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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING ON THE DESTINATION CHOICE OF GEN Z TOURISTS, A CASE OF UGANDA WILDLIFE EDUCATION CENTER (UWEC) ENTEBBE

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A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES, DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A BACHELORS DEGREE OF TOURISM AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT OF BUSITEMA UNIVERSITY

JULY 2026

DECLARATION

I NIUMF HASSAN, confirm that the content of this research report is original work of my creation and never has been submitted to any academic institution for the award of any academic qualification. The information from other scholars has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with academic standards

22/07/2026

APPROVAL

This is to certify that this report has been submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Bachelors Degree of Tourism and Travel Management with my approval as a university supervisor.

ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR

Mr. WAMPANDE JOWALIE AHMED

Signature.....

Date.....

DEDICATION

I dedicate this Research report to Allah the Most High for his guidance, wisdom, strength and unwavering grace throughout my academic journey. I also dedicate this work to my parents **Mr. SSENTAMU HASSAN** and **Mrs. NAKIBIRANGO FARIDAH**, family members, and friends for their unconditional love, encouragement, sacrifices, and continuous support. Finally, I dedicate this research to all scholars and practitioners whose commitment to knowledge and service continues to inspire meaningful research and positive societal transformation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVATION	MEANING
CVI	Content Validity Index
DV	Dependent Variable
Gen Z	Generation Z
GWI	GlobalWebIndex
IV	Independent Variable
ROI	Return on Investment
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UGT	Uses and Gratifications Theory
USD	United States Dollar
UTB	Uganda Tourism Board
UWEC	Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre

ABSTRACT

The study examined the influence of social media influencer marketing on the destination choice of Generation Z (Gen Z) tourists with a specific focus at Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre (UWEC) based in Entebbe. The study aimed at examining how influencer marketing contribute to promoting the awareness of UWEC, its impact on the perceived destination image and its subsequent impacts on the overall destination choice of Gen Z tourists. By adopting a descriptive cross-sectional design, the study used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies with the target population that included 50 respondents comprising UWEC administrators, tour guides, and Gen Z with a sample size of 45 respondents selected using purposive and convenient sampling guided by the Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) sample size determination table. The data for the study was collected using structured questionnaires, surveys, interview questions on selected respondent with special knowledge at UWEC, and data collected will be analyzed using SPSS version 26 conducting descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses. The study acquires a high response rate of 93.3% (42 respondents), the findings further revealed strong relationship that social media influencer marketing effectively raises awareness of UWEC Aggregate Mean =4.34; SD=0.68), with a positive influence on the destination's image, (Aggregate Mean =4.38); SD=0.65), and significantly affects destination choice (Aggregate Mean=4.34; SD=0.65). The correlation results revealed a strong link between destination awareness and choice ($r = 0.731$, $p < 0.01$), and between destination image and choice ($r = 0.788$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analyses demonstrated that awareness creation is a significant indicator of the destination choice ($\beta = 0.364$, $p < 0.001$), showing destination image as the significant influential indicator ($\beta = 0.517$, $p < 0.001$), together explaining 62.1% of the variance in destination decisions. The study concluded with the major highlights that social media influencer marketing strongly enhance awareness, promoting destination image and shaping the destination choice of Gen Z tourists. Overall, the study recommends that UWEC should engage in sustained partnership with potential influencers, craft authentic and visual digital content with a strategic effort to promote tourism among the young tourist demographic

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presented the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, scope of the study, significance of the study, and conceptual frame work.

1.1 Background of the Study

This research aimed at exploring the impact of social media influencer marketing on the destination choice of Generation Z (Gen Z) tourists, with a particular focus on the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC). The study sought to examine how UWEC can utilize social media influencers as a strategic tool for attracting Gen Z visitors, who are digital natives born between 1997 and 2012. These young travelers prioritize authentic experiences, sustainability, visual storytelling, and peer-like recommendations from influencers on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Social media influencer marketing involves collaborations with credible content creators who share sponsored or organic posts, videos, reels, and stories to inspire travel decisions, build trust through social proof, and fulfill Gen Z's informational, entertainment, and social needs (Keelson et al., 2024; Brown & Hayes, 2008).

Globally, influencer marketing has become a dominant force in tourism promotion, especially among Gen Z, who now constitutes nearly 40% of international travellers (Expedia Group, 2025). Gen Z spends an average of 10.6 hours online daily, with 2 hours and 43 minutes dedicated to social media (GWI., 2025). Recent 2025 statistics show that 84% of Gen Z travellers use social media for travel inspiration, 66% rely on Instagram and TikTok for destination ideas, 60% use TikTok as their primary source of inspiration, and 40% have booked a vacation directly because of TikTok content (Peek Pro, 2025; Condor Ferries, 2025). Additionally, 77% of TikTok users report being inspired to visit a destination after seeing influencer content, while 73% of travellers (and up to 83% under 40) say influencer recommendations have led to actual booking decisions (Marketing Dive., 2025); Influencer.com, 2024). In Thailand, leading global examples, influencer marketing campaigns on TikTok and Instagram have been credited with driving a 28% increase in Gen Z arrivals between 2023 and 2025, particularly to sustainable and experiential attractions (Tourism Authority of Thailand,

2025) Phyo, 2025). Influencer authenticity has been shown to enhance pro-environmental attitudes and visit motivations, with platforms surpassing traditional travel agents as the main source of inspiration for Gen Z (Expedia Group, 2025).

In Africa, influencer marketing is rapidly evolving amid high mobile penetration, a youthful population (over 60% under 25), and Gen Z's preference for purpose-driven, authentic content (Statista, 2025). The continent's influencer economy is growing at an estimated 25% annually, with Gen Z (31.2% of Africa's population) playing a central role in shaping travel trends (Dott Media House, 2025; Marketing Analytics Africa, 2025). Influencers advertising spend in key markets such as South Africa is projected to exceed USD 30 million in 2025, growing at 10% per year, with brands reporting strong ROI from micro- and nano-influencers (South African Business Matters, 2025). Over 70% of African social media users say influencers affect their purchase decisions, and campaigns focused on biodiversity, sustainable practices, and community narratives have successfully boosted intra-African and international tourism (Dott Media House, 2025). South Africa stands out as a leading African example, where influencer-led campaigns promoting Kruger National Park and sustainable wildlife experiences have contributed to a 22% rise in Gen Z arrivals and enhanced the country's image as an ethical tourism destination (South African Tourism, 2025).

In Uganda, In Uganda, the adoption of targeted social media influencer marketing specifically aimed at Gen Z tourists' remains very limited. Although Gen Z represents a growing segment of potential visitors who actively seek authentic, sustainable, and ethical wildlife experiences, UWEC has not effectively leveraged influencers to reach them. As a result, awareness of UWEC among Gen Z tourists is notably low, particularly on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, where this demographic primarily discovers and chooses destinations (Peek Pro, 2025; Condor Ferries, 2025). This situation has led to weak destination image perception among Gen Z, limited visit intentions, and poor conversion rates into actual visits. For instance, while overall visitor numbers at UWEC hover around 650,000 annually, the proportion of Gen Z tourists' remains disproportionately low compared to their global travel influence and interest in conservation tourism (UWEC, 2025). The center continues to miss significant opportunities to attract this youthful, value-driven segment that prioritizes ethical wildlife encounters and sustainability. This underutilization of influencer marketing contributes to UWEC's ongoing challenges in

diversifying its visitor base and increasing meaningful engagement from Gen Z tourists (UTB, 2025); adapted from limited local studies on youth tourism in Uganda).

The Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC), commonly known as Entebbe Zoo, was established in 1952 as a sanctuary for injured, sick, orphaned, or rescued animals. It has since evolved into a premier conservation, education, and tourism site that rescues and resettles hundreds of animals annually, cares for 253 animals, and conducts conservation education programs (UWEC, 2025; Entebbe et al., 2023). UWEC aligns perfectly with Gen Z's interest in ethical wildlife encounters and sustainability, yet its digital influencer engagement lags behind broader national efforts.

The study is guided by the **Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)** because it explains why Gen Z actively seeks influencer content to satisfy specific needs (information, entertainment, social validation, and identity expression) and how this leads to destination-related behaviors (Keelson et al., 2024). UGT was chosen because it provides a clear sequential pathway from exposure to awareness, image formation, and final choice, and it has been successfully applied in recent Gen Z tourism studies. This study therefore investigates the role of social media influencer marketing in raising awareness, shaping positive destination image, and influencing destination choice among Gen Z tourists to UWEC.

