Gretzel's (2020) observation that destination-management organisations should not deploy influencer campaigns uniformly; the present data suggest that campaign fit must be calibrated to both the country platform ecology and the category-specific credibility demand.

Third, the present study does not, and cannot, demonstrate that influencer content causes measurable changes in travel behaviour, bookings, expenditure or destination visits. As Yu et al. (2025) emphasise in the parallel context of virtual influencers, source credibility and emotional engagement translate into purchase intentions through parasocial relationships, but the conversion from purchase intention to actual purchase remains conditional on factors outside the influencer channel. The present design therefore positions its contribution as evidence about perceived promotional role and its associations, not as evidence of verified behavioural conversion.

5.1.5. Theoretical contributions and boundary conditions

Taken together, the discussion advances three theoretical contributions. First, by differentiating the influencer-tourism relationship across four tourism categories the present work operationalises Saini et al. (2023) call for category-specific theorising of influencer-mediated destination communication. Second, the comparative Jordan-UAE design, when interpreted together with the platform-ecology and SNS-maturity limitations now made explicit, contributes methodologically to the design of future cross-country influencer studies by demonstrating which confounders must be measured for a clean country effect to be identified. Third, the demographic and correlation patterns reported advance the segmentation literature, reviewed in John and Supramaniam (2026) and Polat et al. (2024), by showing where in the MENA audience landscape influencer marketing is empirically defensible as a destination communication strategy, and where it is not.

5.2. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The purpose of this research was to investigate how frequently individuals use social media to follow/seek out information about tourism from "Influencers," and what they believe the overall impact social media Influencers have in reference to each of the identified types of tourism (Desert, Coastal, Medical, and Events); across both Jordan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Results indicated there was a greater number of individuals in the UAE that used Influencers to find out about tourism, whereas Jordanian respondents reported there were fewer numbers of individuals that found Influencers for tourism-related information (e.g. having moderate interactions with Influencers). Descriptors evaluating whether Influencers play any role in the promotion of social media tourism indicate that Respondents perceived Influencers had the most significant impact in relation to Event-Based and Desert tourism categories. Additionally, responses regarding the positive correlation between frequency of utilizing Influencers and perceived value of Influencers in promoting tourism categories were statistically significant based on comparison of age, educational level, gender and nationality.

These findings suggest that influencer generated tourism content may contribute to awareness, interest, and perceived destination attractiveness among surveyed respondents. However, because the study is based on cross sectional self-reported survey data, the results should be interpreted as perceptual and associational rather than causal. The study does not demonstrate that influencer content produces actual travel behavior or verified movement from online exposure to offline tourism activity.

The contribution of the study lies in its comparative focus on Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, its larger sample size, and its analysis of different tourism categories across two Arab tourism contexts. By clarifying how surveyed respondents perceive influencer roles across national and tourism category differences, the study contributes to the literature on digital tourism communication, influencer marketing, and destination promotion in Arab contexts.

5.3. LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study used a purposive nonprobability sample, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to all social media users or tourists in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. The second limitation is that the data collected for the study are based on self-reported data; therefore, recall bias, social desirability bias, and respondents' own interpretations of the influencer content they viewed may all play a role in how accurate their perception of influencer content is. The third limitation is that the use of a cross sectional design only allows one to determine associations at one point in time and does not allow for the establishment of causal relationships; therefore, the findings of this study cannot be interpreted as indicative of how influencer content leads to a specific tourism behavior, booking, visit or spend. Fourth, the survey instrument did not include monthly household income, and Table 1 therefore retains only gender, age, educational level, and nationality. Income was omitted at the design stage to keep respondent cognitive load within the threshold that the present 2,400 respondent four-point Likert architecture is calibrated to, and because the documented income distribution gap between Jordan and the United Arab Emirates would have required a purchasing-power-parity alignment procedure that lies outside the methodological scope of the present comparative design. Monthly household income, resolved into PPP-aligned ordinal bands and reported as a fifth demographic axis alongside the four retained axes, is accordingly specified as a methodological priority for subsequent replications. In future research, these limitations may be addressed through the use of probability sampling, longitudinal designs, platform analytics, experimental exposure studies, and behavioural measures of tourism decision making.

A fifth methodological boundary concerns the underlying difference in social-networking-site adoption maturity between the two compared countries. The United Arab Emirates is consistently positioned among the world's most digitally connected nations, Livingstone et al. (2019) place the UAE, alongside Qatar and Bahrain, at the top of global rankings for smartphone penetration and social media adoption and Ghanem and Hamid (2020) described the UAE as first among Middle Eastern countries in digital and Internet adoption matching the digital frontier economies. Jordan, by contrast, occupies a more intermediate position on these indicators while its social media user base has expanded rapidly. The ICT data place it below the Gulf states on both internet penetration and per-capita SNS engagement (Jadallah & Khasawneh, 2023; Salem, 2017). This asymmetry is consistent with what we observed descriptively in table 4, where the proportion of respondents classified as "high" followers was 26% in Jordan, compared with 67% in the UAE.

Because the present study did not control for SNS adoption maturity as an Independent variable, the country-level differences observed across Tables 4–9 cannot be unambiguously attributed to differences in influencer content, perceived credibility, parasocial interaction, or tourism-category salience: a non-trivial share of the variation may instead be driven by the differential intensity, duration, and breadth of social media exposure available to each subsample. Furthermore, the comparative design includes only one country per digital-maturity tier, and does not include a second country within each tier to allow the maturity effect to be partialled out from the country effect. Future replications should operationalise SNS maturity as a measured covariate (e.g., country-level penetration rates, average weekly SNS exposure hours, platform repertoire breadth) and, ideally, include at least two comparator countries within each maturity stratum so that the country-specific and maturity-specific variance components can be separated. This boundary should be considered when generalising the present findings beyond the Jordan–UAE pairing.

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