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Article

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Nexus of Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencers, Consumer Engagement, Data Privacy Concern, Financial Literacy and Travel Scam Avoidance

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of FinTok influencers in preventing online travel scams by enhancing consumer trust, financial literacy, and data privacy concerns. The research examines how these influencers can contribute to improving consumer protection and safety in digital transactions. A survey was conducted with a sample of 250 TikTok users (who actively follow FinTok influencers) and have booked travel online at least once. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with Smart PLS software, the study analyzed the relationships between consumer trust, financial literacy, and data privacy concerns in mitigating exposure to travel scam. PLS-SEM estimations indicate that FinTok influencers play a significant role in building consumer trust and enhancing financial literacy and data privacy concerns, which, in turn, reduce susceptibility to online travel scams. Consumer engagement emerged as a critical mediator, emphasizing the need for influencers to maintain credibility and transparency. Additionally, financial literacy was identified as a key factor in empowering consumers to make informed decisions and avoid travel scams. This study contributes to the literature on digital consumer protection by highlighting the potential of social media influencers in combating online fraud. By focusing on the niche of FinTok, it provides practical insights for organizations seeking to leverage influencers for promoting financial literacy and consumer safety.

Keywords: FinTok influencers, consumer trust, data privacy concern, financial literacy, consumer engagement, travel scam avoidance, Finfluencers, financial influencers.

1. Introduction

In the era of digital transformation, social media has reshaped the landscape of consumer decision-making and financial literacy (Shi, Ali & Leong, 2025; Zaimovic et al., 2025). Among the numerous digital media, FinTok, a popular term used to refer to financial

influencers on TikTok, has emerged as a default platform for investment and financial advice (De-Regt, Cheng, & Fawaz, 2023). Consumers, particularly young digital natives, increasingly rely on the opinion of FinTok influencers when advice is sought on budgeting, investing, and financial protection (Aggarwal, Kaye, & Odinet, 2022; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). But greater dependence on such content has raised concerns regarding consumer trust, data privacy, financial literacy, and susceptibility to financial fraud, particularly in the travel sector (Abdullah & Abu-Hussin, 2022; Ding & Ge, 2025). This unique blend of entertainment and education has made FinTok a popular resource, especially for younger demographics navigating the complexities of financial decisions (De-Regt et al., 2023). In parallel, the travel and tourism industry has embraced digitalization, with online platforms such as Airbnb and Expedia revolutionizing how consumers plan trips (Chuah, Tseng, Wu, & Cheng, 2021). However, the convenience of online travel booking has been accompanied by a surge in fraud. Scammers exploit digital platforms to create fake booking sites and deceptive offers, resulting in consumer losses exceeding billions of dollars (Ding & Ge, 2025; Tran & Strutton, 2020; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). Research suggests that the primary drivers of online travel fraud include a lack of consumer financial literacy and the absence of effective preventive measures (Ding & Ge, 2025; Kusumadyahdewi, Lestari, & Ramadhani, 2024; Zaimovic et al., 2025). Despite advancements in cybersecurity, addressing the human element—educating consumers to identify and avoid scams—remains critical (Lejaka, da Veiga, & Loock, 2023; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). By integrating these trends, this study explores how FinTok influencers can address knowledge gaps and foster trust in online travel transactions (Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024; Zhang, 2023).