1.2 Statement of the Problem.

Uganda's tourism sector has achieved post-pandemic recovery, with international arrivals reaching 1,371,895 and revenues hitting USD 1.28 billion in 2024 (UTB, 2025; (UBOS, 2025). However, the sector continues to lag in effectively targeting **Gen Z** tourists, the fastest-growing travel segment globally.

Globally, Gen Z accounts for nearly 40% of travellers and is heavily influenced by social media influencers. In Thailand, influencer campaigns on TikTok and Instagram drove a 28% increase in Gen Z arrivals between 2023 and 2025 (Thai Tourism Authority, 2025; Phyo, 2025). Similarly, in Africa, South Africa has successfully used influencer marketing to promote ethical wildlife tourism at Kruger National Park, recording a 22% rise in Gen Z visitors (South African Tourism, 2025).

Despite UWEC's strong alignment with Gen Z values of sustainability, authenticity, and ethical wildlife experiences, Uganda has not fully utilized targeted social media influencer marketing for this demographic. As a result, UWEC suffers from limited visibility on platforms where Gen Z discovers destinations, weak appeal among young travellers, and missed opportunities to attract high-value youth visitors and boost revenue.

Without strategic influencer marketing, UWEC risks slower growth and reduced competitiveness. This study therefore examines the impact of social media influencer marketing on Gen Z tourists' destination choice for UWEC to provide actionable insights for improved digital promotion.

1.3 Purpose of the study

i. To examine the impact of social media influencer marketing on the destination choice of Generation Z tourists at Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) in Entebbe as a case study.

1.4 Objectives of the study.

i. To assess the role of social media influencer marketing in creating awareness of UWEC among Gen Z tourists.
ii. To evaluate how social media influencer marketing shapes the perceived destination image of UWEC among Gen Z tourists.
iii. To determine the influence of social media influencer marketing on the decision making of Gen Z tourists to UWEC.

1.5 The research question.

i. To what extent does social media influencer marketing create awareness of UWEC among Gen Z tourists?
ii. How does social media influencer marketing shape the perceived destination image of UWEC among Gen Z tourists?
iii. To what extent does social media influencer marketing influence the decision making of Gen Z tourists toward UWEC?

1.6.0 Scope of the Study

The study covered the content scope, geographical scope and time scope;

1.6.1 Content Scope

This research aimed at examining the impact of social media influencer marketing on the destination choice of Gen Z tourists. This research further concentrates on influencer activity across major platforms commonly used by Gen Z tourists

1.6.2 Geographical Scope

This research concentrated at Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC), located in Entebbe Municipality, Wakiso District, and Central Uganda. UWEC serves as the primary case study site due to its status as a leading wildlife conservation, education, and tourism attraction in the country.

1.6.3 Time Scope

This research concentrated on the time frame between 2020 and 2025, and primary data was carried out in 2026.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study is likely to be significant to;

For UWEC Management and Staff

The findings will provide actionable insights into how influencer marketing can be strategically used to attract Gen Z visitors a demographic that values authenticity, sustainability, ethical wildlife experiences, and shareable digital content. By understanding which influencer attributes (credibility, content quality, and platform relevance) most strongly drive awareness, positive destination image, and visit intentions.

For the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) and Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities

The research offers evidence-based recommendations to integrate influencer marketing more deliberately into national tourism promotion strategies, particularly for targeting Gen Z the fastest-growing travel segment globally.

For Academic and Research Community

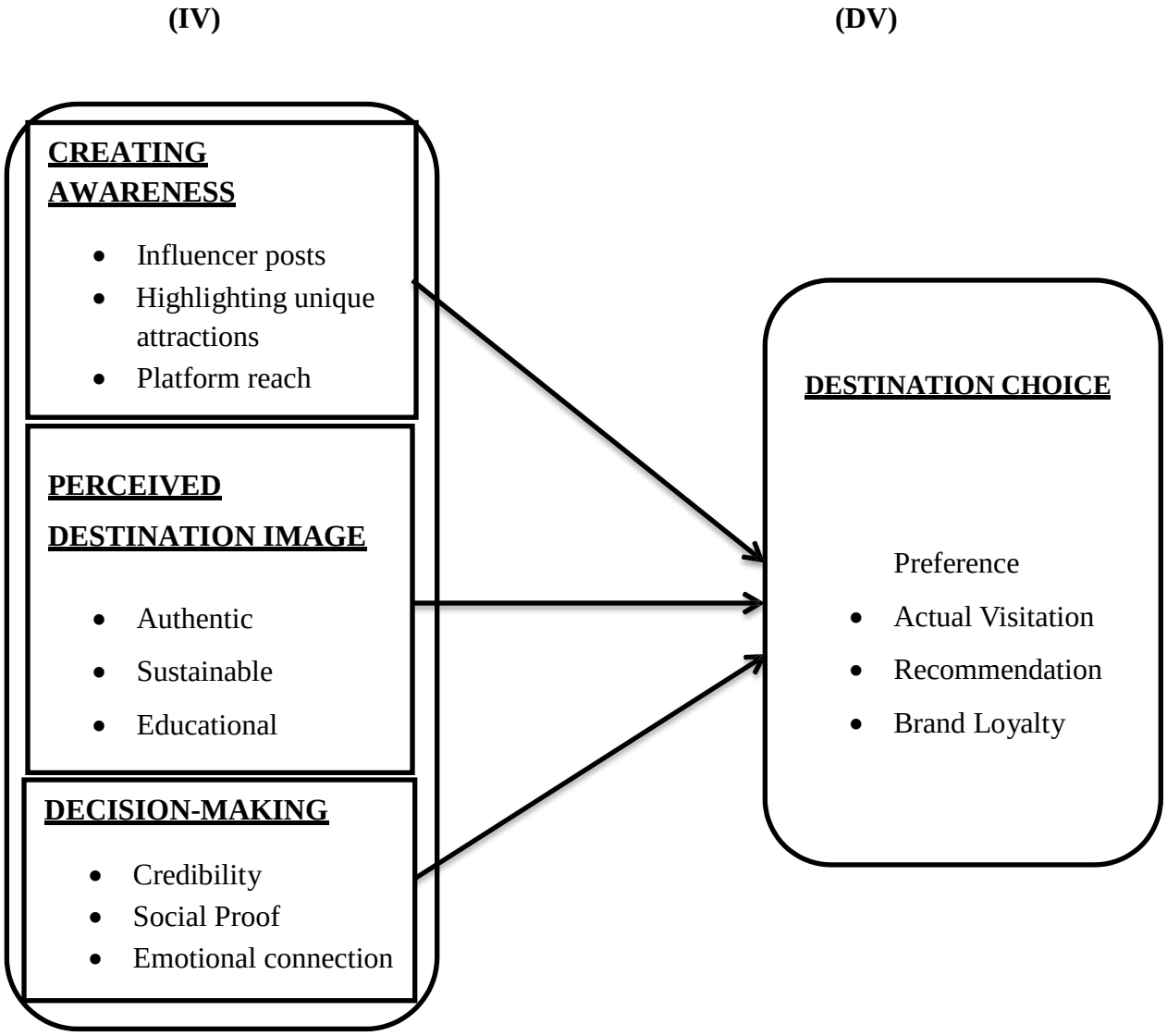
The findings of this study will enrich the existing but limited academic literature influencer marketing in African wildlife tourism contexts, particularly its specific effects on Gen Z behavior in developing destinations. By grounding the study in the **Uses and Gratifications Theory** and providing empirical data from a real-world case (UWEC), it fills a gap in understanding how digital influencers influence youth travel decisions in Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings can serve as a reference for future studies on other Ugandan attractions (e.g., national parks, cultural sites) or cross-generational comparisons, and support undergraduate/graduate research in tourism marketing, digital communication, and sustainable development.

1.8 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework is defined as a visual model that depicts the presumed relationships among the variables under investigation. It serves as a guide for understanding how the independent variable is expected to influence the dependent variable. For instance, the research explores the influence of social media influencer marketing on the destination choice of Generation Z tourists.

Figure 1.1 A conceptual framework showing the relationship between social media influencer marketing and destination choice.

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING **DESTINATION CHOICE**



Source: Adapted from Keelson et al. (2024) – "Driving Forces of Social Media and Its Impact on Tourists' Destination Decisions and recent Gen Z travel behavior studies (e.g., Peek Pro, 2025; Expedia Group Media Solutions, 2025). Modified and restructured by the researcher to align specifically with social media influencer marketing as the independent variable and destination choice of Gen Z tourists as the dependent variable, in the context of the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC).

