



Research Article

Travel Decisions and Influencers: A Study of the Impact Exerted on Tourist Travel Decision Making among Peruvian University Students

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Abstract

This study is based on analyzing travel decisions, influencers and the impact exerted on tourist travel decision making among Peruvian university students. The research was characterized by having a quantitative approach. A survey was applied to 385 university students in Peru and it had 13 questions sections, divided in 2 parts, considering the demographic profile and general questions with a 5-point Likert-type scale.

The results revealed that participants believe that social networks, especially TikTok and Instagram, influence their travel choices. The study also identified the three most impactful influencers and highlighted valued characteristics: authenticity, useful travel information, and showcasing affordable options for a good experience. Influencers who develop interesting and entertaining content that persuades and inspires followers are highly appreciated. At the same time, it was showed that influencers focus on cultural and traditional aspects, food, travel budget, safety and accessibility. Ideas such as archaeological experiences, raising awareness about endangered animals, developing tourism promotion apps, inclusive tourism, entertainment venues, internet connections, souvenir shops, hotel or Airbnb information, adventure travel, off-the-beaten-path places, local businesses and interactive experiences with locals are suggested to be considered in the influencer's content to take better travelling decision making processes.

Finally, the article also discusses the challenges for tourism entrepreneurs. In that sense, the Peruvian government needs to address technology infrastructure issues as many areas lack internet access to improve technological infrastructure and enhance digital skills among entrepreneurs. Government training programs could equip them with the necessary tools to thrive in a dynamic market.

Keywords: influencers, travel decision making, tourism, social media

Introduction

Organizations face increasing competitiveness, especially in tourism, which boosts economic growth in both developed and underdeveloped countries and aids in COVID-19 recovery, according to Rodríguez, Salcedo, and Castro-Ricalde (2023); Morelos, Cardona and Lora (2020); Campines (2024) and Crayne (2020). In a research study by OIT (2020), sustainable and formal businesses are needed to generate jobs and foster social and economic progress.

Marketing must adapt to digital environments due to technological advancements and changing consumer contexts and interests (Garcia and León, 2021). Digital marketing adds value and enhances tourism marketing to attract, retain, and increase customers, especially as consumer habits have changed post-COVID-19 (Maldonado, Perez, and Lalangui, 2019; Reyes and Meza, 2021).

Brazil and Argentina are advanced in these areas, while Peru saw a 50% increase in digital payments in 2020 due to e-commerce and digital banking (Organización Mundial de Comercio, 2021). Online purchases in Peru rose from 18.6% in 2019 to 41.8% in 2021, despite infrastructure challenges (Escuela de Administración de Negocios para Graduados [Esan], 2022).

Consumer behavior, especially in tourism, involves new communication and promotion trends. Tools are needed to channel consumer needs and analyze market information, improving service, optimizing sales, attracting new business, and developing brand identity (Rendón & Sánchez, 2016; Toro, 2021 and Cudriz et al., 2020).

Influencer marketing, providing personalized and genuine experiences, is a tactical resource for organizations (Marreiro et al, 2014; De la Rosa, 2019). It establishes emotional connections, inspires trust, and provides real experience-based recommendations, essential for defining effective persuasion strategies (Barrera, et al., 2022). This article aims to identify Peruvian university students' perceptions of social networks and influencers in travel decision-making.

Literature Review

Tourism Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior focuses on the process of purchasing products and services, from the search

for options to post-purchase (Alfinito and Federal, 2020). For many tourists, the travel experience and perceptions of the destination provided by others are the most reliable sources of information for decision-making, as recommendations indicate a willingness to revisit or support a destination. Various theories have been developed to explain consumer behavior (Perez et al, 2021). Consumer choices can be influenced by external factors such as economic, social, political, geographic, and demographic elements, while endogenous variables are controlled by economic agents, such as the tourist offer and the cultural development of consumers (De Oliveira, 2022).

The tourism consumer seeks valuable and rewarding experiences, highlighting the need to ensure a competitive advantage through innovative and differentiated services (Borges and De Sevilha, 2020; Perez et al., 2021), shows variations in the online consumer profile, such as the generational gap and differences in education and income levels. There are also differences between traditional and online consumers in booking accommodation and transportation through digital channels. Advances in big data analysis and research methodologies have evolved, emphasizing e-tourism.

