

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' CREDIBILITY ON THE TRAVEL DECISION MAKING OF DOMESTIC TOURISTS IN KENYA

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Article History

Received: 11.06.2025

Accepted: 17.07.2025

Published: 31.07.2025

Abstract: Social media has, over the past few decades, become a powerful communication platform capable of influencing consumer decision-making at various levels. The growth of social media has led to the emergence of high profile individuals with huge followings and capability to influence users on critical matters in key topical areas and business sectors. Many tourism and tourism-related business are increasingly using these individuals, known as social media influencers, to attract clients to their establishments. This study aimed to explore the influence of the credibility of social media influencers on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. It focused on social media influencers and how they affect the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya to determine whether or not they lead to purchase or non-purchase of holidays within the country. The study targeted domestic tourists who follow social media influencers in Nairobi and Kiambu counties. Questionnaires were used to collect data from a sample of 399 respondents. The study found a moderate relationship between information source credibility and the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The study further established that social media was a dominant force with profound impact on travel decisions. The study therefore recommends that the tourism sector leverage the use of credible social media influencers in their marketing campaigns. Moreover, tourism marketers and advertisers should incorporate credibility indicators into their marketing assessment processes. Evaluating and monitoring the credibility of information sources should be an integral part of measuring marketing effectiveness.

Keywords: Social media influencer, information source, credibility, decision-making, domestic tourists, Kenya.

Cite this article:

Mohamed, A. Z., Mberia, H. K., Bosire, J. T., (2025). SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' CREDIBILITY ON THE TRAVEL DECISION MAKING OF DOMESTIC TOURISTS IN KENYA. *ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(7), 68-75.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background Information and Literature Review

Tourism industry is one of the fastest growing business sectors in the world (UNWTO, 2016). Many definitions of tourism exist, 'almost as many definitions of tourism as there are organizations operating within the field or scholars who study it' McDonald, et al (2019). The tourism sector encompasses other industries such as accommodation and lodging, transport, attractions and travel agencies, making tourism be seen as a service and not a product (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007).

Tourism is one of the most significant economic activities in Kenya, contributing massively to the country's economy (Akuno, Otieno, Mwangi & Bichanga, 2015). In 2018 alone, the tourism industry accounted for 9% of the total number of the jobs created in the country (Sindiga, 2018). Additionally, the sector contributes to more than 21% of the national income in each financial year, positioning it as one of the most significant contributors to the Gross Domestic Product of the country (Njoya & Seetaram, 2018). Local tourism has also grown tremendously. According to the Tourism Sector Performance Report (2018), domestic bed nights for the year 2018 were estimated at 3,974,243, a 9.03% increase over the 2017 numbers, with the figure predicted to grow to 4,955,800 in 2019.

The growth of the tourism industry in Kenya has been promoted in the recent times through the use of the social media and social media influencers in creating awareness on the various aspects of tourism in the country (Otieno, 2014; Arika & Moronge, 2017). Facebook, a major social networking site, is the second highest social media platform after WhatsApp, with more than 7.2 million users (Bett & Makewa, 2018). The number of Facebook users account for more than 58% of the total number of people that use the social media platforms in Kenya. YouTube and Instagram are equally popular in the country, with more than 8 million and 4 million subscribers respectively (Githinji, 2018). Instagram is particularly influential, as it focuses on photo sharing, which is effective for tourism promotion, and has over a billion active users worldwide (Statista, 2020; Instagram, 2020). Social media sites offer travel destinations and business owners an online presence and direct connection with tourists through their business accounts, while also giving tourists an opportunity to express their experiences and opinions on an interactive platform (The Voice of Travellers, 2018; Narangajavana et al, 2017). Most social media platforms are free and are therefore cost-effective (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013). Additionally, social media is effective in marketing of tourism industry because of its global reach (Hudson & Thal, 2013).