1.9 Explanation of the conceptual framework

The conceptual framework, illustrates the influence of social media influencer marketing which is the independent represented by (Creating Awareness, Perceived Destination Image and Decision making aimed at Destination Choice) of Gen Z tourists while Destination Choice which

is the Dependent variable was measured in terms of Visit Intention, Destination Preference, Actual Visitation, Recommendation and Loyalty

1.10 Definition of the key terms used in the study.

1.10.1 Generation Z (Gen Z) Tourists

People born from 1997 and 2012 are widely recognized as digital natives, who are highly connected to social media, value authenticity, sustainability, experiential travel, and visual/shareable content. In this study, Gen Z tourists refer to young travelers (approximately aged 13–28 in 2025) who actively seek travel inspiration from influencers and prioritize ethical, meaningful, and environmentally responsible destinations (Dimock, 2019; Expedia Group, 2022;Pro., 2025; Condor Ferries., 2025).

1.10.2 Destination Choice

Destination choice is defined as the process which tourists make decisions to evaluate and select a specific travel destination from available alternatives. In this study, it encompasses Gen Z tourists' final preference for UWEC, including the formation of visit intentions, preference ranking over competing wildlife/education sites, actual booking or visitation behavior, and post-visit advocacy (recommendation or sharing). It is the ultimate behavioral outcome influenced by influencer marketing (Keelson et al., 2024)

1.10.3 Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC)

A premier wildlife conservation, rescue, rehabilitation, and education facility located in Entebbe, Uganda, established in 1952 as a sanctuary for injured, orphaned, or confiscated animals. It currently cares for over 253 animals, conducts hundreds of successful rescues annually, and serves as a key tourism attraction offering ethical wildlife viewing, interpretation talks, and conservation education to promote public awareness and sustainable practices (UWEC official reports; Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Uganda).

1.10.4 Social Media Influencer Marketing

The strategic collaboration between brands and individuals with significant, engaged followings on social media platforms who create authentic, sponsored or organic content (posts, videos,

reels, stories, endorsements) to promote products, services, or destinations. It capitalizes on the influencer's perceived credibility, reliability, and trust to influence audience attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Keelson et al., 2024; Giang, & Hải, 2022; Haryani et al., 2022; Brown & Hayes, 2008).

1.10.5 Tourism

According to (Kalam et al., 2022),Tourism is the deed and method of taking a break from the regular monotonous routine and travel to places away from the boundaries of home in quest for entertainment, recreation, relaxation, and pleasure, while utilizing the business arrangement of the service-providers.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction.

This chapter presents the theoretical review (Uses and gratification theory), and empirical review of existing literature basing on the study objectives.

2.1Theoretical review

2.2 Uses and gratification theory.

The study is guided by the **Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)**, originally developed by (Katz et al., 1974). The theory posits that individuals are active participants in their media consumption and deliberately select media content to fulfil specific personal and social needs rather than being passive recipients (Keelson et al, 2024; McQuail, 2010).

According to Keelson et al. (2024), UGT has been widely applied in tourism research to explain why tourists, especially Gen Z, actively seek influencer content on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. The theory identifies several key gratifications relevant to travel behavior: cognitive needs (information seeking and awareness), affective needs (entertainment and emotional pleasure), and social integrative needs (social validation and belonging), and personal integrative needs (self-identity and value expression). In the context of influencer marketing, Gen Z uses influencer content to satisfy needs for authentic travel inspiration, sustainability information, peer recommendations, and identity alignment with ethical tourism practices (Vašaničová, 2025; Rajput, 2025).

UGT is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a clear framework for understanding how influencer marketing leads to a sequential process: from creating awareness of UWEC, to shaping its perceived destination image, and finally influencing Gen Z tourists' destination choice and visit intentions. The theory helps explain why Gen Z, as digital natives, actively engages with influencer-generated content rather than traditional advertising when making travel decisions.

2.3 Role of Social Media Influencer Marketing in Creating Awareness of UWEC among Gen Z Tourists

Social media influencer marketing plays a vital role in creating awareness and facilitating the discovery of tourism destinations among Gen Z tourists. This generation heavily depends on social media for travel inspiration, with 84% using platforms like TikTok and Instagram to discover new destinations and 60% citing TikTok as their primary source of travel ideas (Peek Pro, 2025; Condor Ferries, 2025). Influencers create awareness by producing short, visually appealing, and authentic content such as reels, stories, and videos that introduce destinations to audiences who may previously have been unaware of them.

Empirical studies support this view. Vašaničová (2025) found that influencer credibility, authenticity, and content format significantly increase destination awareness among Gen Z. Rajput (2025) revealed that genuine influencer content raised awareness of sustainable tourism sites by 55% among Indian Gen Z travellers. (Widaningsih & Putranto, 2025), also showed that high-quality TikTok content is a strong predictor of awareness and emotional engagement. In Africa, South Africa has used influencer campaigns to successfully raise awareness of Kruger National Park among young international travellers (South African Tourism, 2025).

However, a major gap exists in the literature. Most studies on awareness creation have been conducted in Europe and Asia (e.g., Vašaničová, 2025) in Slovakia and (Rajput & Gandhi, 2025 in India). Very few studies have examined how influencer marketing creates awareness for specific wildlife conservation and education sites like UWEC in the Ugandan or East African context. This leaves a clear contextual gap, as findings from other regions may not fully apply due to differences in digital infrastructure, cultural values, and Gen Z's interest in ethical wildlife experiences in Uganda.

2.4 How Social Media Influencer Marketing Shapes the Perceived Destination Image of UWEC among Gen Z Tourists

According to Költringer and Dickinger (2015) describes destination image as "an interactive system of thoughts, ideas, feelings, imagery, and goals toward a destination". Destination image is considered as a guest's or visitors' perception of the company and its products (Malhotra, 2012).

Social media influencer marketing significantly shapes the perceived destination image by influencing both the cognitive beliefs and emotional feelings that Gen Z tourists hold about a destination. Destination image is described as an interactive system of thoughts, ideas, feelings, and impressions toward a place (Költringer& Dickinger, 2015). Gen Z tends to form these perceptions through authentic visual storytelling and value-aligned influencer content.

Studies confirm this influence. Widaningsih (2025) found that influencer credibility and TikTok content quality strongly shape emotional responses, self-identification, and positive destination image among Gen Z. (Babu, 2025), established that trust, emotional connection, and content characteristics significantly affect destination perception. Rajput (2025) noted that genuine influencer content enhances perceptions of sustainability, ethics, and accessibility attributes highly valued by Gen Z. (Ong, et al., 2024), further highlighted that Gen Z responds more favorably to relatable and authentic influencer portrayals.

Despite these findings, a significant gap remains. Most studies on destination image formation were carried out in non-African contexts and focused on general leisure or beach destinations rather than wildlife conservation and education centers. For example, there is limited research on how influencers shape Gen Z's image of UWEC as an ethical, educational, and family-friendly conservation site in Uganda. This gap is particularly important because UWEC's core offering (animal rescue and conservation education) differs from typical safari experiences studied in existing literature.

2.5 Influence of Social Media Influencer Marketing on the Destination Choice of Gen Z Tourists to UWEC

Social media influencer marketing has a strong influence on the destination choice and visit intentions of Gen Z tourists. This generation is highly responsive to influencer recommendations, with 40% booking trips directly from TikTok content and 77% being inspired to visit destinations discovered through influencers (Condor Ferries, 2025; Marketing Dive, 2025).

Key studies show that influencer credibility, authenticity, social proof, and emotional connection drive destination choice. Keelson et al. (2024) and Vašaničová (2025) confirmed that trust in influencers significantly predicts travel intentions among Gen Z. Babu (2025) found that perception shaped by influencer content strongly predicts visit intention. Widaningsih (2025) reported both direct and indirect effects of influencer content on visit intention through emotions and FOMO. Rajput (2025) added that genuine content fosters self-determined intentions toward sustainable destinations.

However, a clear research gap exists in this area. While national influencer campaigns in Uganda have contributed to overall tourism growth (UTB, 2025), there is almost no empirical research examining how influencer marketing specifically influences Gen Z's destination choice for individual attractions like UWEC. Most existing studies focus on general tourism or broad national branding and were conducted outside Africa. This leaves a significant gap in understanding the conversion process from awareness and image formation to actual destination choice for conservation-focused sites in the Ugandan context.

2.6 Summary of the Literature Reviewed

The chapter reviewed literature from different presented by various scholars show both supporting and non-supporting views on the impact of social media influencer marketing on Gen Z tourists' destination choice. However, the majority of the literature strongly supports that influencer marketing plays a significant role in creating awareness, shaping perceived destination image, and influencing destination choice among Gen Z. Scholars such as Keelson et al. (2024), Vašaničová (2025), Rajput (2025), Widaningsih (2025), and Babu (2025) provided empirical evidence that influencer credibility, authenticity, content quality, and social proof are key factors that satisfy Gen Z's gratifications and lead to positive tourism outcomes. Relating to their arguments, the researcher aligned with those who presented strong proof supporting the positive impact of influencer marketing across the three dimensions of the study.