Tourism Marketing

In a study developed by Maldonado, Perez and Lalangui (2019), Tourism marketing involves promoting various places along with all elements of the tourism sector, such as supply, demand, tourist facilities, infrastructure, and superstructure (Huertas, Pilco, and Rodríguez, n.d.). Companies in the tourism sector select their target audience and seek to identify and influence their needs, desires, and motivations, both locally and internationally, to propose and adapt their tourism products (Olguin et al, 2020). This process involves tourism institutions selecting the public they wish to target, analyzing needs, desires, and motivations at local, regional, national, and international levels to achieve tourist satisfaction and company objectives (Galloway et al, 2008).

There is often confusion between marketing and sales; they are not the same. Marketing encompasses sales and advertising within its functions, especially when considering the marketing mix of price, product, place, and

promotion. Research, planning, and information systems are also integral parts of marketing (Kotler et al., 2013).

Due to increased competitiveness in the tourism sector, companies must adapt to identify customer needs and develop strategies to meet these objectives. This requires support from marketing specialists (Alcocer, 2013). The tourism product is crucial because it must be tailored to the client, not vice versa (Houston, 1986). The tourism product consists of integrated services with tourists as the main users (Siu-Lan and Alastair, 2004).

Tourism Marketing related to social networks

Due to new trends in online travel services and tourism offerings through social networks like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, businesses such as lodging and airlines can adapt to consumer changes by analyzing sociodemographic profiles (Rekom and Ve, 1999). Consumers can now purchase flights, book hotel stays, and conduct other transactions conveniently. Previously, travel information and purchases were limited to travel agency business hours. Facebook's technology reduces these limitations, allowing for convenient travel planning (Chatzigeorgiou and Christou, 2020).

In today's digital age, potential tourists obtain travel information through social networks and mainstream media advertising (Soto, 2016). Understanding tourists' efforts to experience includes information about travel destinations, pre-purchase procedures, preparations, travel between countries, and experiences at the destination until returning home. For potential travelers, previous visitors' experiences are valuable for business travel creators supporting the travel industry and stakeholders.

H1: The social network most used by Peruvian university students is TikTok due to its growing popularity, its focus on visual content and the ease of consumption of information in short video format.

H2: The social network that significantly impacts travel decision making among Peruvian university students is TikTok, due to the fact that

it facilitates exposure to a wide range of destinations, which could influence travel decision making by providing them with a quick and visually stimulating overview of various options.

Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing involves compensating people who promote products or services on social networks (Bautista and Chávez, 2021). This practice is growing, and many marketing specialists are now working with influencers to increase their media presence (Campbell and Rapp, 2020).

According to Amics Digital (2024), 67% of marketing experts plan to increase investment in influencer marketing this year. Nanoinfluencers, with 1,000 to 10,000 followers, are expected to remain significant, while microinfluencers, with 10,000 to 100,000 followers, are ideal for specific campaigns due to their closeness and authority. Macroinfluencers, with over 100,000 followers, help brands achieve wider recognition.

Influencer marketing continues to grow, leveraging the success of word-of-mouth and relationship marketing (Brown and Hayes, 2008). Information and communication technologies (ICT) and broadband access have changed communication styles across various fields (Prado and Frogeri, 2017).

Choosing the right influencers is crucial for business strategy and success, ensuring alignment with the company's message (Gómez, 2018). In our country, top influencers include Phillip Chu Joy (Pchujoy), Natalia Merino (Cynnamon Style), and Misias pero Viajeras (Fátima Sotomayor and Daniela Cabrera) (Vela, De la Cruz and Zegarra, 2023). These influencers stand out for their interaction, impact, and large follower base.

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing involves online strategies and tools (Arroyo and Docente, 2023) used to disseminate advertising information. It is defined as systematic procedures for advertising products or services on digital platforms

(Cevallos, Guerrero and Ii, 2022). The importance of digital marketing has grown with ICTs in business management (Pedreschi and Nieto, 2023; Cueria et al, 2022), creating challenges like dynamic interactions between companies and customers, Web 2.0, and user-generated content on social networks, blogs, and online travel agencies.

