

# ***Exploring the Effects of Social Media Influencer on Consumer's Hotel Decision in China***

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**Abstract:** Accompany with fast-pace development of technology, people start to use social media for travel information, while companies also invest at social media influencer advertisement for better revenue. As the number of media user search tourism content on social media platform consisten increase, influencer advertisement market effects of consumer behaviour is inevitable, however, most of previously research are only focus on general effects, the specific aspect research like effects on hotel is rare been done. Because the research topic is rare been research, this essay use qualitative method, obsevation and focus group as research method. The focus group result naturally points out that social media influencer did affect consumer's hotel preference, but it did not create new general factor that vital for judge hotel experience and hotel selection, most of the media user only take influencer generated tourism content as one of the reference source, they will make independent decision after crtical compare between different resource. Furthermore, there are two suggestion of commercial decision and consumer decision at the end of the essay, which suggest hotel focus on quality control first, then invest at truthful advertisement, and consumer need to develop ability of indentify fake or exaggerate social media influencer tourism content.

**Keywords:** Social media, Influencer market, Hotel selection, Consumer behaviour

## **1. Introduction**

As the rapid development of internet and technology, social media user like traveller could reach multiple tourism information source, due to the digitalization, the fix cost of media production and advertisement is consistently reduce, which there appear a surge on number of individual media creator, and it became one of the most popular force in specific content sharing such as different trip accommodation information, meanwhile tourism company will focus more on invest social media influencer because of the advertisement utilizes the influence of KOL on social media platform is become a high return on investment ratio marketing techniques [1-2]. There are standard of tourism facility concluded by user experience, for instant, there are four vital elements confirmed that is related to the hotel experience and consumer satisfaction, during multiple exploration, examination, and analysation of consumer experience, it could illustrate that visible aspect, tangible aspect, staff aspect and location aspect are important elements that could affects traveller hotel decision [3]. As the development of internet, media communication was enhanced, the media content creation ability become surplus, and the cost of production and transportation is reducing, which content creator and

entrepreneur could focus niche market on social media platform, the profit could be promise [1]. At the meantime, the value of tourism information on social media is being recognized, people could search various specific tourism information on social media, and most of the information is useful, which it became the reason why traveller begin to use social media and follow influencer on tourism aspect [4]. The detail description of various specific aspect on tourism is possible at social media platform, however, the research is mainly concentrated on overall effects, the research of niche aspect like effects on hotel is rare been done, which the exploration of the range of key opinion leader's influence of audience hotel consumption behaviour is inevitable. The aim of this essay is to illustrate and discuss How social media influencer affects consumer's decision on hotel in China. This essay is based on pilot study, which illustrated the result and implication of the pilot study and extended to full scale analyse. This pilot study mainly uses qualitative research methods, which the observation and Focus group. This essay will have three parts, first part will illustrate the research methods of this study, then second part will illustrate the trend of influencer on trip accommodation section and analysis the possible effects on consumer behaviour and the last part will present the result, discussion and suggestion. The conclusion of the research will be present at the final section.

## 2. Research Methods

As this essay previously mention that most of the research are focus on the overall perspective of social media influence on travel market, the detail analyses of specific area like effects on hotel decision is rare, qualitative method could help researcher on few explored research topics, the observation as qualitative research method performs well at gather and conclude data from un-explore area than other research method [5]. The open-ended is the main feature of qualitative research method, for instance, interview use open-ended design question to improve the quality and efficiency of information and data collecting process for further analysis [6]. Meanwhile, focus group as main research method of this research could confirm the richness of data. Multiple groups of individual interviews combine into focus group, and it is great for observer and record respective interviewee's motion in group discussion [7-8]. Therefore, observation and interview are predominantly research method, qualitative research strategy is appropriate in this research topic.