However, the results of their discussions cannot be fully relied upon or directly applied to this study because most of the findings were not from Uganda. For example, Vašaničová (2025) was conducted in Slovakia, Rajput (2025) in India, Babu (2025) in Bangladesh, and Widaningsih (2025) in Indonesia. These studies mainly examined general tourism destinations, hotels, or national campaigns rather than specific wildlife conservation and education sites like UWEC. Factors such as differences in Gen Z's perception of ethical wildlife tourism, the level of digital infrastructure in Uganda, and the unique conservation focus of UWEC were rarely addressed. Additionally, academic research specifically on the impact of social media influencer marketing on Gen Z tourists' awareness, destination image, and choice in the Ugandan context is still very limited and recent. It is against this background that this study becomes necessary to fill these gaps by providing context-specific empirical evidence on the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z tourists' destination choice with reference to the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The chapter presents the research design, study population sample size, sampling method, data collection methods, type of data sources, data analysis plan and techniques research validity and reliability and ethical considerations for this study.

3.1 Research Design

Experimental research designs involve deliberately altering one or more factors to examine their influence on a particular outcome and establish causal relationships. while longitudinal designs collect data from the same subjects over an extended period. Case studies provide in-depth analysis of a single instance, and correlational designs examine relationships between variables without manipulation.

The study uses a descriptive cross-sectional survey design which involves collecting data from a sample of respondents at one point in time in order to describe the existing situation and examine relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The study employed this design because it allows the researcher to explore how demographic attributes, particularly age, influence differences among individuals. A cross-sectional design was considered appropriate because it is cost-effective, time-saving, and allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. It also facilitates the use of correlation and regression analysis to determine the influence of social media influencer marketing on Gen Z tourists' destination choice.

3.2 Study Population

Kothari and Gaurav (2019) define a research population as the complete group of individuals, objects, or units that possess the characteristics of interest to a study and from which the researcher intends to draw conclusions or make generalizations. The major study population for this research consisted of Gen Z tourists who had visited UWEC, and administrators involved in marketing and visitor services at the center. The focus was deliberately placed on these two groups because the study's main concern is the destination choice of Gen Z tourists. The total accessible population during the study period was estimated at approximately 50 respondents.

3.3 Sample size

The research utilized a sample size of 45 respondents drawn from the total target population of 50 individuals, comprising of administrators working in UWEC and Gen Z tourists. The sample size was determined by the aid of sample table presented by (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

Table 3:1 showing population and sample size

CATEGORIES OF RESPONDENTS	**PROPOSED SAMPLE**	**ACTUAL SAMPLE**	**SAMPLING METHODS**
ADMINISTRATORS.	3	3	Purposive sampling
TOUR GUIDES	2	2	Convenient Sampling
GEN Z TOURISTS	45	40	Convenient sampling
TOTAL	**50**	**45**	

SOURCE: Krejcie and Morgan, (1970).

3.4 Sample techniques

The researcher used a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was applied to select UWEC staff who are directly involved in marketing, promotion, and visitor services because they possess relevant knowledge and experience. Convenience sampling was used to select Gen Z tourists who were available and willing to participate at the time of data collection at UWEC. This approach ensured that only respondents with relevant information were included while remaining practical within the available time and resources.

3.5 Sources of data

This study utilized information obtained from both primary and secondary sources to provide comprehensive data for analysis. Primary data was gathered directly from respondents using structured questionnaires. Meanwhile, secondary data was sourced from existing materials like UWEC annual reports, publications from the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB), scholarly journal articles, and up-to-date statistics on Gen Z travel behavior.

3.5.1 Primary source

The primary data is very significant in research as it provides accurate and firsthand information about the outcomes of an experiment or observation. For this study, primary data was collected directly from various respondents at the Uganda Wildlife Education Center through questionnaires designed to address the major aspects of the research topic.

3.5.2 Secondary data

Secondary data refers to information that has been collected, compiled, or analyzed by researchers or institutions other than the original investigator. This type of data is commonly derived from existing scholarly materials such as books, pamphlets, research reports, proposals, online journals, and other published academic works. Secondary data was drawn from a range of existing literature, including e-books, peer-reviewed journals, published articles, and periodicals, particularly those focusing on the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre.

3.6 Data collection methods and instruments

Data collection is a systematic procedure of gathering and analyzing relevant information to answer research questions and assess study outcomes. In this study, a self-administered approach was employed, where the selected respondents were given questionnaires to complete on their own based on the items provided by the researcher.

The instrument used was a structured questionnaire comprising closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale: 5 (Strongly Agree), 4 (Agree), 3 (Not Sure), 2 (Disagree), and 1 (Strongly Disagree). This approach was chosen because it saves time and is easy for respondents to complete, as they only need to select the option that best reflects their view, which also improves the consistency of responses (Polit & Beck, 2012). Follow-ups were carried out to ensure a satisfactory response rate and the timely completion of all questionnaires.

3.7 Data collection procedure

The researcher first obtained an introductory letter from the Faculty of Management Sciences at Busitema University, which was used to seek permission from the management of the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) to carry out data collection within the institution. Upon receiving authorization, the researcher contacted the selected respondents and arranged suitable times for administering the questionnaires. The questionnaires, which contained items relevant to the study, were then distributed and later collected after completion. The data obtained were organized, analyzed, and presented in tables, which formed the basis for drawing conclusions for the study.

3.8 Data analysis plan

Data analysis refers to the systematic application of statistical and logical techniques to organize, summarize, interpret, and evaluate collected data. In this study, the gathered data were first edited, coded, and then entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 for analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied to examine the data.

SPSS was selected over other software such as Excel and R due to its user-friendly interface, advanced built-in functions for conducting descriptive analysis, correlation, and regression, as well as its widespread acceptance in social science research. It is also reliable for handling large datasets efficiently while ensuring accuracy in statistical computations.

3.9 Data Analysis Techniques and Methods

The data collected in this study were first cleaned, coded, and systematically arranged into tables for analysis. Descriptive statistical measures, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were then computed to summarize the data. The analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26, selected for its reliability, efficiency, and capacity to reduce errors during data processing. In addition, correlation analysis was applied to assess the strength and direction of relationships among the study variables

3.10 Reliability and Validity of results

3.10.1 Validity of results

To maintain the validity of the data collection instruments, the researcher conducted a pilot test by administering 10 questionnaires to 10 Generation Z tourists at the Uganda Wildlife Education

Centre (UWEC), and the responses were reviewed to assess the clarity and suitability of the instrument for the main study. The questionnaire was also submitted to the academic supervisor for evaluation to ensure alignment with the study objectives, and necessary revisions were made based on the feedback received. In addition, the Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed to determine the relevance of the questionnaire items, resulting in an overall CVI of 0.79, which was above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating adequate content validity. The formula used was: **CVI = Number of items rated as relevant / Total number of items**

Table 3:1 Validity Test Results

Variable	Relevant Items	Total Items	CVI
Awareness Creation	12	13	0.92
Destination Image	12	13	0.92
Destination Choice	12	13	0.92
Overall CVI	36	39	0.92

Source: Expert Evaluation (2026)

The overall Content Validity Index of 0.92 exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70. This indicates that the questionnaire items were relevant and adequately measured the constructs of awareness creation, destination image and destination choice. Therefore, the instrument was considered valid for collecting data for the study.

3.10.2 Reliability of the results

Reliability refers to the extent to which data collection instruments produce consistent results across different settings (Kazim, 2013). To assess this, Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was employed to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire**.** All constructs achieved Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, which is considered acceptable (Taber, 2018). The formula for Cronbach's Alpha is: **α = (N × c) / (v + (N-1) × c) where N = number of items, c = average inter-item covariance and v = average variance**. This ensured the instrument produced consistent results.

Table 3.3: Reliability Test Results

VARIABLE	NUMBER OF ITEMS	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
Awareness Creation	13	0.841
Destination Image	13	0.867
Destination Choice	13	0.852
Overall Reliability	39	0.853

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The results indicate that all study variables had Cronbach's Alpha values above the recommended threshold of 0.70. Awareness Creation recorded an alpha coefficient of 0.841, Destination Image recorded 0.867, while Destination Choice recorded 0.852. The overall reliability coefficient was 0.853. These findings suggest that the questionnaire was highly reliable and capable of producing consistent results.