Personalization and mass reach are key in digital marketing. Digital platforms create profiles with sociodemographic data, tastes, preferences, and interests, providing more information (Merino et al, 2023). This makes today's buyer more demanding due to numerous communication tools (Mendieta and Garín, 2023). Tourism agendas using digital marketing strategies are more competitive (Llontop, 2021). In Latin America, digital marketing is used empirically and incipiently, with a lack of digital skills (Soledad et al., 2023; Levano et al., 2019).

Social Media Influencer

A social media influencer has a large followers' network, allowing significant influence (Ki and Kim, 2019). New social media stars reach wider audiences and influence pop culture more than traditional celebrities (Nouri, 2018). Consumers use social networks to gather decision-making information. Many opinion leaders are influential in online communities, providing valuable advice (Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez 2020).

The influencer phenomenon isn't new. Traditional celebrities influenced consumer behavior before social networks (Erdogan, 1999). People imitate celebrities, who promote products and services through traditional media like TV and newspapers (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995). Social networks are digital platforms that generate interaction between users and influencers, through which information is provided, allowing to give references about products or services used as well as the unlimited dissemination of information having a great potential to connect with the audience and originating the creation of the so-called influencers, which are people active in social networks that by their lifestyle have a profile on one or more platforms; they are public people who express their opinions, exercising an influencer marketing.

Methodology

The population is Peruvian university students, considering that in Peru there are 50 national universities and 92 private universities duly licensed by Superintendencia Nacional de Educación Superior Universitaria (2024). According to the sampling theory by having a large and difficult to identify population, we proceed to apply simple random sampling (Otzen and Manterola, 2017), the infinite population formula, which is based on the standard normal distribution and is expressed as follows, from where:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2}$$

- n: Sample size sought
- Z: Confidence level
- q: Proportion of the reference population that does not present the phenomenon under study (1 - p).
- p: The proportion we expect to find.
- e: Estimation error

Fig. 1 Formula for the simple random sample

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = 384.16$$

Based on the calculation, a sample of 385 Peruvian university students was determined.

Instrument and data collection

A survey was structured in three parts: the first part consisted of five questions that allowed to profile the demographic data of the students; the second part consisted of eight questions with a 5-point Likert-type scale, from totally agree to totally disagree; and finally, the third part consisted of open questions in order to recognize the needs and expectations of the university students regarding the topic of the study.

Each of the participants indicated their consent based on a form prior to the completion of the virtual survey. Applied through a google forms, the form was available for 7 days to collect

information from university students and was channeled with teachers from different universities nationwide.

Results

4.1 Profile of the respondents: From the analysis of the data, it was possible to identify that of the 385 Peruvian university students who participated in the study, 63.38% of the participants in terms of gender were female students, while 36.62% of the participants were male students (Figure 2). With regard to their ages, in Figure 3 we determined three marked ranges, from 18 to 21 years old (55.33%), from 22 to 26 years old (36.62%) and from 27 years old and older (8.05%). The average age of the participants was 22 years, all of whom are of legal age.

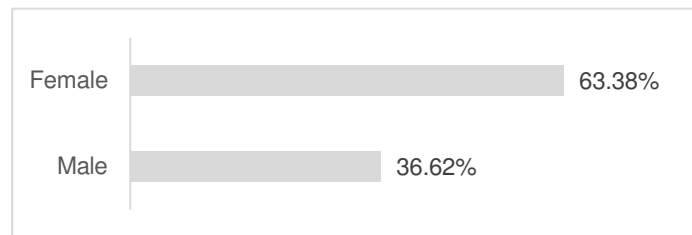


Fig. 2. Gender of the respondent

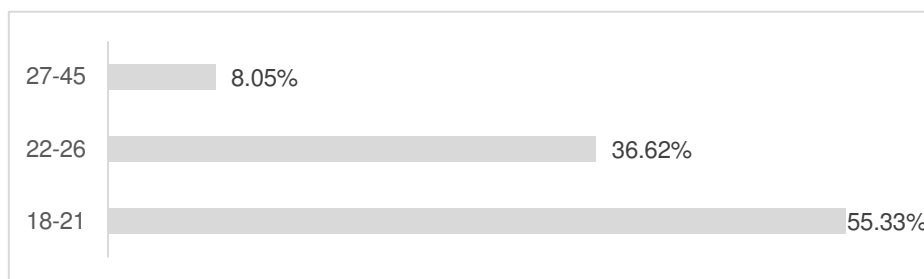


Fig. 3. Age range of the surveyed students

Use of social networks

About the analysis of the use of social networks, Figure 4 indicates that participants use the social networks: Instagram (40.52%), TikTok (40.52%),

Facebook (10.65%) and YouTube (6.75%). This shows that the social network Instagram is one of the most used by university students.