When making purchase decisions, consumers are influenced by several interpersonal and non-personal factors (Kazmi & Batra, 2008). These include individual culture, sub-culture, social class and reference groups. Schiffman et al. (2014) defined reference groups as 'social role models who affect consumer behaviour. Traditional reference groups include family, friends, colleagues and club members (Kazmi & Batra, 2008). For a long time, celebrities have become a key part of reference groups used in advertising and promotion (McCracken, 1989). Their use has steadily increased over the past years, as marketers acknowledge their power in influencing consumer-purchasing decisions (Zipporah & Mberia, 2014). The increased use and popularity of social media has led to development of high profile individuals, known as social media influencers, who enjoy significant following and are capable of influencing media users on key matters in given industries (Abidin, 2016). Practitioners in the industry continually seek to make use the social media influencers on account of the brand they have created over time and the reach they command with the audiences.

1.2 Information Source Credibility

There are two dimensions of information source credibility, namely, expertise and trustworthiness (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; O'Keefe, 2002). According to Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953), expertise is the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions. Trustworthiness, according to Shimp (2000), refers to honesty and believability of a source. Scales such as 'honest/dishonest, trustworthy/untrustworthy, open-minded/closed-minded, just/unjust, fair/unfair, and unselfish/selfish' are used to describe the trustworthiness of a source (O'Keefe, 2002). If the receiver of a message perceives the source as trustworthy with no selfish interests, they are more inclined to believe the source. These assertions essentially apply to information posted on social media.

Hanifah (2019) studied the influence of Instagram travel influencers on visiting decisions of tourists in Indonesia. The study found that by using Instagram, users can easily find information to evaluate alternatives before deciding to visit a

tourist destination. Aljafari (2019) explored social media influencers, their characteristics, relationships with the audience, and how effective they would be for the tourism industry. The research established that physical attractiveness, awareness and credibility affect the image of the brand. Additionally, Madondo (2016), established that opportunities in the social media have assisted significantly in promoting tourism. The research noted that when individuals are moving into a new country or seek to travel in the form of tourism, most dig into the social media for information on pertaining to travelling to new destinations. Otiende (2018) focused on studying the Instagram influencers in Kenya to establish their impact on brand communication. According to the study, attributes of particular social media influencers persuade users to take the brands being promoted seriously. The study also found that even where there is trust and persuasion, a social media influencer can expand persuasion, which is useful in the tourism industry.

While social media can generate a positive impact on tourism by increasing the number of tourists Khairunnisa and Atmayanti (2024), the use of the social media in marketing requires different strategies for the platforms to be successful. There is also need to continually identify the effectiveness of the use of the social media influencers in shaping the behavior of the tourists with regard to their conviction to make visits to particular regions (Buigut & Amendah, 2016). It is against this background that this study aimed to investigate the effect of information source credibility on the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

2.0 Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design and Target Population

The study applied a mixed method research design, which is useful when qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis are used in a study (Plano, Clark & Ivankova, 2016). Quantitative data was collected through questionnaires.

The target population of the study was domestic tourists who are influenced by social media while making travel decisions in Kenya. The population of this study was limited to Nairobi and Kiambu counties. These two counties were selected because they have the highest socio-economic capability in the country (KNBS, 2019). According to KNBS (2019), Nairobi and Kiambu counties have a total population of 6,814,808. At the same time, the number of internet users in the two counties aged between 25 to 64 years stood at 1,980,099 as of 2019, see Table 2.1. This category formed part of the study group for this research. This decision was informed by the fact that cost and age is a determining factor in whether a domestic tourist travels or not in Kenya (Omare, 2016).

Table 2.1: Number of Internet users

County	Total Population	Number of Internet Users
Nairobi,	4,397,073	1,367,593
Kiambu	2,417,735	612,506
Total	6,814,808	1,980,099

Source: KNBS, 2019

2.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

This study made use of stratified random sampling for the target population of internet users. This is because the target population

did not constitute a homogenous group and stratified random sampling enabled the researcher to obtain a more representative group (Kothari, 2004). The strata (29) were formed by dividing the two counties into their respective sub-counties. Nairobi County was divided into Westlands, Dagoretti North, Dagoretti South, Langata, Kibra, Roysambu, Kasarani, Ruaraka, Embakasi South, Embakasi North, Embakasi Central, Embakasi East, Embakasi West, Makadara, Kamukunji, Starehe and Mathare, while Kiambu was split into Githunguri, Kiambaa, Lari, Limuru, Kabete, Gatundu North, Gatundu South, Juja, Kikuyu, Thika town, Ruiru and Kiambu Town.