Consumers, businesses, and the digital economy face escalating online travel scams (Ding & Ge, 2025; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). Fraudsters exploit customer vulnerabilities despite improved cybersecurity and legal frameworks (Hameed, Akram, & Ashraf, 2023). According to Böhm and Müller, (2022), most internet frauds succeed owing to customer ignorance rather than technology issues. Phishing emails, bogus travel websites, and fraudulent social media advertisements are common ways fraudsters abuse tourists (Carlisle, Ivanov, & Dijkmans, 2023; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). Online travel platforms, essential to modern tourism, lose confidence and suffer financial losses (Sujood, Bano, & Siddiqui, 2024). On FinTok, social media influencers may help solve these problems. Studies show they can engage audiences and communicate vital financial information (Zülch, Mölders, Fennen, Mathes, & Hoffmann, 2024). Their involvement in fighting sector-specific challenges like internet travel fraud is unclear (Sille et al., 2024; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). Research on how influencers may establish trust and increase financial literacy to reduce fraud is lacking (Shah, Anwar, & Hussain, 2021). Technological and regulatory solutions are well-documented, but empowering consumers via education needs more attention (Nazmul et al., 2021; Shi, Ali & Leong, 2025). This study examines how FinTok influencers affect online travel consumer behavior and fraud prevention to fill these gaps (Ding & Ge, 2025; Ekinci, Dam & Buckle, 2025). This study

aims to evaluate the role of FinTok influencers in preventing online travel fraud by enhancing consumer trust, data privacy concerns and financial literacy (Panigrahy & Verma, 2025; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024; Zaimovic et al., 2025). The specific objectives are:

- To analyze the impact of consumer trust in FinTok influencers on the ability of active TikTok users to recognize and avoid online travel scams.
- To evaluate the role of consumer engagement with FinTok content in raising awareness and vigilance against travel scams among individuals who frequently book travel online.
- To examine how data privacy concerns and financial literacy levels influence the credibility and effectiveness of FinTok influencers in providing scam prevention advice to TikTok users and online travel consumers.

The study adds to the literature on social media and financial education and consumer protection. By concentrating on FinTok, it illuminates a new and underexplored social media sub-community and how digital influencers affect consumer awareness and behavior (Ekinci, Dam & Buckle, 2025; Vassey et al., 2025). The study also connects financial literacy, trust-building, and fraud prevention in online travel. The findings provide companies and regulators with ways to use social media influencers in consumer protection efforts. This information can help travel companies engage with FinTok influencers to educate consumers and reduce fraud (Ding & Ge, 2025). In a digital economy, financial literacy empowers customers to make educated decisions. Hence, this research highlights the importance of social media influencers in consumer protection and supports digital marketplace safety and trustworthiness by tackling online travel fraud (Ekinci, Dam & Buckle, 2025; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). It highlights the revolutionary power of social media to create a secure and informed digital ecosystem (Ding & Ge, 2025; Ekinci, Dam & Buckle, 2025; Vassey et al., 2025).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer

FinTok refers to the financial niche that has emerged on TikTok where people share tips and often caution others about the scams that might be out there (Aggarwal et al., 2022; Akhtar & Siddiqi, 2024; Ekinci, Dam & Buckle, 2025; Vassey et al., 2025). Thus, influencers, while building up their audience's trust and positively impacting the target audience's financial knowledge and behaviors, could shape the identity and direction of the social media space (Ye & Mattila, 2025; Thomas, 2023). This trust is important to the users who follow these influencers and perform the searches and bookings of travel online; it helps them to differentiate between genuine travel deals and travel scams. People attending to posts are active and those seeking advice and tips from their favorite influencers (Wallace, Torres, Augusto, & Stefurn, 2022). It is such an engagement that

forms part of the protective wall against scams (Al Halbusi, Al-Sulaiti, Abbas, & Al-Sulaiti, 2022). Additionally, when consumers are activated, the lessons on financial literacy delivered by influencers are bound to be adopted (Kumar, Phani, Chilamkurti, Saurabh, & Ratten, 2024). This rise in financial education empowers them to learn what to look out for to avoid falling prey to fake online travel deals or getting stranded, falling for a sweet deal only for the provider to ask for unusual methods of payment. Another aspect is that data privacy also has a great impact on this ecosystem (Ilias, Azizi, Rahman, & Mahali, 2023).