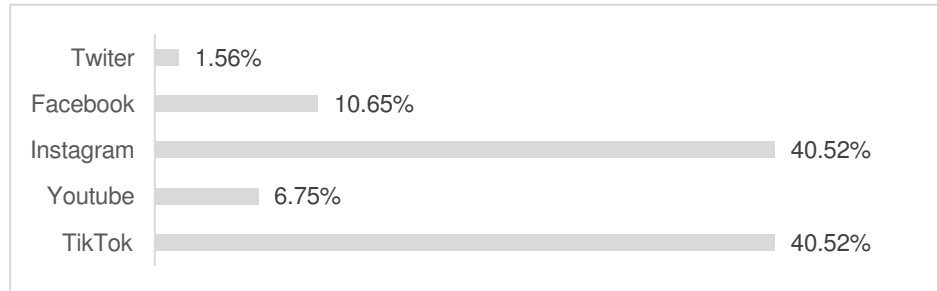


Fig. 4. Use of social network

Influence of social networks on tourism travel decision.

The participants specify that they agree (49.09%) and totally agree (39.74%) that social networks

influence their tourism travel decision, obtaining 88.83% of Peruvian university students who agree with the impact of social networks (Figure 5).

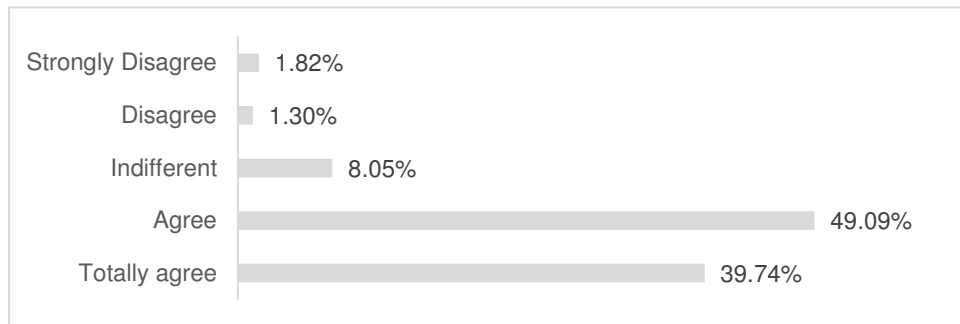


Fig. 5. Use of social networks to make travel (tourism) decisions

About determining which of the existing social networks is the one that influences to a greater extent their tourism travel decisions, Figure 6 shows that women consider that the social

network that has impacted to a greater extent is TikTok (63.52%), similarly in relation to males, the social network TikTok (47.52%) is the one that has impacted their travel decisions and in second place in both cases is Instagram (Figure 7).

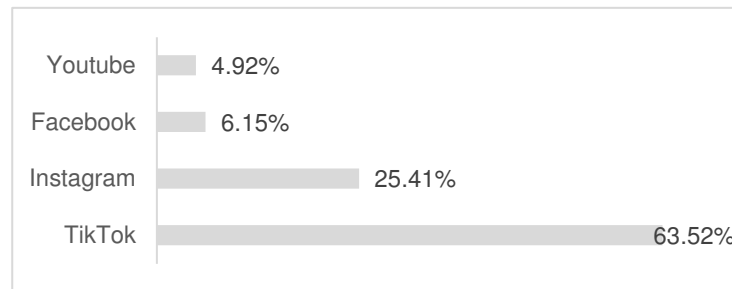


Fig. 6. Social networks that have influenced travel decision making -Female

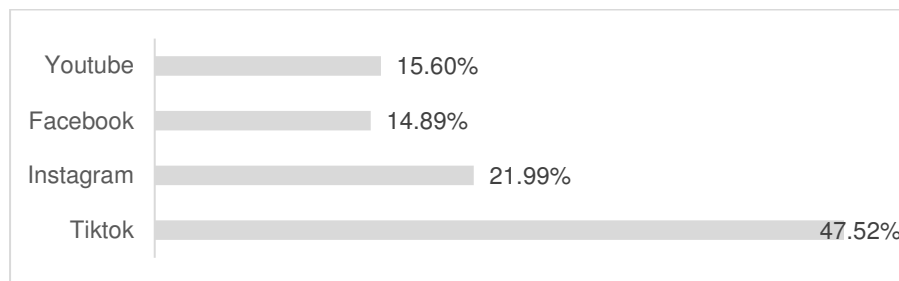


Fig. 7. Social networks that have influenced travel decision making -Male

Influencers considered to have the greatest impact on tourism travel decisions.