To calculate the sample size to be used in this study, the researcher made use of the Yamane Formula which allows inferences and conclusions drawn from the survey to be applied to the complete population from which the sample was drawn.

$$n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$$

Where:

n is the required sample size from the population under study

N is the whole population that is under study (1,980,099)

e is the precision or sampling error which in this case was 0.05

This yielded a sample size of 399 respondents which was proportionally distributed based on the population of the two counties.

2.3 Research Instrument

This study utilized questionnaires as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire featured open and close ended questions. It was chosen because it is cheap, especially when the respondents are many and widely spread geographically; it is free from interviewer bias and it gives the respondents ample time to answer the questions (Kothari, 2004). The researcher administered the questionnaires through Google Forms.

The researcher carried out a pilot study which involved twenty-five participants who answered the questions as presented in the questionnaire. The pilot study collected data from the respondents in Mombasa and Nakuru Counties which were not included in the final study. The instrument's reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha constant, which measured the internal consistency and average correlation among the indicators under consideration. Cronbach's values usually range between 0 and 1, with the commonly accepted alpha value of at least 0.70 (Martin & Rast, 2020). A reliability coefficient (alpha) of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable reliability (Groves, 1987). From the findings, the domestic tourists' decision making based on source credibility had a Cronbach's reliability alpha of 0.803, source attractiveness had an average Cronbach's reliability alpha of 0.805. The study questionnaire met the reliability criteria ($\alpha > 0.7$).

The researcher also ensured there was validity in the data collection tools. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) define validity as

the accuracy and meaningfulness of any interpretations that are founded on research results. During the pilot study, an evaluation of the responses of the respondents was done to ensure clarity and consistency in answering the questions. Content validity in this investigation was increased by obtaining expert opinions in this specific field of study. In addition, the research instrument's face validity was increased by conducting a pilot test and altering ambiguous and indistinct questions.

3.0 Results and Discussions

3.1 Quantitative Analysis

After data collection, the information was grouped and coded. The results were analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) to get the descriptive results, as recommended by Cronk (2019). The data was analyzed such that there was both descriptive and the inferential statistics to establish the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables. Linear regression model was used to show the significance of the independent variables in determining the dependent variable.

4.1 Response Rate

Of the 399 questionnaires distributed to internet users drawn from the followers of social media influencers, 380 participants responded, giving a response rate of 95.2%. This was acceptable according to Metsamuuronen (2017), who recommended a response rate above 50% as adequate for data analysis and reporting.

4.2 Demographic Information

According to the findings of the study, majority of the respondents (56.84%) were female, while the males were 43.16%. On the year of birth, majority (37%) of the respondents were born between 1990 and 2000. When asked if they followed social media influencers on social media, a majority of the respondents 56% indicated that they did. On why respondents followed social media influencers, majority of the respondents, 196 (51%), followed the influencers to be updated on trends about travel and vacations. On the number of times in a year the respondents travelled within Kenya on holiday, the majority, 207 (54%), indicated that they travelled twice a year, while the others 129 (33) indicated that they only travelled once in a year. On how the respondents chose their travel destination in Kenya, majority of the respondents, 329 (86.57%), made their choices because of social media. On the question of whether social media influenced their search for travel and vacation ideas, majority of the respondents, 295 (77%), indicated that social media had a great influence on their travel decisions. These findings resonate with Xie-Carson (2023), who established that Instagram posts from social media influencers that combined images of tourism settings with rational messages attracted the most engagement from audiences. Table 4.1 summarises the demographic findings.