2.2 Data Privacy Concern

At the time of global connected and online interface, there are apprehensions with reference to data protection that pertain to business and customer interface, especially in sectors like online travel booking (Aysan & Syarif, 2025; Panigrahy & Verma, 2025; Ponsard & Grandclaude, 2020). Data privacy issues are at the core of this discursive formation (Panigrahy & Verma, 2025). These details include weighing the right destination, timing, and prices based on consumer experiences, among other important information that consumers input on the said platforms like TikTok and then rely on for bookings (Wang, Li, & Khaskheli, 2024). Nevertheless, they can easily be accessed by the wrong (i.e., unauthorized) persons, which in turn causes identity theft or loss of money (Guzmán, Abdelnour-Nocera, Parra-Agudelo, & Barriga-Isaza, 2022). The study insists more so, it has been noticed that influencers can significantly change due to the increasing influence and popularity of influencers (Sood & Mehendale, 2023). When encouraging people to make safe bookings and discussing potential threats linked to the violation of personal data's right to privacy, influencers help their audience to become knowledgeable (Wang et al., 2024). Some studies show that people's participation in reputable accounts to create a feeling of togetherness and reliance on other individuals. This trust is crucial in addressing concerns with regard to the protection of the data being collected (Rehman & Rajkumar, 2022). When influencers give preference to open and safe applications, they not only enhance the customers' trust but also help to make a more secure online space (Zhani, Mouri, & Ahmed, 2022).

2.3 Financial Literacy

Financial literacy is a major factor in shielding consumers from using their audiences, and these influencers raise people's financial literacy, and share information about potential scams in online operations like booking travel (Chin et al, 2023; Shi, Ali & Leong, 2025; Zaimovic et al., 2025). Some of the studies have found that consumers who frequent social media confluentials have a higher level of financial literacy (Alfania, Wahyuningtyas, & Prasat, 2024). They are more conscious of possible scams, comprehend the need to ascertain the source and the transactions, and are generally better placed in terms of decision-making regarding their finances (Maziriri & Chivandi, 2020). Previous research found that when consumers' financial knowledge is improved, they become less vulnerable to fraudsters and more inclined to look for credible information to support their financial decisions. Furthermore, trust is developed between influencers and their fans/ consumers

(Kurhayadi, Rosadi, Yusuf, Saepudin, & Asmala, 2022). Trust brings credibility to the information being passed to followers, cautioning them about scams in the travel industry on the internet (Tran & Strutton, 2020).

2.4 Consumer Engagement

The consumers' interactions with the FinTok influencers involve helping them avoid falling prey to these scams, improve their financial literacy, and be knowledgeable on data privacy, as well as engaging themselves (Rather, 2025; Wong & Wong, 2025; Yousaf, Choo, & Yusof, 2023). The influencers seem to have better-educated customers when it comes to financial issues and knowledge. This literacy prepares them with the skills and information required to avoid scams, learn about pricing strategies, and learn the authenticity of the offers made in traveling (Anim, Arthur, & Amoako, 2024). Consumers are also able to observe from the influencers in travelling and financial advice about measures of risk or other abuses detected that can mean fraudulent actions in the contracting of services or products through internet. In addition, it is crucial that the consumer trusts the influencers in order for the message to be delivered as intended (Sheetal, Tyagi, & Singh, 2023).

2.5 Travel Scam Avoidance

In the digital world, travel scams have evolved and the new generation of scams are much more difficult to notice since they look almost legitimate (Rather, 2025; Naseeb, Diab, & Metwally, 2021; Wong & Wong, 2025). However, the FinTok influencers present on TikTok have become quite influential in educating the audience and shielding them from such threats (Rather, 2025; Wong & Wong, 2025). In light of this, such big influencers significantly help strengthen consumer trust and engagement in the prevention of scams (Bhuiyan, Islam, Haque, & Biswas, 2021). As for social media leading and following, social media personalities are people's go-to experts for financial advice, which also applies to booking travel tickets on the Internet (Baird, 2023). Due to the detailed content in their posts about scams and how to avoid them and the use of personal stories, followers of the accounts are able to put the knowledge into practice (Tran & Strutton, 2020). Prior research established the fact that the trust of consumers is a crucial factor in the financial decisions that they make, and reliable influencers are capable of alerting their followers about possible scams in traveling (Maziriri & Chivandi, 2020).