The research identifies which influencers are considered to have the greatest influence on their

tourism travel decisions. Figure 8 shows that the influencers considered Misias per Viajeras (50.38%), Viaja y Prueba (21.30%), Traveleras (13%) and others (15.32%), where the first 3 are local influencers focused on providing content about tourism experiences.

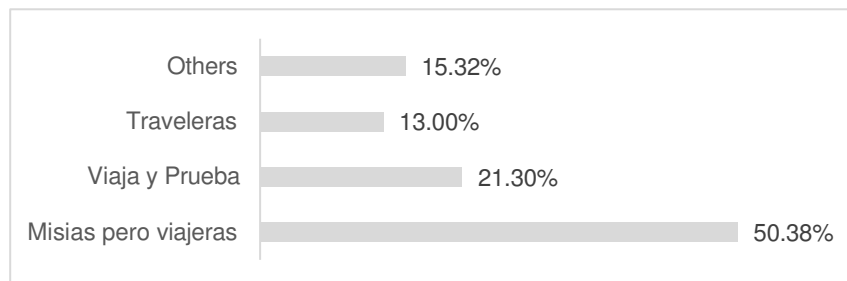


Fig. 8. Influencers that have influenced their travel (tourism) decision making

Characteristics of the content of the influencers analyzed.

According to the influencers mentioned by the participants, in table 1, the consolidated information that allows observing the number of

followers and subscribers is shown, in which it is ratified that the influencers Misias pero Viajeras lead in number of followers, in each of the social networks analyzed, followed by Viaja y Prueba and finally Traveleras.

Table 1. Followers per influencers

Social Media	Influencer		
	Misias pero viajeras	Traveleras	Viaja y prueba
Name	Misias pero viajeras	Traveleras	Viaja y prueba
Instagram	1M Followers	281K Followers	378K Followers
Facebook	991 mil Followers	276 mil Followers	963 mil Followers
Youtube	1,26 M Subscribers	97,9 K Subscribers	321 K Subscribers
Twitter (X)	14,6 mil Followers	no data	1.347 Followers

The participants considered that the influencers have credibility in tourism-related topics, of which the participants indicated to agree (48.05%) and totally agree (34.03%), while

others indicated that they could not agree or disagree with the statement (15.85%), as shown in Figure 9.

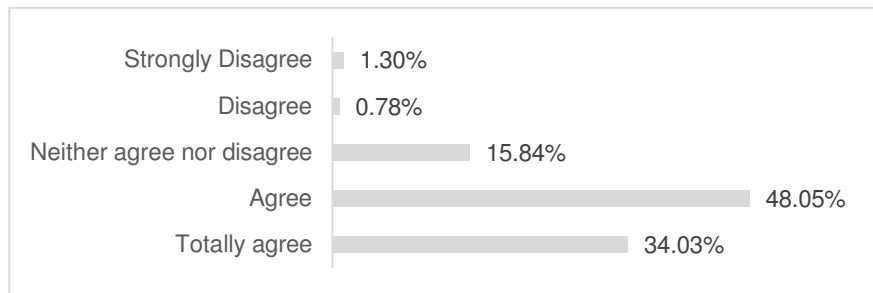


Fig. 9. Credibility of influencers' content on tourism issues

When asked if they consider that the content developed by the influencer is useful, the participants indicated that they agree (52.21%)

and totally agree (35.84%) while others indicated that they could not agree or disagree with the statement (10.12%), as shown in Figure 10.