3.11 Ethical consideration

The researcher secured formal permission to conduct data collection from respondents at UWEC by submitting an introductory letter from the University for Identification Purposes, thereby ensuring that the study adhered to established ethical research standards.

The researcher ensured minimal disruption to wildlife and visitors at UWEC, avoided littering, and promoted responsible behavior during data collection, in line with sustainable tourism principles effectively.

To uphold confidentiality, the identities of respondents who participated in the study were kept anonymous and not disclosed in any part of the research. In addition, the researcher promoted coordination and cooperation among participants by maintaining regular communication through phone calls and direct face-to-face engagements, which helped facilitate smooth data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis, presentation and interpretation of findings on the impact of social media influencer marketing on the destination choice of Gen Z tourists at the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC), Entebbe. The findings are presented according to the study objectives which were

i. To assess the role of social media influencer marketing in creating awareness of UWEC among Gen Z tourists,

ii. To evaluate how social media influencer marketing shapes the perceived destination image of UWEC among Gen Z tourists.

iii. To determine the influence of social media influencer marketing on the destination choice of Gen Z tourists to UWEC.

The chapter presents the response rate, demographic characteristics, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression analysis.

4.1 Response Rate

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Sample size	No. of questionnaires returned	Response Rate (%)
45	42	93.3

Source: Field Data (2026)

The study targeted 45 respondents comprising administrators, tour guides and Gen Z tourists at Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC). Out of the 45 questionnaires distributed, 42 were successfully completed and returned, representing a response rate of 93.3%. Three questionnaires were either not returned or were incomplete and therefore excluded from the analysis. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 70% and above is considered adequate for analysis. Therefore, the response rate obtained was sufficient to provide reliable findings for the study.

4.3 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic information presented on the gender, age, level of education, departments, and period of existence at UWEC.

4.3.1 Gender of Respondents

The researcher requested the respondents to present their gender information and their responses were analysed in the table below

Table 4.2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender		Frequency	percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative Frequency
Valid	**Male**	22	52.4	52.4	52.4
	Female	20	47.6	47.6	100.0
	Total	**42**	**100**	**100**	

Source: Field Data (2026)

The results indicate that 52.4% of the respondents were male while 47.6% were female. This suggests that both genders were adequately represented in the study, providing balanced views regarding the influence of social media influencer marketing on destination choice.

4.3.2 Age of Respondents

The respondents were further required to state their age which was later analyzed and presented in the Table 4.3

Table 4.3: Age Distribution of Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	**18-25**	27	64.3	64.3	64.3
	26-35	10	23.8	23.8	88.1
	36-45	3	7.1	7.1	95.2
	45 & above	2	4.8	4.8	100
Total		**42**	**100**	**100**	

Source: Field Data (2026)

The majority of respondents (64.3%) were aged between 18 and 25 years. This confirms that the study mainly captured views from Gen Z respondents who form the target population of the study. The findings suggest that young tourists constitute a significant proportion of visitors exposed to influencer marketing activities.

4.3.3 Education Level of Respondents

Table 4.4: Education level of Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Certificate	6	14.3	14.3	14.3
	Diploma	11	26.2	26.2	40.5
	Bachelor's Degree	20	47.6	47.6	88.1
	Postgraduate	5	11.9	11.9	100.0
Total		**42**	**100**	**100**	

Source: Field Data (2026)

The findings indicate that the majority of respondents (47.6%) possessed a bachelor's degree, followed by diploma holders (26.2%). This implies that most respondents were sufficiently educated and capable of understanding and evaluating tourism-related information shared through social media platforms.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics based on each study objective

The study examined respondents' views regarding the impact of social media influencer marketing on destination choice using a five-point Likert scale.

Mean Range Interpretation

4.4.1 Role of Social Media Influencer Marketing in Creating Awareness of UWEC among Gen Z Tourists

Table 4.5: Social Media influencer Marketing and Awareness Creation

Statement	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Social media influencer marketing helped me become aware of UWEC as a tourism destination	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.38**	**0.72**
I first learned about UWEC through influencer posts, reels, or videos.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.11**	**0.81**
Influencer content on TikTok and Instagram increased my knowledge about UWEC.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.29**	**0.65**
Travel influencers made UWEC visible to young people like me.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.42**	**0.61**
Seeing influencers visit UWEC made me curious to know more about the centre.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.33**	**0.69**
Influencers introduced UWEC's conservation and rescue work to new audiences.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.44**	**0.57**
Influencer marketing helped UWEC stand out	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.20**	**0.78**

among other wildlife destinations.

I discovered new things about UWEC through influencer stories and live sessions.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.27**	**0.73**
Influencers increased my general awareness of UWEC as an educational destination.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.36**	**0.66**
Content from influencers made me aware of visitor experiences at UWEC trips.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.31**	**0.70**
Influencer campaigns helped UWEC reach Gen Z audiences effectively	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.47**	**0.59**
I came across UWEC because of recommendations from social media travel influencers	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.18**	**0.76**
Social media influencers played a major role in introducing UWEC to potential young visitors.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.41**	**0.63**
Aggregate Mean			**4.34**	**0.68**

Source: Field Data (2026)

The aggregate mean of 4.34 indicates that respondents strongly agreed that social media influencer marketing plays an important role in creating awareness of UWEC among Gen Z tourists. The findings suggest that influencer-generated content increases destination visibility, provides information about conservation activities and introduces UWEC to potential visitors.

4.4.2 How Social Media Influencer Marketing Shapes the Perceived Destination Image of UWEC

Table 4.6: Social Media Influencer Marketing and Perceived Destination Image

Statement	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Influencer content portrays UWEC as an authentic and ethical wildlife destination	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.35**	**0.66**

Influencers make UWEC appear sustainable and environmentally responsible	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.29**	**0.73**
Content shared by influencers shows UWEC as an educational and informative place.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.48**	**0.59**
Influencer posts make UWEC look fun and enjoyable for young people	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.40**	**0.64**
Influencers and travel bloggers create a positive image of UWEC.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.44**	**0.61**
UWEC's official social media pages provide a good impression of the destination.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.22**	**0.71**
Social media influencer content makes UWEC appear as a family-friendly and safe place to visit.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.26**	**0.74**
Social media influencer marketing highlights unique aspects of UWEC that tourists didn't know before.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.37**	**0.67**
Social media influencer marketing highlights unique aspects of UWEC that tourists didn't know before.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.41**	**0.63**
Social media Influencers help build a strong and positive brand image of UWEC.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.39**	**0.68**
Social media Influencers make me view UWEC as a high-quality tourism attraction.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.32**	**0.70**
Influencers at UWEC make me believe it is a worthwhile destination.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.45**	**0.58**
Social media Influencers portray UWEC as a place that supports ethical wildlife tourism.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.52**	**0.55**
Aggregate Mean			**4.38**	**0.65**

Source: Field **Data (2026)**

The aggregate mean of 4.38 indicates that respondents strongly agreed that social media influencer marketing positively shapes the perceived destination image of UWEC. The findings suggest that influencer content portrays UWEC as ethical, educational, sustainable and attractive to young tourists.

4.4.3 Influence of Social Media Influencer Marketing on Destination Choice

Table 4.7: Social Media Influencer Marketing and Destination Choice

Statement	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Social media influencer marketing influences Gen Z tourists' decisions to visit the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC).	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.41**	**0.62**
Gen Z Tourists consider recommendations or reviews on social media influencer platforms before deciding to visit UWEC.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.28**	**0.70**
Social media made it easier for Gen Z tourists to choose UWEC as a tourism destination.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.37**	**0.66**
Seeing friends or influencers post about UWEC motivated Gen Z tourists to visit.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.46**	**0.58**
I used social media to compare UWEC with other wildlife destinations before making a decision.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.18**	**0.74**
Posts about UWEC on social media influencer platforms help tourists plan the right time to visit.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.23**	**0.72**
Social media influencer marketing provides enough information to help tourists decide whether UWEC suits their interests.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.31**	**0.69**
Social media influencer marketing gives tourists' confidence in choosing UWEC as a travel destination.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.35**	**0.65**

Influencer posts increase my willingness to visit UWEC in the near future.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.48**	**0.57**
I feel motivated to visit UWEC due to social media influencer storytelling.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.44**	**0.61**
Social media Influencer marketing influences my preference for UWEC as a wildlife destination.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.33**	**0.67**
Social media Influencer content significantly affected my destination choice toward UWEC.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.39**	**0.64**
I chose UWEC because of the content I saw from social media travel influencers.	**1.00**	**5.00**	**4.16**	**0.78**
Aggregate Mean			**4.34**	**0.67**

Source: Field Data (2026)

The aggregate mean of 4.34 indicates that respondents strongly agreed that social media influencer marketing significantly influences destination choice. The findings suggest that influencer content motivates travel intentions, increases confidence and encourages preference for UWEC among Gen Z tourists.