2.6 Hypothesis Development

2.6.1 Effect of FinTok Influencer Consumer Trust on Travel Scam Avoidance

The fact that entertainment influencers are shifting peoples' trust has been a vital factor in helping active TikTok users avoid online travel scams (Ding & Ge, 2025; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). Social media users, being one of the primary specialized topics, represent a powerful platform that lets influencers teach consumers about different aspects of their financial decisions, including the tricks to avoid scams (Ekinici, Dam & Buckle, 2025; de

Regt et al., 2023). This trust is based on perceived credibility, relevance, and regular contact, making influencers key partners in combating online travel agency (OTA) scams. Through establishing FinTok as an objective source of information, the influencers can help avoid online travel scams by acquainting their audiences with such threats (Stefanou, 2022; Vassey et al., 2025). Their key strength is their capacity to explain financial data in an easy-to-understand way and it makes their audience enjoy the information, hence making consumers develop more faith in their work (Muharam, Chaniago, Endraria, & Harun, 2021; Ye & Mattila, 2025). When influencers notify their followers about schemes of fake travel offers, the need to check the legitimacy of travel companies, and describe secure ways to use the services of such companies, applying cautions and practical lessons, they teach their followers to be wise (Chokpitakkul, Anantachart, & Hamilton, 2020). This awareness, and education are critical in preventing the scams in the first instance. In addition to the perceived ability of influencers, consumers feel that these influencers are also honest and thus rely on them (Akhtar & Siddiqi, 2024; Vassey et al., 2025; Ye & Mattila, 2025). Thus, influencers who often declare sponsored posts and who do not shut their followers out create an inherent credibility (Mölders et al, 2024).

- H1: Consumer trust in FinTok influencers positively influences travel scam avoidance.
- H2: Consumer trust in FinTok influencers positively influences data privacy concern.
- H3: Consumer trust in FinTok influencers positively influences financial literacy.
- H4: Consumer trust in FinTok influencers positively influences consumer engagement.
- H5: Data privacy concern positively influences travel scam avoidance.
- H6: Financial literacy positively influences travel scam avoidance.
- H7: Consumer engagement positively influences travel scam avoidance.

2.6.2 Data Privacy Concern as a Mediator

In the contemporary setting, where the influence of digital interfaces has taken precedence through transactions and consumption, influencers, specifically those in TikTok are strategic in steering consumers (Aysan & Syarif, 2025; Li, Werner, Ernst, & Damian, 2022). This influence even reaches areas that are rather close to mere suggestions of certain products, including investing tips and alerts for possible frauds, including those that may be emerging in the sphere of online travel services (Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2024). In this task, it is relevant to establish the roles that link the relationship between social media influence and online travel scams, specifically data privacy concerns (Xu, Murphy, & Chen, 2024). Since social media followers are more engaged and knowledgeable about financial-related issues, including online bookings, the awareness level is likely going to be high (Srivastava, Srivastava, & Mishra, 2023). Yet, their reliance on such influencers goes beyond the nature of recommendations received; it includes factors such as data privacy as well (Canatan, Toker, & Coskun, 2023; Panigrahy & Verma, 2025).

- H8: Data privacy concern mediates the relationship between consumer trust in FinTok influencers and travel scam avoidance.