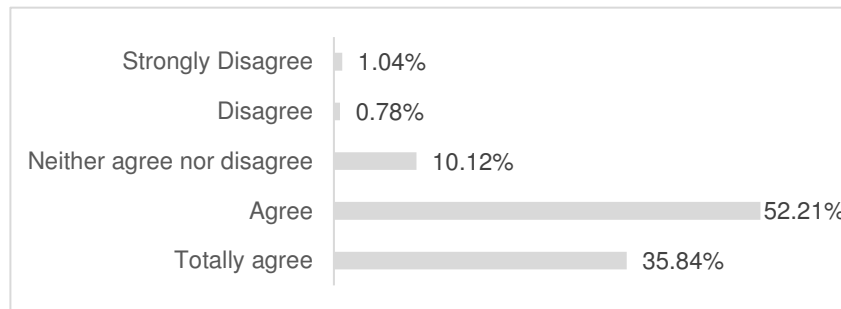


Fig. 10. Opinion on useful content from influencers

At the same time, the participants were asked, if they had to mention certain characteristics that defined the influencer mentioned, what they would be, in that sense the following have been

specified in order of frequency: savings (35.84%), travel (34.29%), influence (7%), information (5.19%), fun (3.64%), reliability (2.60%), curiosity (2.60%), creativity (2.34%), among others according to figure 11.

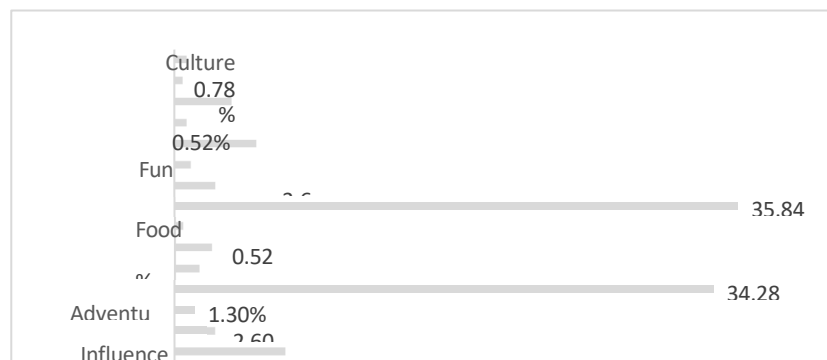


Fig. 11. Characteristics that define the mentioned influencers

Figure 12 shows that when the participants were asked if they consider that the content of the influencers has increased their willingness to know more places in Peru and internationally,

they stated that they totally agree (46.23%) and agree (43.38%) and some stated that they could neither agree nor disagree (8.57%).

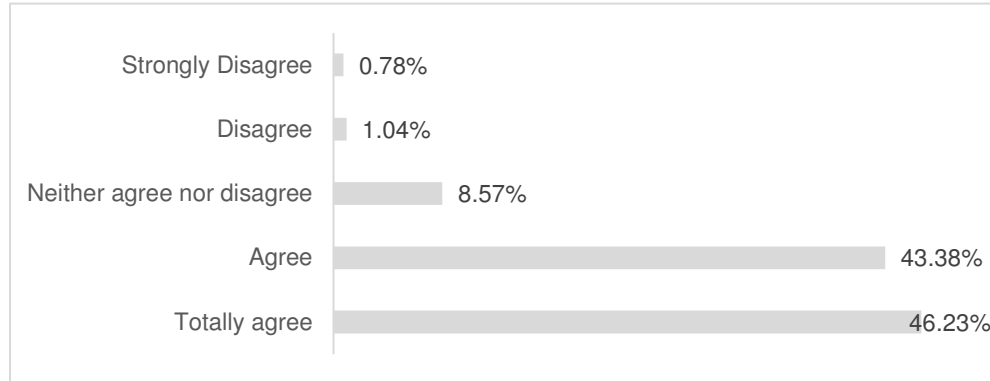


Fig. 12. Opinion about the content of the influencers to increase willingness to know more places in Peru or internationally

In relation to the appreciation of the participants regarding the content shown by the influencers, they indicate according to Figure 13 that they can highlight that they have good content (20%), useful (18.70%), interesting (17.40%), entertaining (9.35%), authentic (9.35%),

understandable (6.49%), inspiring (5.19%), creative (4.68%) and safe (2.60%), from which the usefulness of the content to generate savings, providing real information, showing situations in an authentic way, variety in the tourist places visited and the creativity with which the information is shown stand out.