4.5 Correlation Analysis

Table 4.8: Social Media Influencer Marketing and Destination Choice

Variables			**(1)**	**(2)**	**(3)**
Spearman's rho	**DESTINATION AWARENESS**		1		
	DESTINATION IMAGE		0.684**	1	
	DESTINATION CHOICE		0.731**	0.788**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) N = 42

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The correlation analysis conducted using responses from 42 respondents revealed a strong positive relationship between awareness creation and destination choice ($r = 0.731$, $p < 0.01$). The results further showed a strong positive relationship between destination image and

destination choice ($r = 0.788$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as awareness and positive destination image increase, the likelihood of choosing UWEC also increases.

4.5.1 Awareness Creation and Destination Choice

From Table 10 above, the findings indicate a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.731$, $p < 0.01$) between Awareness Creation and Destination Choice. This implies that increased awareness created through social media influencer marketing is associated with an increase in the likelihood of Gen Z tourists choosing Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) as their preferred tourism destination. The findings suggest that influencer-generated content plays a significant role in informing potential visitors and encouraging them to consider UWEC when making travel decisions.

4.5.2 Destination Image and Destination Choice

From Table 10 above, the findings indicate a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.788$, $p < 0.01$) between Destination Image and Destination Choice. This suggests that a more positive destination image created through social media influencer marketing is significantly associated with an increased likelihood of Gen Z tourists selecting Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) as their destination. The results imply that portraying UWEC as an attractive, educational, ethical, and sustainable destination positively influences tourists' destination choices.

4.6 Regression Analysis

The study employed simple regression analysis to establish the predictive effect of each independent variable of social media influencer marketing on the dependent variable, destination choice among Gen Z tourists at Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC). The analysis was conducted separately for each study objective to determine the contribution of Awareness Creation and Destination Image towards Destination Choice.

4.6.1 Regression Analysis on Awareness Creation and Destination Choice

Table 4.9: Regression Analysis on Awareness Creation and Destination Choice

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.521	0.185		2.814	.007
Awareness Creation	0.364	0.091	0.364	3.982	.000

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.832	0.692	0.677	0.423

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The regression analysis indicates a strong positive relationship between Awareness Creation and Destination Choice at Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC), with a correlation coefficient ($R = 0.731$) indicating a strong association between the two variables. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.534$) shows that Awareness Creation explains 53.4% of the variation in Destination Choice among Gen Z tourists. The regression coefficient ($B = 0.364$) indicates that an increase in awareness created through social media influencer marketing leads to a corresponding increase in destination choice. The relationship is statistically significant ($t = 3.982$, $p = 0.000$), implying that Awareness Creation is an important predictor of destination choice among Gen Z tourists visiting UWEC.

4.6.2 Regression Analysis on Destination Image and Destination Choice

Table 4.10: Regression Analysis on Destination Image and Destination Choice

Model	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
(Constant)	**0.521**	**0.185**		**2.814**	**.007**
Destination Image	**0.517** **R = 0.788**	**0.092** $R^2 = 0.621$	**0.517** Adjusted $R^2 = 0.612$	**5.641**	**.000**
Dependent Variable: Destination Choice (N = 42)					

Source: Primary Data (2026)

The regression analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between Destination Image and Destination Choice at Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC), with a correlation coefficient ($R = 0.788$) indicating a strong association between the variables. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.621$) indicates that Destination Image explains 62.1% of the variation in Destination Choice among Gen Z tourists. The regression coefficient ($B = 0.517$) demonstrates that improving the destination image through social media influencer marketing significantly increases the likelihood of tourists choosing UWEC as a tourism destination. The relationship is statistically significant ($t = 5.641$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that Destination Image is the strongest predictor of destination choice in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The chapter presents the discussion of the study findings, conclusions, recommendations based on each objectives, limitations of the study and areas for future research.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

This section interprets the study's results in relation to its objectives, drawing from descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses detailed in Chapter Four.

5.1.1 Role of Social Media Influencer Marketing in Creating Awareness of UWEC among Gen Z Tourists

The first objective examined how social media influencer marketing creates awareness of the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) among Gen Z tourists. The descriptive data results showed a strong positive relationship, indicated by a mean =4.34 and SD = 0.68, emphasizing that influencer efforts greatly penetrate the Gen Z segment audience.

These results support Vašaničová (2025), who reported the effect of influencer credibility and authenticity on destination awareness among Gen Z tourists. Besides, Rajput (2025) cited the critical role of engaging visual storytelling experience by influencers in attracting credible visitors. Widaningsih (2025) reported that high-quality social media content greatly aids awareness and discovery for Gen Z tourists.

Correlation study results demonstrated a high positive relationship between awareness and destination choice ($r = 0.731$, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating that awareness created by influencer marketing compels tourists to consider UWEC as a number one destination. Also, regression findings emphasized that awareness creation had a positive link on destination choice ($\beta = 0.364$, $p = 0.000$). Therefore, creating awareness by engaging influencers enhances the possibility of Gen Z travellers visiting UWEC.

5.1.2 Social Media Influencer Marketing Shapes the Perceived Destination Image of UWEC among Gen Z Tourists

The second objective examined how influencer marketing influences Gen Z tourists' perceptions of UWEC's destination image. Descriptive statistics demonstrated a strong relationship, with an aggregate mean = 4.38 (SD = 0.65). Respondents agreed that influencers market UWEC as a recommendable wildlife tourism site (Mean = 4.52), an educational destination (Mean = 4.48), and a worthwhile place to visit (Mean = 4.45). These findings indicate that influencer marketing content enhances a positive perception and attitude about UWEC.

This supports Költringer and Dickinger's (2015), conceptualization of destination image as a blend of tourists' perceptions, feelings, and impressions. The influencer's authentic storytelling content helps to create emotional and cognitive perception of destinations' potential tourists. Furthermore, Widaningsih (2025), reported influencer credibility and quality visual content as a major driver of destination image which supports the study's findings. Similarly, Babu (2025), also confirmed that trust and emotional bonds formed by influencer content increase tourists' destination perceptions. In the same way, Ong et al. (2024) reported that authentic posts by influencers enhance destination attractiveness.

5.1.3 Influence of Social Media Influencer Marketing on the Destination Choice of Gen Z Tourists to UWEC

The third objective examined the overall impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z tourists' destination choice for UWEC. Respondents strongly agreed to this impact, with a mean = 4.34 (SD = 0.67). They expressed that seeing influencers or friends post about UWEC motivated visits (Mean = 4.46), increased willingness to visit in the future (Mean = 4.48), and influenced their decision to visit (Mean = 4.41). This highlights influencer marketing as a significant driver of tourist behaviour by providing information, building trust, and creating emotional connections that motivate travel intentions.

These study findings are in line with Keelson et al. (2024), who highlighted influencer credibility and trust with a great impact on destination choice. Similarly, Vašaničová (2025) established trust in influencers as a positive predictor of travel intentions. Babu (2025) and Widaningsih (2025) also documented the direct and indirect effects of influencer content on visit intentions through emotional engagement and social influence.

5.1.4 Summary of the Findings

The findings of this research study demonstrate that social media influencer marketing has a significant role in promoting destination awareness, strengthening the image of the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC), and shaping the destination choices of Generation Z tourists. The results indicate that many Gen Z visitors depend on content shared by social media influencers as a major source of travel information, enabling them to learn about UWEC and its tourism offerings. The study further shows that influencer-generated content positively influences perceptions of the destination by showcasing the centre's wildlife attractions, conservation initiatives, quality visitor services, and unique experiences. Moreover, the findings show that recommendations and experiences shared by influencers significantly affect the travel decisions of Generation Z tourists. These results suggest that UWEC should invest more strategically in influencer marketing initiatives to increase its visibility, attract a larger proportion of Gen Z visitors, and improve the overall competitiveness and appeal of the destination.

5.2 Conclusions

This section of the chapter presents the conclusions based on each study objective.

5.2.1 Social Media Influencer Marketing and Creating Awareness of UWEC

Based on the finding, study concludes that social media influencer marketing is very significant in creating awareness of UWEC among Generation Z tourists. The findings showed a strong link with (mean = 4.34) where respondents agreed that influencer visual content enhance the visibility of UWE due to its conservation and educational efforts and effectively penetrates to young audience on social media channels like Tiktok and Instagram. The correlation results highlighted a strong positive relationship between awareness and destination choice ($r = 0.731$, $p < 0.01$) and the significant regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.364$, $p = 0.000$) showing that increased awareness about UWEC, through influencer marketing strongly encourages the Gen Z tourists' decision to visit. Therefore, online and social media influencers strongly promote destination awareness for young tourists.