Table 4.1 Demographic information

		Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Gender	Male	164	43.16	43.16
	Female	216	56.84	100
	Total	380	100	
Year of Birth	Between 1960 and 1970	50	13.16	13.6
	Between 1971 and 1980	44	11.58	24.74
	Between 1991 and 2000	144	37.98	62.63
	Between 2001 and 2005	142	37.37	100
	Total	380	100	
Social Media Influencer Following	Yes	216	56.84	56.84
	No	164	43.16	100
	Total	380	100	
Why follow influencers	I follow SMI's for discounts/giveaways	24	6.32	6.32
	I follow SMI's for inspiration	68	17.89	24.21
	I follow SMI's for entertainment	92	24.21	48.42
	I follow SMI's for to be updated on trends	196	51.58	100.00
	Total	380	100	
How many times a year do you travel within Kenya on holiday?	None	4	1.05	1.05
	Once a Year	129	33.95	35.00
	Twice a Year	207	54.47	89.47
	3 or more times a Year	40	10.53	100.00
	Total	380	100	
How did you choose the destination of your last travel in Kenya?	Friend/family recommended it	2	0.52	0.52
	Saw it on Social Media	329	86.57	87.09
	I saw an ad on TV	49	12.90	100.00
	Total	380	100	
Social Media Influence	Sometimes	36	9.47	9.47
	Somewhat influence	45	11.84	11.84
	great influence	295	77.63	89.47
	very great influence	40	10.53	100.00
	Total	380	100	

4.3 Linearity Test

When the value of sig. Deviation from the linearity > 0.05 , it can then be argued that the predictor variables significantly affect the response variable. If the value sig. Deviation from linearity is < 0.05 , then the relationship between the predictor and the response variable is partially significant. In the study, the sig. value of source credibility was 0.663, implying that increasing the effect of the source credibility increases impact on decision-making among tourists.

4.4 Normality Test

A normality test determines whether a dataset is modeled for normal distribution. Normally distributed data assumes a symmetrical or bell-shaped curve with a higher frequency of scores in the midpoint and lower frequencies towards the extremes. There are two main methods of assessing normality, namely, graphically and statistically. Tests for normality include, skewness and Kurtosis; Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, and the Shapiro-Wilk. This research adopted the Shapiro-Wilk test due to the study's small

sample size, as recommended by Annals of Cardiac Anaesthesia (2019). The Prob < W value listed in the output is the p-value. If the chosen alpha level is 0.05 and the p-value is less than 0.05, then the null hypothesis that the data are normally distributed is

rejected. If the p-value is more significant than 0.05, then the null hypothesis is not rejected. As indicated in Table 4.2, the p-value for source credibility is more significant than 0.05, thus confirming that the data is normally distributed.

Table 4.2: Normality test.

Variable	Obs	W	V	z	Prob>z
Source credibility	380	0.92223	1.299	0.510	0.30494

4.5 Descriptive Statistics

4.5.1 One-sample t-test

In determining the influence of information source credibility on the decision-making among domestic tourists in Kenya, the study conducted a one-sample *t*-test. The one-sample *t*-test is used to establish whether a given sample comes from a particular population, but there is no full population information available to us. In order to test the positivity of the influence of source credibility on the decision-making of the domestic tourists, the Likert Scale was used, with coding of 1 to 5, where 5 = Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3 = Neutral (N), 2 = Disagree (D), and 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD). The main disadvantage of the Likert scale is that it is unidimensional and only gives 5 to 7 options of choice, and the space between each choice is not equidistant. In order to address this disadvantage, the values between 1 and 5 were

further enumerated in order to establish an accurate range between each code. These ranges include (1) 1 to 1.8, which represents “strongly disagree,” (2) 1.8 to 2.6, representing “disagree,” (3) 2.6 to 3.4, representing “neutral,” (4) 3.4 to 4.2 representing “agree,” and (5) 4.2 to 5 representing “strongly agree”. To explain the test value $\mu = 3.4$, the following method was used. The four spaces between the five Likert scale items (Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, and Strongly Agree = 5) were divided by the five numbers, which equals 0.8. This, therefore, implied that Neutral and below fell below $\mu = 3.4$.