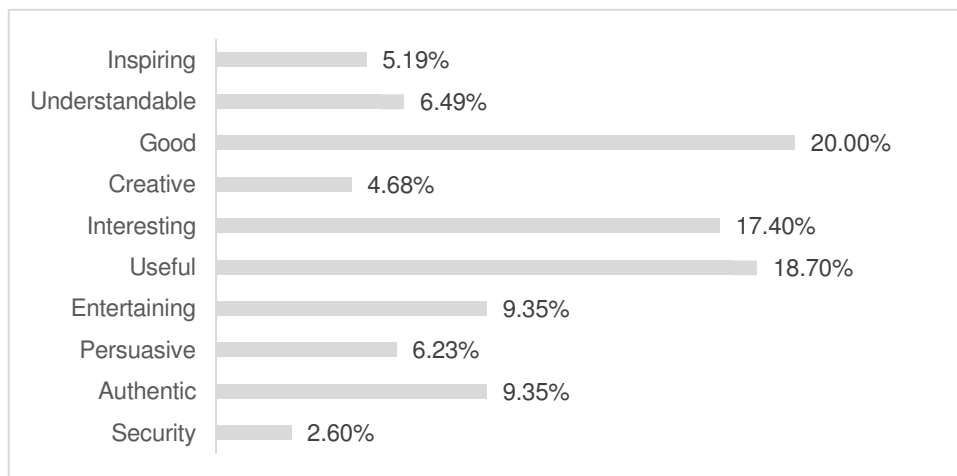


Fig. 13. Appreciation of content shown by influencers

Topics to be promoted in influencers' content

The participants consider that influencers should promote the development of: Information about local culture and customs (17%), information about gastronomic routes (16%), economic

tourism (11%), information about full day destinations (6%), travel tips in general (6%), visibility of sustainable tourism sites (5%) and safety and access recommendations (5%), Figure 14.

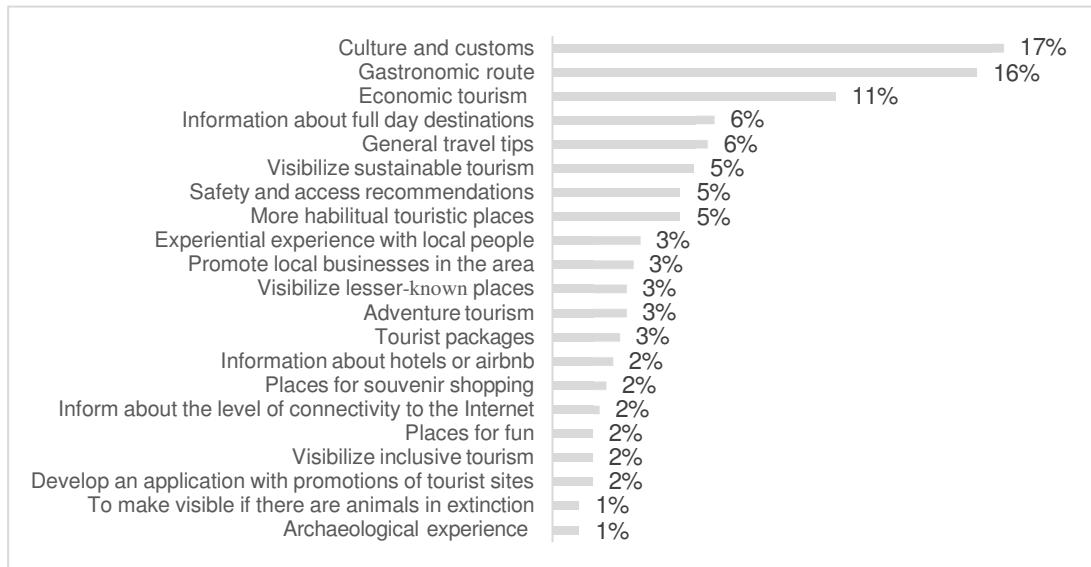


Fig. 14. Topics that *influencers* should talk about

Discussion

The study's main hypothesis was that TikTok is the most used social network by Peruvian university students due to its popularity, visual content, and ease of consumption in short videos. The hypothesis was confirmed, with 40.52% using TikTok and 40.52% using Instagram, similar to Ana and Istudor (2019) on Instagram usage (85.7%) and platform use from 1-3 hours (56.4%) and 3-5 hours (28.2%).