2.6.3 Financial Literacy as a Mediator

In the sphere of digitized finance and consumer psychology, the impact of FinTok, or influencers of TikTok, on consumer trust and the rate of identification of travel scams online has become an important area to study (Fauzi, Antoni, & Suwarni, 2020; Shi, Ali & Leong, 2025). Based on the current study, it is evident that social media influencers are influential in determining the perception and behavioral intention of consumers in matters to do with financial decisions such as the online booking of travel services (Huong & Anh, 2024). This influence greatly depends on factors such as consumers' trust, activity level, concerns about privacy of the data, and most importantly, financial literacy (Akhtar & Siddiqi, 2024; Shi, Ali & Leong, 2025). Through the influencers and consumers' trust is created, which forms part of the means of discouraging fake travel-related scams (Ding & Ge, 2025; Xu et al., 2023). Credibility helps to build trust as a result of perceived professionalism by fringe banks, clear information in financial advice, and credibility of information passed around. Nonetheless, the general applicability of trust in averting scams is conditional on the consumers' financial literacy (Shi, Ali & Leong, 2025; Warmi, Adirakasiwi, & Nawawi, 2024).

- H9: Financial literacy mediates the relationship between consumer trust in FinTok influencers and travel scam avoidance.

2.6.4 Consumer Engagement as a Mediator

Consumers, who are engaged in FinTok and pay attention to some influencers, can learn useful and informative material that improves their financial literacy and inform customers about various scams regarding traveling service bookings and others (Milanesi, Guercini, & Runfola, 2023; Rather, 2025; Wong & Wong, 2025). Thus, the influencers use social media platforms to spread good financial tips and useful information about scam projects to gain the audience's trust. This trust is earned based on the perceived credibility of the influencers and the content that they share (Asanprakit & Kraiwanit, 2024). When they click the 'like' button and/or share such content, or write comments to such posts, consumers not only strengthen their belief in these influencers, but they are also more cautious of scams, including online travel scams (Ding & Ge, 2025; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). Also, consumer engagement is beneficial to the influencers as it provides them with reactions, comments, and questions from the engaged consumers (Rather, 2025; Tolossa, Singh, & Gautam, 2024). To sum up, consumer engagement plays the role of a mediator in the relationship between FinTok influencers and the effectiveness of preventing online travel scams due to the creation of trust and promotion of precautionary behaviors (Omar, Kassim, Shah Alam, & Zainol, 2021). This mutually beneficial connection points to the function of digital platforms in enabling the consumer to embark on financially productive

online transactions whilst being protected from fraud (Ding & Ge, 2025; Xu, Murphy, & Chen, 2022).

- H10: Consumer engagement mediates the relationship between consumer trust in FinTok influencers and travel scam avoidance.

2.6.5 Trust Theory (Underpinning Theory)

In order to investigate the trust theory of consumer trust on FinTok and online travel scam detection, we uncover consumer trust, engagement patterns, data privacy issues, and financial literacy of the most active TikTok users and online travelers (see Figure 1). Reliance is a vital element in the buyer-seller relationship, even though it is usually not realized because many transactions are made virtually (Quan, Khoa, & Nguyen, 2023). The so-called FinTok creators on mobile applications like TikTok are critical for building digital consumers' trust through informative materials that help to improve financial literacy and raise awareness of fraud schemes in social media (Aggarwal et al., 2022; Zaimovic et al., 2025). According to followers' risk perception is strongly influenced by influencers, and they can reduce feelings of riskiness by sharing correct financial data and negative stories about internet frauds. This educational function not only helps consumers be wiser with their money but also fosters confidence in, for example, the digital sales of travel services (Li & Ma, 2024). FinTokkers engage FinTech influencers positively to create a communal and convincing environment as a result of smooth and open gatekeeping. Some current empirical research underlines that conglomerations embracing credible influencers generalize lesser perils towards acquisitions performed online, including travel accommodations (Ekinci, Dam & Buckle, 2025; Li et al., 2023). This engagement is important because it makes people ask questions, consult other sources of information, and compare experiences, which promotes a kind of 'collective wisdom' as to guard against fraudsters (Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). However, one cannot overlook the problem of the data privacy question of the whole process (Panigrahy & Verma, 2025; Stefanou, 2022).