Brennen points out the design of research question, and the topic of group discussion is the priority process of focus group [9]. Which the research question of pilot study is 'How social media influencer affects consumer's decision on hotel in China', at the meantime, the question inspire topic, which is 'Viewpoint of judgement standard of hotel among youth in China influenced by the online tourism celebrities advertise content.' When the topic of this pilot group is selected, the aim of this focus group and interview question could be confirm, which there are three aims and five question in this focus group. The aims include the following perspectives:

- (1) figure out does social media key opinion leader change consumer perspective of hotel or trip accommodation.
- (2) figure out does social media influencer produce and promote different standard of selecting hotel or trip accommodation.
- (3) figure out does social media Key opinion leader affects the media user's consume behaviour on hotel or trip accommodation.

The Questions include:

- (1) which type of hotel or trip accommodation is popular from your viewpoint in Chinese social media platform.
- (2) what standard you have on hotel or trip accommodation.
- (3) what your perspective of social media influencer generated travel information content
- (4) have you been affect by social media influencer on the decision of select hotel or trip accommodation.

(5) how you judge phenomenon of exaggerate advertisement on hotel or accommodation to attract consumer by social media influencer.

When the research material been designed, the selection of space for meeting and the participants is next process. The environment for group discussion and is vital to the focus group [9]. But due to covid-19, there has requirement of maintain social distance, finally the meeting is held online. For member selection, according to Dou , user at 18-34 age are the most active user at RED, female and male respectively take up 30% and 70% of use sexual distribution, and from Bigdata-Research's static analyses that people use social media for travel information are also around 18-40 years old, which due to cost control, this pilot study consisted 7 member, which are 5 female and 2 male around 18-30 years old, include student and office worker [10-11].

The limitation of this research is the number of participants on focus group, due to the cost control and covid-19, this research is a pilot study, the participant of this focus group is reach minimum requirement, at 7 people. However, because this research topic is focus on how media influence affect Chinese media user's behaviour of hotel selection, the participant number is relatively small compare with the huge amount of Chinese population and enormous travel accommodation market, which means the research result is not universality, but it could be promote from this pilot study to full scale research for various data and result robustness.

### 3. Background Information

As it mention that the research topic of social media influencer affects media user's behaviour at tourism in China is rare been done, especially the niche aspect like the effects on hotel decision, especially there are few essay about compare which media platform at China are most popular of been used for sharing or searching travel and trip accommodation experience or review, it naturally points out that this essay need to use qualitative measure to figure out the market background of the research topic, which means the observation is the method this research will apply on background research.

Before the illustration, the definition of Key opinion Leader (KOL) need to be addressed, Key opinion leader (KOL) generating media content that display self-experience on social media platform, in which their content is influence enough to dramatically effect on media user behaviour [12]. The social media system in China is unique, there has a Chinese version of social media platform ecosystem, for instance, people in China will use Weibo, Xiao Hong Shu (Red) rather than Twitter and Instagram, however the promotion on social media market is same as other place of the world, especially the influencer marketing is consistently rising, which in 2019, there are around 79% of company increase the investment on social media KOL marketing, at the meantime, platform like Red will sharing and discuss the consume experience of various category of production, which attracted huge amount of consumer to search specific product on Red, finally affects their purchasing decision [13]. Media user's thought and action may influence by first-class producer, Xiao Hong Shu (RED) is the biggest KOL generated content social media platform in China, include different category content like fashion product review and tourism information sharing and facility rating like hotel and restaurant [14-16]. The number of media content about tourism is huge and consistently increasing every year, according to Global SaaS's analysis in the year of 2022, there already appeared more than 15.37 million media content about travel, and the specific content related to trip accommodation is over 6.54 million[17].

Furthermore, the age group, sexual distribution, and user image of the media user of RED and consumer who use RED for receive travel information like customer experience and review of hotel need to be explore for better research design and accuracy of research result. According to multiple previously done static analysis of Audience of RED and user who focus on tourism information at RED, it concluded that most of the user of RED is youth, while chasing high quality lifestyle, and

the image of RED user and who search travel information at RED are similar. In the year of 2020. There are over 1 billion daily active user at RED, and over 3 billion over media content had been generated, at the meantime, the user of RED is displaying a rejuvenation trend, the age group of most of the RED user is around 18-34 years old, which take up around 83.31% of total user at RED, furthermore, female are tend to use RED more than male, in 2021, the percentage of female user almost take up 90% of total user, while male user only take up around 10% [10]. The amount of user and sexual distribution is continue change at 2022, there are 2billion dally user, and the gender ratio of male and female users become 30% vs 70% [18].