TikTok impacts travel decision-making by offering quick exposure to travel experiences. Participants confirmed this indicating that this information is decisive for their decision making, which is in line with what is mentioned by, Maguirre, Ruelas and De la Torre (2016) who found User-Generated Content (UGC) crucial for sharing travel experiences, especially on TikTok. This platform is significant for Gen Z and

millennials, transferring experiences in natural spaces and promoting sustainable tourism (Promperú, 2022).

In relation to the results obtained on the influence exerted by influencers and how they impact university students' travel decision-making, participants indicated that Miasias Pero Viajeras have a strong influence with 50.38%, Viaja y Prueba with 21.30%, and Traveleras with 13%, being considered as influential, which is related to the results obtained by Gómez (2018), where influencers' online reputation, credibility, and ability to persuade through personal experiences have a considerable impact on decision-making process.

In mid-2021, Peruvian influencers found growth opportunities due to a large user base, with companies increasing digital advertising. Mateus, León and Alberca (2022) and Kitsios et

al. (2022) noted that consumers face significant cognitive load from extensive social network use, where fast, practical, and creative communication by influencers creates greater acceptance.

It is confirmed that students highly value the usefulness of influencer content, planning activities and promoting economic tourism. Authenticity and attractive content are also valued, in line with Rodríguez and García (2022), who found that travel users share experiences in a natural way, increasing engagement. In relation to the participants' assessment of the content shown by the influencers, they indicated that they value good content (20%), in addition to its being useful (18.70%), interesting (17.40%), entertaining (9.35%) and authentic (9.35%), mainly highlighting the usefulness of the content to generate savings, providing authentic information and the creativity with which the information is shown.

It is confirmed that Peruvian students trust local influencers due to cultural familiarity. Participants identified the top influencers as Peruvian, similar to Aparecida (2023), noting a preference for local influencers for credibility and inspiration. In a research study conducted by Rhor, Carvajal and Álvarez (2022), they emphasized that influencers need communication skills, charisma, and the ability to inspire, with 89.71% of participants saying influencer content increased their willingness to explore Peru and beyond.

According to the results, those partially confirmed that students want influencers to highlight lesser-known destinations, offer economic travel tips, and cover culture, gastronomy, sustainable tourism, safety, and access.

Conclusions

The research shows that social media trends have changed, with TikTok now the most influential platform in travel decision-making for university students. This platform, popular since 2020-2021, effectively transmits emotions and experiences through short videos, catering to students' need for quick and practical information.

Students value influencers' authenticity and useful data, especially for budget management. Peruvian influencers like Misias pero Viajeras, Viaja y Prueba, and Traveleras are noted for their influence and creative, inspiring content that aids in planning affordable trips.

Students suggested that influencers should highlight cultural and traditional aspects, gastronomic routes, economic tourism, safety, and accessibility. They also proposed ideas such as archaeological experiences, endangered animal awareness, developing an app for tourist promotions, inclusive tourism, fun places, internet connectivity, souvenir shops, hotel or Airbnb information, adventure tourism, lesser-known places, local businesses, and experiential interactions with locals.

The Peruvian government must address technological infrastructure issues, as many areas lack internet access. Additionally, most entrepreneurs need better digital and technological skills to sustain their market presence.

In the specific context of how TikTok impacts the travel decision making of Peruvian university students, practical implications could include:

- Development of Targeted Digital Marketing Strategies: Companies in the tourism sector can design advertising campaigns and digital marketing strategies specifically targeting Peruvian university students on TikTok and other relevant social networks. This could include creating engaging and relevant content that highlights popular tourism destinations among this demographic.
- Collaborations with Influencers: Travel agencies and tourist destinations can collaborate with local influencers or influential university students on TikTok to promote their services and destinations. These collaborations can help increase the visibility and credibility of tourism offerings among the target audience.

- Personalization of Offers and Experiences: Based on insights gained about the travel preferences and behaviors of Peruvian university students in TikTok, companies can customize their tourism offers and experiences to better meet the needs of this market segment. This could include tour packages tailored to their specific interests and unique travel experiences.
- Continuous Monitoring and Analysis: It is important for companies in the tourism sector to continue to monitor and analyze trends and conversations on TikTok and other relevant social platforms. This will allow them to adjust their strategies and campaigns as needed to stay aligned with the changing preferences and behaviors of Peruvian college students.

In summary, the practical implications of this study can help tourism companies develop more effective strategies, improve the relevance of their offerings, and maximize their impact on the target market.

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