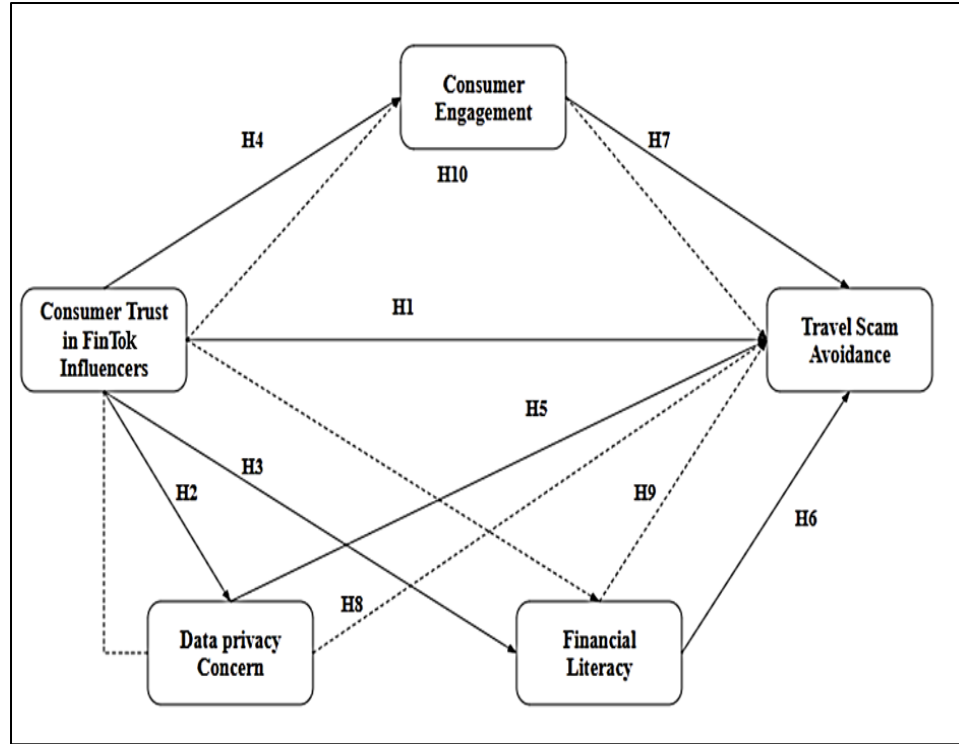


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Materials and Method

3.1 Sampling and Procedure

This research applies a quantitative research approach with different latent constructs that include travel scam avoidance, data privacy concerns, financial literacy, and consumer engagement. The data is gathered with the help of a structured questionnaire, while SEM with the help of Smart PLS software is used for analysis. This study employs a purposive sampling technique, which is appropriate given the focus on TikTok users who actively follow FinTok influencers and engage in online travel bookings. This non-probability sampling method ensures that the selected respondents possess relevant experience and insights into financial literacy, consumer trust, and travel scam avoidance, making the data more meaningful. The sample size of 250 respondents was determined based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) guidelines, ensuring sufficient statistical power and model stability. A commonly used rule in SEM suggests at least 10 responses per indicator variable, justifying the adequacy of the sample. Additionally, G*Power software analysis

was considered likely to confirm the required sample size for detecting meaningful effects. Since SmartPLS was used for PLS-SEM, which is less restrictive on sample size compared to covariance-based SEM, 250 participants provided a robust dataset while allowing for potential non-response bias and missing data, ensuring reliable and generalizable results. Data collection was done through a theory-driven developed questionnaire in an online survey using the target respondents' email addresses, and social media accounts.