Meanwhile, according to the data analysis done by Bigdata-Research in the year of 2020, the age group of online tourists service in China is around 18-40 years old, 18-30 years old user take up about 37% of market share, at the meantime, the requirement of online travel service also dramatically change, traditional online service is follow user's needs of travel destination, then plan for the trip ticket and accommodation, in the digital media era, user will be attract by media content post on social media and further explore specific travel information at other photograph and video blog at social media platform [11]. The statistical analysis also points out that in 2020, people use social media the most for travel decision, which about 67% of user make decision before searching online, and among all social media platform, RED is the most used social media platform for tourism reference, about 63.7% people user it for searching specific travel information like trip accommodation and restaurant. At the meantime, the research of tendency of youth user been influence by KOL content in hotel selection in China is lack of discuss.

## **4. Result and Discussion**

### **4.1. Obeservation and Focus Group Result**

As this essay previously mention that in digital media era, people could share or receive virous information on social media, meanwhile, the cost of user and content creator are consisting of reducing, user generate content become easy and popular, media user could receive specific detail they want rather than description of general category. Travel information include transportation, accommodation, and restaurant, at traditional media era, the fix cost of media production is inevitable, which most of the information are texture review and rating, however, in new media era, due to the digitalization, the budget of generated media is reduced, multi-media information sharing is become possible, media user could have in-depth understand of their destination, and accommodation. Meanwhile, due to the low cost of media content production, content generator could focus on more specific area, finding niche destination or visit some place due to accommodation is possible, which the number of media user using social media like RED for travel information is consistently increased, and there are looking for unique, special trip experience [1,11]. According to Anderson that the surplus of production could reduce cost, to confirm the profit, company will try to make sure the scarcity of their product, which means travel content on social media such as hotel content will be selected for unique target [1]. While the influence of social media are increasing, such as KOL 's review or recommendation will affects on the hotel or trip accommodation, the power of their influence is beneficial on commercial and visible, although the standard of hotel experience and consumer satisfaction had exist, and points out four aspect are vital for consumer next purchasing, the effects from social media influencer, to influence or even change customer consumer behaviour is possible, which the possibility of whether the social media influencer affects consumer behaviour on hotel or trip accommodation need to be verify, which in this essay will use focus group to figure out the media user's tendency [2,3].

Previous it mentions that there are three aims and five question in this pilot study, in this section, the result of the aim and question will be display. It needs to be notice that the answer of aims is came

from the analysis of the result of questions, which follow section will illustrate the result of question and analysis it, then come out the answer of the aim. From the analyzation of focus group notes, it summary the answer of five question.

For the first question, there are 4 interviewee points out that seaside or sea viewing hotel is hit choice, 2 people mention that countryside style or natural scenery hotel is famous choice, only 1 person believe that hotel at city that famous online like Chongqing is special choice, but all of them mention that hotel or trip accommodation famous on social media have same characteristic, which is the location and the facility of hotel. Around 60% of interviewee are prefer that popular hotel need clean and stylish design of room, while about 40% of them are interested in specific equipment, such as room equip with projector for watch movie.

For second question, each participant gives same answer, they believe that there are three dimensions are essential, namely location, customer service and room facility, to be specific, every interviewee mention that they will select hotel that located near to airport and train station or scenic spot, however, there are opposite viewpoint at scenery of hotel, the positive and negative viewpoint are both only have one supporter, one believe that hotel or accommodation is only for rest, the require of beautiful outside view is minimum, while other one argue that if hotel did not present with great scenery that fit the social media promotion, then it will feel the purchasing of the hotel room is not satisfy experience.

For third question, every participant points out that they will take social media influencer generated travel information content as a reference, but it will not be the decisive element when they make decision on hotel. There are 3 people will take KOL's travel information as reference for further research, then made their independent decision, other 4 people are preferring to use their personal experience to identify the truthfulness of social media influencer generated travel context, then make final decision.