The study, therefore, concluded that any value < 3.4 was below the neutral and thus didn't show positivity in the influence on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya. The *t*-test was used in this study to test hypotheses and determine whether the four independent variables influenced the decision of domestic tourists in Kenya. The *t*-test findings are represented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: One Sample t-test.

Variables	obs	Mean	St Err	t-value	p-value
Source Credibility	380	36.824	0.222	150.501	0

4.5.2 Source Credibility Test

To investigate the effect of source credibility on the decision-making among domestic tourists in Kenya, a five-point Likert scale was used, where 1 symbolized strongly disagree, 2 symbolized disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. The scores of disagreeing were taken to represent a variable with a mean score of

0 to 2.4 on the continuous Likert scale; ($0 \leq \text{Mean} < 2.4$). The scores of 'Undecided' were taken to represent a variable with a mean score of 2.5 to 3.4 on the continuous Likert scale ($2.5 \leq \text{Mean} < 3.4$), and the scores of both agree and strongly agree have been taken to represent a variable which had a mean score of 3.5 to 5.0 on a continuous Likert scale; ($3.5 \leq \text{S.A.} < 5.0$). Table 4.4 represents the findings.

Table 4.4 Source credibility test.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
The social media influencer demonstrates being well-informed about domestic tourist destinations and activities	4.444	.888
I perceive the social media influencer as competent in providing accurate and reliable information about domestic tourism	4.34	1.00
The social media influencer comes across as honest and transparent in their interactions and recommendations.	4.397	.825
The social media influencer has established themselves as trustworthy through their past content and interactions	4.292	.903
The intelligence and knowledge demonstrated by the social media influencer greatly influenced my decision-making for domestic tourism	3.94	.867
I am more likely to trust the recommendations and advice of a social media influencer who is well-informed about domestic tourism	3.721	.817

From the results, the respondents strongly agreed that the social media influencer comes across as honest and transparent in their interactions and recommendations. This is supported by a mean of 4.397 (std. dv = 0.825). In addition, as shown by a mean of 4.444 (std. dv = 0.888), the respondents agreed that the social media influencer demonstrates being well-informed about domestic tourist destinations and activities. The respondents also agreed that the social media influencer has established themselves as trustworthy through their past content and interactions. This is shown by a mean of 4.292 (std. dv = 0.903). From the results, the respondents agreed that they are more likely to trust the recommendations and advice of a social media influencer who is well-informed about domestic tourism. This is supported by a mean of 3.721 (std. dv = 0.817). In addition, as shown by a mean of 3.17 (std. dv = 0.895), the respondents were undecided on their perception of the social media influencer as competent in providing

accurate and reliable information about domestic tourism. These findings resonate with Lim, Radzol, Cheah and Wong (2017), who found that individuals usually tend to observe one's trustful characteristics before getting to believe and trust in what that person says.

4.5.4 Univariate Analysis

A univariate analysis was conducted in which decision making of the domestic tourists was regressed on source credibility.

4.5.5 Analysis of Variance

To determine the fitness of the model to predict the dependent variable (decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya), the study conducted an F-test at 95% confidence level as shown in table 4.6 below;

Table 4.5: ANOVA results.

Source	SS	df MS	F	Prob > F
Between groups	2806.526	23 122.02287	13.90	0.0000
Within groups	3124.47137	356 8.77660497		
Total	5930.99737	379 15.6490696		

The significance of the study variables was determined based on the P-value of the variable coefficients at a 0.05 significance level. The decision in the fitness of the model is accepted if the p-value is below 0.05 and rejected if it is above 0.05. The findings in Table 4.6 showed that the Prob > F value was 0.000. Since the F-calculated was greater than the F-critical and the p-value 0.000 was less than 0.05, the model was considered a good fit for the data,

and can be used to predict the influence of Source Credibility on the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya.