5.2.2 Social Media Influencer Marketing and Perceived Destination Image of UWEC

Based on the second objective findings, the study concludes that social media greatly increase the perceived destination image of UWEC in the face of Gen Z tourists. This was highlighted by a mean score of (mean=4.38), where respondents clearly agreed that social media content promotes UWEC's ethical, educational and sustainable appeal of the centre. Further the high positive correlation link between destination image and choice ($r = 0.788$, $p < 0.01$), and destination image has a strong interaction on choice ($\beta = 0.517$, $p = 0.000$). Therefore, the study concludes that influencer marketing has a significant part in creating and promoting the good image of UWEC which increases its attractiveness and competitiveness before Gen Z tourists.

5.2.3 Influence of Social Media Influencer Marketing and Tourists' Destination Choice

Based on the third objective, the study concludes that social media influencer marketing strongly impacts Generation Z's choice to visit UWEC. This was evidenced by (mean =4.34) score, this ascertains that influencers' recommendation, reviews and storytelling increases the travel decisions and confidence while selecting UWEC. According to the study findings the destination choice is highly linked to the destination awareness and image explained by 69.2% of the changes in travel decisions ($R^2 = 0.692$). Similarly, the regression strongly significant ($F = 43.760$, $p = 0.000$), concluding that influencers marketing is critical determinant of destination choice among Gen Z tourists.

Finally, social media influencer marketing is a vital factor in Gen Z tourists' decisions to visit UWEC. It raises awareness, builds a positive destination image, and strongly influences travel behavior. Destination image is the strongest predictor, underscoring the value of authentic and engaging influencer content. Effectively engaging influencers can boost UWEC's visibility, appeal, and ability to attract and retain young visitors in today's digital tourism landscape.

5.3 Recommendations

This section presents the recommendation of the study based on each study objective

i. UWEC should build strong partnerships with potential influencers who have a large following among the young audience. Focus should be placed on online channels like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and X that are mostly used by young tourists.

ii. UWEC should share engaging, high-quality visual content (photos and videos) that showcases the center's animal rescue, conservation, and education campaigns, highlighting visitor experiences.

iii. UWEC should invest in long-term partnerships with influencers to maintain ongoing destination engagement and public awareness, helping the center stay relevant and reach the global market in a competitive digital tourism landscape.

iv. The management should create and share authentic, high-quality online content that portrays UWEC as an ethical, eco-friendly, educational, and sustainable destination. Successful wildlife conservation stories, educational efforts, and unique visitor experiences should be highlighted.

v. UWEC should collaborate with influencers who value wildlife conservation and sustainable tourism to promote a credible destination brand image and appeal to both local and international young tourists.

vi. UWEC should integrate influencer marketing into its overall marketing campaigns. Influencers should share engaging travel tips, reviews, and personal stories. Interactive activities such as live streams, virtual tours, and challenges should be used to boost travel interest and tourist engagement.

vii. UWEC should monitor campaign success using visitor data, social media engagement metrics, and travel trends to maximize the effectiveness of influencer marketing efforts.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations hindered the progress of this study including the distance and the transportations costs to UWEC which limited the time to carryout in-depth interactions and conservations with the respondents affecting data quality and overall findings. Secondly, some respondents had tight schedules and programs which led to brief interactions that might have introduced bias. This was overcome by making necessary arrangements and clearly explaining the purpose of the study. Furthermore, some visitors were in transit which may have reduced their concentration on the study questionnaires which affected the accuracy of the response. Finally, the findings may not apply to different destinations, and other demographic segments

since the study strongly focused on Gen Z segment at a defined destination. Therefore, future research from diverse sites and demographics segments would provide more detailed understanding of influencer marketing on destination choice.

5.5 Areas for Further Research

The research study examined the impact of social media influencer marketing on Gen Z tourists at UWEC. Therefore, future research studies should explore other tourism destinations in Uganda to discover whether similar findings apply in different destination contexts in order to increase the generalizability of the findings. Additionally studies should use a longitudinal mixed method approaches to demonstrate how tourist's perceptions and characters evolve in order to discuss the long-term impact of influencer marketing on destination awareness, image and choices in different tourist segments. Furthermore, future research should assess the impact of other factors like travel budget, destination accessibility, perceived risks and digital referral or positive word-of-mouth, quality customer care services and tourist satisfaction to understand travel trends and decisions since this study explained almost 69.2% of factors affecting destination choice

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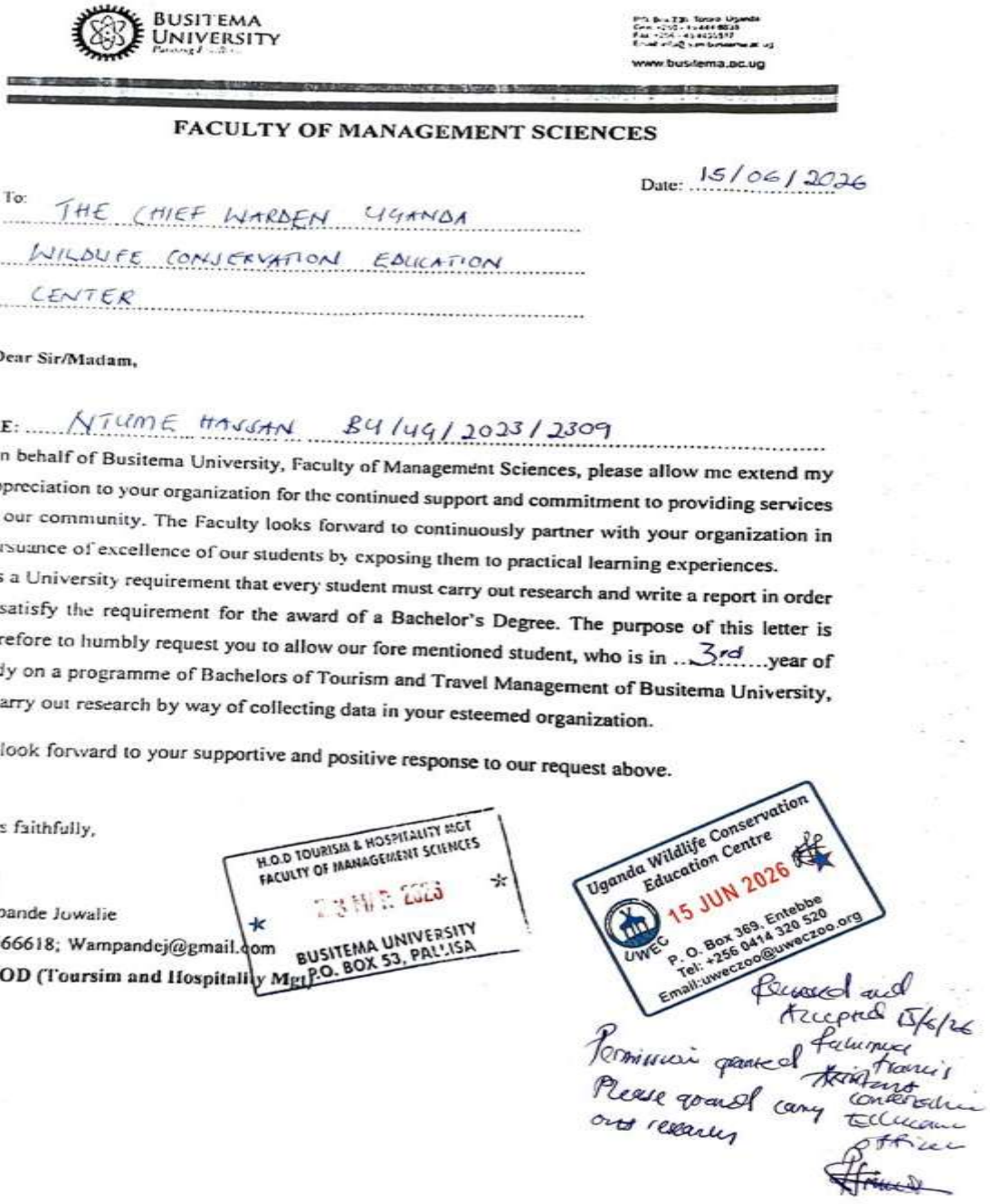
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APPENDICES

Appendix i: Introduction Letter



BUSITEMA UNIVERSITY

www.busitema.ac.ug

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

Date: 15/06/2026

To: THE CHIEF WARDEN UGANDA WILDLIFE CONSERVATION EDUCATION CENTER

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: NTUME HASSAN B4/46/2023/2309

On behalf of Busitema University, Faculty of Management Sciences, please allow me extend my appreciation to your organization for the continued support and commitment to providing services to our community. The Faculty looks forward to continuously partner with your organization in pursuance of excellence of our students by exposing them to practical learning experiences.