3.2 Measures

The scales employed in this study were constructed from well-established works in the prior literature. The consumer trust (in FinTok influencers) scale was derived from de Regt et al. (2023), Zhani, Mouri and Ahmed (2022), as well as Tran and Strutton (2020). Travel scam avoidance scale was based on the works of Xu et al. (2023) and Li and Ma (2024). Data privacy concerns were measured using the developed scale from prominent literature by Bibri and Allam (2022), as well as Li et al., (2022). The financial literacy scale was developed using the work by Shanava and Vanishvili (2021), as well as Lone and Bhat (2024). Lastly, the consumer engagement scale was derived based on the prominent studies by Vo et al. (2022) and Omar et al. (2022). This extensive review of prominent literature to identify and develop appropriate scales ensured the robustness and relevance of the constructs for the SEM analysis.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1 Measurement Model

This part evaluates the measurement model's validity and reliability through indicators such as factor loadings, AVE, and composite reliability to guarantee that the defined constructs are measured correctly. HTMT ratio test is employed to ensure that constructs under analysis are different. This paper assesses the structural model by examining path coefficients, coefficients of determination (R^2) to show the extent of the relationship between variables.

Table 1: Construct Reliability and Validity

Variables	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
Consumer Engagement	CE1	0.825	0.899
	CE2	0.843	
	CE3	0.816	
	CE4	0.842	
	CE5	0.767	
	CE6	0.797	
Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer	CT1	0.820	0.933
	CT2	0.839	
	CT3	0.878	
	CT4	0.869	
	CT5	0.866	
	CT6	0.779	
	CT7	0.865	
Data Privacy Concern	DP1	0.780	0.873
	DP2	0.782	
	DP3	0.802	
	DP4	0.826	
	DP5	0.876	
Financial Literacy	FL1	0.791	0.909
	FL2	0.852	
	FL3	0.871	
	FL4	0.858	
	FL5	0.875	
	FL6	0.726	
Travel Scam Avoidance	TSA1	0.876	0.928
	TSA2	0.849	
	TSA3	0.883	
	TSA4	0.818	
	TSA5	0.887	
	TSA6	0.835	

Table 1 illustrates the reliability and validity test of the constructs employed in this research. The findings show high internal consistency for all the variables, as evidenced by the Cronbach's alpha values, which are far above the desired 0.7 threshold. Travel scam avoidance ($\alpha = 0.928$) and consumer trust in FinTok influencers ($\alpha = 0.933$) are the most reliable, pointing to their pivotal position in the research model. Additionally, the item

loadings for all the constructs are above 0.7, demonstrating good convergent validity and ensuring that the chosen indicators are effective in measuring the respective constructs. These findings provide the strength of the measurement model, which supports the theoretical underpinning of the research.

Table2: Discriminant Validity

	Consumer Engagement	Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer	Data Privacy Concern	Financial Literacy	Online Travel Scam Detection
Consumer Engagement	0.815				
Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer	0.593	0.846			
Data Privacy Concern	0.773	0.624	0.814		
Financial Literacy	0.667	0.776	0.662	0.830	
Online Travel Scam Detection	0.662	0.845	0.691	0.768	0.858

Table 2 discriminant validity is tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which confirms that all constructs share more with their own indicators than with any other construct. Diagonal values are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct, which should be greater than the associations between constructs. The results confirm that all constructs pass this test, confirming sufficient discriminant validity. The highest association is between consumer trust in FinTok influencers and financial literacy, which indicates a strong but distinct relationship between trust in influencers and financial awareness. The results confirm that each construct is conceptually distinct, reducing multicollinearity and construct redundancy issues.