For fourth question, there appear viewpoint diversity, the percentage of participant who had influenced by social media influencer versus who had not influenced by social media influencer is 60% VS 40%. People who support the viewpoint that they been affect by KOL mention two aspects of how their purchase behaviour been affect, first aspect is most consumer are not familiar with travel destination and accommodation, then they will try to get reference that have rich media content like specific photo blog or even detail video blog, which social media influencer generated tourism content could fulfil they need. The second aspect is consumer may attract by social media famous scenery spot's gorgeous graph, however, due to the exaggerated and fake propaganda by KOL, the experience may vary.

For last question, every participant agrees that exaggerate advertisement on hotel or accommodation to attract consumer by social media influencer is commercial behaviour and become negative phenomenon, furthermore, they points out that government or relevant department should enhance the force on social media influencer advertise supervision and control, at the meantime, they believe that consumer also need to improve their discriminating ability of fake or exaggerate content when search travel information on social media platform.

The answer of three aims is summarized below:

For first aim, apparently social media influencer did change consumer's viewpoint of compare different hotel or trip accommodation, as focus group result points out that KOL generated travel content did add new detail on traditional hotel selection standard like location and room equipment, but the bespoke requirement is based on consumer's personal hobbies, social media influencer only help them to realize their needs and provide information, for instance, consumer may take niche location or build-in projector room into their viewpoint of review different hotel location, tangible and visible aspect service, then make final decision of purchase, which these information are share by social media influencer.



For second aim, as it mention at previous aim, social media influencer did make general standard of hotel selection more specific and bespoke, however, at this focus group, it clearly points out that social media user still take traditional four factor to judge hotel, which the tangible aspect, visible aspect, customer service and location, it naturally conclude that social media influencer products and promotion did not create different standard of selecting hotel or trip accommodation, but make it specific and bespoke, which means fulfil the need of niche market.

For last aim, it clearly points out that social media Key opinion leader did not affects the media user's consume behaviour on hotel or trip accommodation, as this focus group mention that participant will not take KOL's content as decisive information on decide their hotel or trip accommodation, most people only take KOL's travel content as one source of reference, consumer still make critical comparisons then make independent decision. Meanwhile the influencer's tourism sharing did attract media user's an affect their interest and preference on compare different hotel.

In conclusion, social media influencer did not affect consumer's decision on hotel, but it did help consumer realized new specific requirement on traditional hotel selection and make general standard of hotel selection more detail and bespoke.

## 4.2. Discussion

As previously mentioned, the ability of generating media become surplus in digital era, the fix cost of media production is reducing, the profit of market segmentation could be promise [1]. Social media influencer will focus on different niche market, while social media is a great platform of explore niche market. Because of the feature of social media, media user could interact with media content, they not only saw influencer's post, but also participant the discussion at the comment area below the post content. During the participant of information sharing and discussion, the engagement of media context will rise, especially the context of niche market [19]. Which means that advertise on social media platform can help hotel been notice by specific costumer, such as costumer who interested in traditional interior design, for companies who try to explore niche market to earn profit, social media influencer market is great investment direction.

Furthermore, as the number of youth media user participate into the social media surge, hotel and other tourism companies realised the huge market, they take part in the conversation in social media platform for understand consumer requirement. Meanwhile, youth media user is chase individuation experience, they will give advice or even order hotel companies to improve service or even create new products, which end up that media audience are technically part of the developer of new tourism market [20]. Most of the travel information share by influencer are because of the content is suit audience flavour, in other words, influencer will consider what category of hotel and trip accommodation is attract different audience for maximum traffic and click rate of their post, then earn more profit, which end up is consumer push key opinion leader, hotel companies and tourism market develop new product rather than they affect consumer decision.