4.5.6 Beta Coefficients

The bivariate analysis of source credibility and decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya in shown in table 4.7 below;

Table 4.6: Univariate Analysis (Source credibility)

DM	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
CRED	.407	.028	14.44	0	.352	.463	***
Constant	29.659	1.048	28.31	0	27.599	31.719	***
Mean dependent var	44.603		SD dependent var		3.956		
R-squared	0.356		Number of obs		380		
F-test	208.523		Prob > F		0.000		
Akaike crit. (AIC)	1959.607		Bayesian crit. (BIC)		1967.488		

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

As indicated in Table 4.7, the R-squared for the relationship between source credibility and the decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya was 0.356, an indication that at 95% confidence interval, 35.6% of variation in decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya can be attributed to changes in source credibility. Therefore, source credibility can be used to explain 35.6% of changes in decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya but there are other factors that can be attributed to 64.4% change in decision

making of domestic tourists in Kenya. From the results in Table 4.5, the following regression model was fitted.

$$Y = 29.659 + 0.407 X_1$$

(X_1 is Source Credibility)

The coefficient results showed that the constant had a coefficient of 29.659 suggesting that if source credibility was held constant at zero, decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya would be 29.659 units. In addition, results showed that source credibility

coefficient was 0.407, indicating that a unit increase in source credibility would result in a 0.407 improvement in decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. It was also noted that the P-value for source credibility coefficient was 0.000 which is less than the set 0.05 significance level indicating that source credibility was significant. Based on these results, the study concluded that source credibility has positive significant influence on decision making of domestic tourists in Kenya. Based on the hypothesis testing, (H01 source credibility has no significant role in the decision-making of domestic tourists in Kenya) these findings fail to accept the null hypothesis. This means that source credibility is a key driver to decision making by domestic tourist in Kenya. These findings resonate with Lim et al. (2017), who found that individuals usually tend to observe one's trustful characteristics before getting to believe and trust in what that person says. Travelers would seek information on social media from influencers who are credible and experienced in order to make purchasing decisions wisely.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The fact that majority of the respondents were females underlines the role women play in initiating travel decisions in the society. Majority travel twice a year, which indicates the desirability of the respondents to explore domestic tourism opportunities. Most of the respondents who chose to travel to a destination within Kenya made their decisions based on social media. Further, they only searched related travel hashtags on social media when intending to travel.

The study established a positive impact of source credibility, indicating that respondents attribute significant importance to the trustworthiness of information sources when making choices related to domestic tourism. The findings of the study confirm that respondents attribute significant importance to the trustworthiness of information sources when making choices related to domestic tourism. The one-sample t-test further solidifies this deduction, refuting the null hypothesis and affirming that source credibility plays a significant role in shaping the decision-making of local tourists in Kenya. Thus, it is evident that domestic tourists actively seek information from influencers perceived as credible and experienced, utilizing this information to make well-informed and prudent decisions. In essence, the findings underscore the crucial link between source credibility, particularly in the form of social media influencers, and the decision-making dynamics of domestic tourist in Kenya. These findings hold practical implications for stakeholders in the tourism sector, emphasizing the need to prioritize and uphold credibility in influencer-led promotional strategies to foster positive decision-making among local vacationers.

5.2 Recommendations

In line with the findings of this research, a number of recommendations are drawn for major players in the tourism sector. First, the tourism stakeholders including hotel and resort owners, should embrace the use of social media in the promotion of their businesses. Players in the tourism sector should leverage the use of credible social media influencers in their marketing campaigns. Influencers perceived as credible are more likely to positively shape the decisions of potential domestic tourists. By choosing influencers who are popular and trusted by their followers, the tourism and hospitality stakeholders can take

advantage of their ability to connect with their target audience and capture these demographic sets as potential clients.

Additionally, marketers and advertisers in the tourism sector should integrate credibility metrics into their marketing evaluation efforts. Source credibility should be tracked and analyzed as part of marketing performance metrics. Surveys and feedback forms can be used to assess whether audiences perceive information sources as trustworthy and how this influences their travel decisions.

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