It's a University requirement that every student must carry out research and write a report in order to satisfy the requirement for the award of a Bachelor's Degree. The purpose of this letter is therefore to humbly request you to allow our fore mentioned student, who is in ...3rd.....year of study on a programme of Bachelors of Tourism and Travel Management of Busitema University, to carry out research by way of collecting data in your esteemed organization.

We look forward to your supportive and positive response to our request above.

Yours faithfully,

H.O.D TOURISM & HOSPITALITY MGT FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES 23 MAR 2026 BUSITEMA UNIVERSITY P.O. BOX 53, PALISA

Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre UWEC 15 JUN 2026 P. O. Box 369, Entebbe Tel: +256 0414 320 520 Email:uweczoo@uweczoo.org

Wampande Juwalie

0752566618; Wampandej@gmail.com

Ag. HOD (Toursim and Hospitality Mgt)

Received and Accepted 15/6/26

Permission granted Kindly contact Education Officer Francis Please record carry out research

Appendix ii: Research Questionnaires



Dear respondent,

I, **NTUME HASSAN**, **BU/UG/2023/2309**), a students of Busitema University Faculty of Management Sciences Pallisa Campus. As part of the requirements for the award of my degree, I am conducting a research study entitled **"The Impact of Social Media Influencer Marketing on the Destination Choice of Generation Z Tourists: A Case Study of the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC)."**

You have been invited to join this study because your genuine perspectives and experiences are crucial to ensuring the research's authenticity. Your participation is completely voluntary, and all information you share will be handled with strict confidentiality. The data collected will be used exclusively to maintain the integrity and credibility of this academic study. No information that could identify you personally will be disclosed in the research report.

Your honest responses will greatly contribute to the quality and credibility of this study. I sincerely appreciate your time, cooperation, and willingness to participate.

Thank you for your valuable support.

Instructions

- Please read each question carefully before responding.
- Tick (✓) the option that best represents your response.
- For Sections B, C, D, and E, select only one response for each statement.
- Responses should be rated using the following five-point Likert scale:

5 = Strongly Agree (SA)

4 = Agree (A)

3 = Not Sure (NS)

2 = Disagree (D)

1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Gender

Male	**Female**	**Prefer not to say**

Education qualifications

Certificate	Diploma certificate	Bachelor's degree	Post graduate

Age of the respondents

18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	55 and above

SECTION B: **ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING IN CREATING AWARENESS OF UWEC AMONG GEN Z TOURISTS**

S/N	**Statements**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
TP1	Social media influencer marketing helped me become aware of UWEC as a tourism destination					

TP2	I first learned about UWEC through influencer posts, reels, or videos.					
TP3	Influencer content on TikTok and Instagram increased my knowledge about UWEC.					
TP4	Travel influencers made UWEC visible to young people like me.					
TP5	Seeing influencers visit UWEC made me curious to know more about the centre.					
TP6	Influencers introduced UWEC's conservation and rescue work to new audiences.					
TP7	Influencer marketing helped UWEC stand out among other wildlife destinations.					
TP8	I discovered new things about UWEC through influencer stories and live sessions.					
TP9	Influencers increased my general awareness of UWEC as an educational destination.					
TP10	Content from influencers made me aware of visitor experiences at UWEC trips.					
TP11	Influencer campaigns helped UWEC reach Gen Z audiences effectively					
TP12	I came across UWEC because of recommendations from social media travel influencers					
TP13	Social media influencers played a major role in introducing UWEC to potential young visitors.					

SECTION C: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING SHAPES THE PERCEIVED DESTINATION IMAGE OF UWEC AMONG GEN Z TOURISTS

S/N	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
DI1	Influencer content portrays UWEC as an authentic and ethical wildlife destination					
DI2	Influencers make UWEC appear sustainable and environmentally responsible					
DI3	Content shared by influencers shows UWEC as an educational and informative place.					
DI4	Influencer posts make UWEC look fun and enjoyable for young people					
DI5	Influencers and travel bloggers create a positive image of UWEC.					
DI6	UWEC's official social media pages provide a good impression of the destination.					
DI7	Social media influencer content makes UWEC appear as a family-friendly and safe place to visit.					
DI8	Social media influencer marketing highlights unique aspects of UWEC that tourists didn't know before.					
DI9	Social media influencer marketing highlights unique aspects of UWEC that tourists didn't know before.					
D20	Social media Influencers help build a strong and positive brand image of UWEC.					
D21	Social media Influencers make me view UWEC as a high-quality tourism attraction.					

D22	Influencers at UWEC make me believe it is a worthwhile destination.					
D23	Social media Influencers portray UWEC as a place that supports ethical wildlife tourism.					

SECTION D: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING ON THE DESTINATION CHOICE OF GEN Z TOURISTS TO UWEC

S/N	**Statements**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
DM1	Social media influencer marketing influences Gen Z tourists' decisions to visit the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC).					
DM2	Gen Z Tourists consider recommendations or reviews on social media influencer platforms before deciding to visit UWEC.					
DM3	Social media made it easier for Gen Z tourists to choose UWEC as a tourism destination.					
DM4	Seeing friends or influencers post about UWEC motivated Gen Z tourists to visit.					
DM5	I used social media to compare UWEC with other wildlife destinations before making a decision.					
DM6	Posts about UWEC on social media influencer platforms help tourists plan the right time to visit.					
DM7	Social media influencer marketing provides enough information to help tourists decide whether UWEC suits their interests.					
DM8	Social media influencer marketing gives					

	tourists' confidence in choosing UWEC as a travel destination.					
DM9	Influencer posts increase my willingness to visit UWEC in the near future.					
DM10	I feel motivated to visit UWEC due to social media influencer storytelling.					
DM 11	Social media Influencer marketing influences my preference for UWEC as a wildlife destination.					
DM 12	Social media Influencer content significantly affected my destination choice toward UWEC.					
DM 13	I chose UWEC because of the content I saw from social media travel influencers.					

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND PARTICIPATION

Interview Questions



Dear respondent,

My name is **NTUME HASSAN**, Registration Number **BU/UG/2023/2309**, an undergraduate student at **Busitema University, Faculty of Management Sciences in Pallisa, Uganda**. As part of my academic requirements, I am conducting field research and preparing a report on the **"The impact of social media influencer marketing on the destination choice of Gen Z tourists: A Case Study of Uganda Wildlife Education Center (UWEC)."**

This study is strictly for academic purposes and will only contribute to the partial fulfillment of my degree in **Tourism and Travel Management**. You have been selected as a respondent because of your knowledge and insights relevant to this topic. Please be assured that all information you provide will be handled with the highest level of confidentiality.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Position / Title at UWEC

Number of Years in Current Position

QUESTIONS;

In your opinion, how effective has influencer marketing been in creating awareness of UWEC among Gen Z tourists?

How has social media influencer marketing influenced the way Gen Z tourists perceive UWEC's image (e.g., as ethical, educational, or sustainable)?

On average, how many **Gen Z tourists** visit UWEC per day? Has this number changed due to influencer marketing?

What is the **spending behavior** of Gen Z tourists who visit UWEC (e.g., average amount spent per visit on entry, souvenirs, food, etc.?)

In your view, how has social media influencer marketing affected the overall destination choice and visitation patterns of Gen Z tourists to UWEC?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND PARTICIPATION

Appendix iii: Research work plan

ACTIVITIES	**JAN**	**FEB**	**MARCH**	**APRIL**	**MAY**	**JUNE**
Identify the Topic and the problem of the study	■					
Formulating and approving the problem statements		■				
Writing and finalizing the research proposal			■	■		
Approving and submitting the research proposal				■		
Collecting data					■	
Analyzing and interpreting data					■	
Compiling final report						■
Submitting the compiled report						■

Appendix iv: Research Budget

ITEM	**AMOUNT(shs)**
Borrowing the laptop	60,000
Accessing relevant documents	80,000
Internet subscription	120,000
Pilot study and transport	75,000
Field data collection and research assistant	50,000
Stationeries and printing	180,000
Uncertainties	60,000
Overall Total	**625,000**

Appendix v: Krejcie and Morgan's table of sample size determination

N	*S*	*N*	*S*	*N*	*S*
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	1000000	384

Note.—*N* is population size. *S* is sample size.

Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970