But for entire hotel market, youth media user's standard of the quality control on judge, compare hotel still maintain the same, it is the priority of hotel review and rating, and did not compensate by adding other attractive feature or influencer's fake advertise. Social media key opinion leader did not influence consume decision because they only take influencer's content as reference rather than decisive reason of select specific hotel. For instance, one of the members in focus group mention that once a KOL post a video blog that display a hotel that have invincible sea view, however when they arrival, they found the sea view is actually a small artificial pool, while the quality control and service of the hotel is lack of competitiveness than another hotel at same price. In other word, consumer will make comparison before make decision, even they are attracted by blog that introduce fancy hotel. According to focus group discussion, consumer may saw an attractive hotel post on social media by Key opinion leader on hotel, but they will not make decision before comparison, most of them may

create short list for hotel comparison, they only take the suitable hotel into short list first, then in the comparison section, they will compare the content from influencer and other online review, finally they will find out which hotel is truly worth the price, which means the content in influencer advertise have to be support by truth hotel condition.

### 4.3. Suggestion of Hotel Management in the Age of Media Convergence

As previous section analyses the result of focus group, it naturally points out that social media travel information from KOL could influence media user's viewpoint of hotel comparison, but it is not become the decisive factor that affect consumer's purchase behaviour. Although the number of media user take information from social media influencer as reference, the quality of hotel service still vital, and cannot be compensate by KOL's fake or exaggerate advertisement, while the hotel and social media influencer could easily make exaggerate or fake advertisement of hotel location, by edit graph or video to embellish the scenery they catch on hotel to convince consumer that the specific hotel environment or the location hotel settle is fancy [21]. It may attract consumer, but the experience is negative and unworthy, which finally damage reputation and reduce revenue of influencer and hotel. However, in the focus group, participants agrees that their awareness of fake and exaggerate content are increasing during years of using social media, the vigilant of influencer's content truthfulness is become consensus in this focus group participants.

From the finding of this focus group, it concludes two suggestions for hotel manager and consumer on social media respectively. For hotel manager, the social media platform is great for advertise, but it also become a power of competition between different hotel and influencer, but it is not means the competition on fake advertisement, but for the hotel quality, the tangible aspect, visible aspect, customer service and location still vital, and cannot be compensate by embellish content on social media content, the priority of hotel is the quality control, then manager could reach influencer for truthful advertise on their beautiful scenery and first-class service [22]. For consumer, they knew that social media is a powerful platform that could provide huge amount of travel information, but they also need to aware that social media also a great platform for invest advertise, many hotel companies are invest at all platform advertisement, which include social media platform include RED, which means consumer should develop a sense of discernment on possible fake advertisement, and keep critical thinking when reference KOL's content, then make independent decision [22,23].

## 5. Conclusions

This essay is illustrated and discuss how social media influencer affects consumer's decision on hotel in China. Although social media user takes social media as a tool for gain tourism information, there had been done a huge amount of research are only focus on social media general effects on tourism market, the research of niche aspect like effects on hotel is rare been done, which naturally point out the research aim is illustrate and discuss how social media influencer affects consumer's decision on hotel in China. Because the research topic is rare been research, to achieve research aim, this research uses qualitative method, the observation and focus group as research method.

All in all, by the analysis of data collected by focus group, it concludes that social media influencer did affects consumer on hotel comparison, which mainly influence on perspective of hotel comparison and the standard of hotel selection, but the social media influencer did not affect the media user's consume behaviour on hotel or trip accommodation. To be specific, social media travel KOL did provide bespoke viewpoint of various hotel, which help consumer specify their perspective of select hotel, while maintain the original four categories that vital for hotel experience and decisive of hotel selection. However, it did not create new generous factor as four important elements of select trip accommodation like tangible aspect, visible aspect, customer service and location during specify

requirement, because the niche flavour of hotel is come from consumer rather than influencer, influencer did not educate consumer, they only notify the exist of certain products to consumer.

After concluded the effects of social media influencer on hotel selection, there are two suggestions for commercial decision and consumer behaviour respectively. For hotel companies, social media influencer advertisement did play important role on attract costumer, but the consumer standard of judging hotel remains the same, and become complex, to increase revenue and build up reputation still need invest on quality control. For consumer, they need to acknowledge the positive and negative when take social media influencer's tourism content as reference on planning trip and develop ability of discernment on possible fake advertisement and make independent purchase decision on hotel or trip accommodation.

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