Table 3: Discriminant validity (HTMT)

	Consumer Engagement	Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer	Data Privacy Concern	Financial Literacy
Consumer Engagement				
Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer	0.645			
Data Privacy Concern	0.872	0.678		
Financial Literacy	0.735	0.839	0.737	
Travel Scam Avoidance	0.723	0.905	0.755	0.832

The discriminant validity test with the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) validates that each construct is unique from the rest. The HTMT values in Table 3 are below the critical value of 0.90, validating that the constructs are unique conceptually. Consumer engagement and consumer trust in FinTok influencers are moderately related (HTMT = 0.645), implying that trust in influencers has a strong impact on the level of engagement. Financial literacy is highly related to consumer trust (HTMT = 0.839), implying that trustful influencers can boost the level of financial awareness of consumers. Data privacy concern is highly related to consumer engagement (HTMT = 0.872), implying that privacy concern can impact the level of active engagement by consumers in FinTok discourse. Notably, travel scam avoidance is highly related to consumer trust (HTMT = 0.905), implying that trust in influencers directly impacts the capacity of consumers to identify scams. These results highlight the significance of differentiating between constructs while noting their interrelated nature in impacting consumer behavior.

4.2 Structural Model

Table 4 gives the R-square statistics, indicating the model's explanatory fit. The findings reveal that consumer trust in FinTok influencers accounts for 60.2% of the variance in financial literacy and 38.9% of the variance in concern for data privacy, underlining its significant impact on consumer knowledge and awareness. The general model accounts for 77.4% of the variance in avoiding travel scams, indicating that the predictors in the model are a good representation of consumers' capacity to detect and avoid online travel scams. These results affirm the appropriateness of consumer trust in influencers as a major driver of financial literacy, privacy concerns, and, by extension, scam avoidance. The adjusted R-square statistics reveal little dwindling, affirming that the model possesses high predictive validity without overfitting.

Table 4: Coefficient of Determination (R-square)

	R Square	Adj. R Square
Consumer Engagement	0.352	0.349
Data Privacy Concern	0.389	0.387
Financial Literacy	0.602	0.600
Travel Scam Avoidance	0.774	0.770

Path analysis results reveal the mediating role of consumer trust in FinTok influencers in affecting financial literacy, participation, and scam-detecting behavior (Table 5 and Figure 2). The most robust relationship in the study is that between financial literacy and trust in influencers ($\beta = 0.776$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that consumers who trust influencers tend to increase their knowledge and awareness of finances. This finding suggests that influencers not only entertain but are also an influential learning channel for understanding digital finance. Similarly, trust in influencers also significantly affects data privacy concerns ($\beta =$

0.624, $p < 0.001$), aligning with the contention that trustworthy influencers are able to influence followers' attitudes toward online security threats. Additionally, trust in influencers is also a strong predictor of consumer participation ($\beta = 0.593$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that when consumers trust influencers as authorities, they are more likely to follow financial content, actively engage with others, and adopt influencer recommendations into their financial activities. However, the direct effect of consumer participation in detecting travel scams is comparatively weak ($\beta = 0.100$, $p = 0.029$), suggesting that participation alone is insufficient to improve consumers' capacity for detecting scams unless with the combination of financial literacy and data privacy awareness.

Table 5: Path Analysis

Hypothesis	Beta	STDEV	t-value	p-value	Results
Consumer Engagement -> Travel Scam Avoidance	0.100	0.053	1.892	0.029	Accepted
Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer -> Consumer Engagement	0.593	0.078	7.626	0.000	Accepted
Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer -> Data Privacy Concern	0.624	0.071	8.804	0.000	Accepted
Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer -> Financial Literacy	0.776	0.026	30.297	0.000	Accepted
Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer -> Travel Scam Avoidance	0.565	0.096	5.873	0.000	Accepted
Data Privacy Concern -> Travel Scam Avoidance	0.155	0.070	2.224	0.013	Accepted
Financial Literacy -> Travel Scam Avoidance	0.161	0.055	2.908	0.002	Accepted
Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer -> Consumer Engagement -> Travel Scam Avoidance	0.125	0.044	2.853	0.002	Accepted
Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer -> Data Privacy Concern -> Travel Scam Avoidance	0.097	0.049	1.986	0.024	Accepted
Consumer Trust in FinTok Influencer -> Financial Literacy -> Travel Scam Avoidance	0.059	0.036	1.654	0.049	Accepted

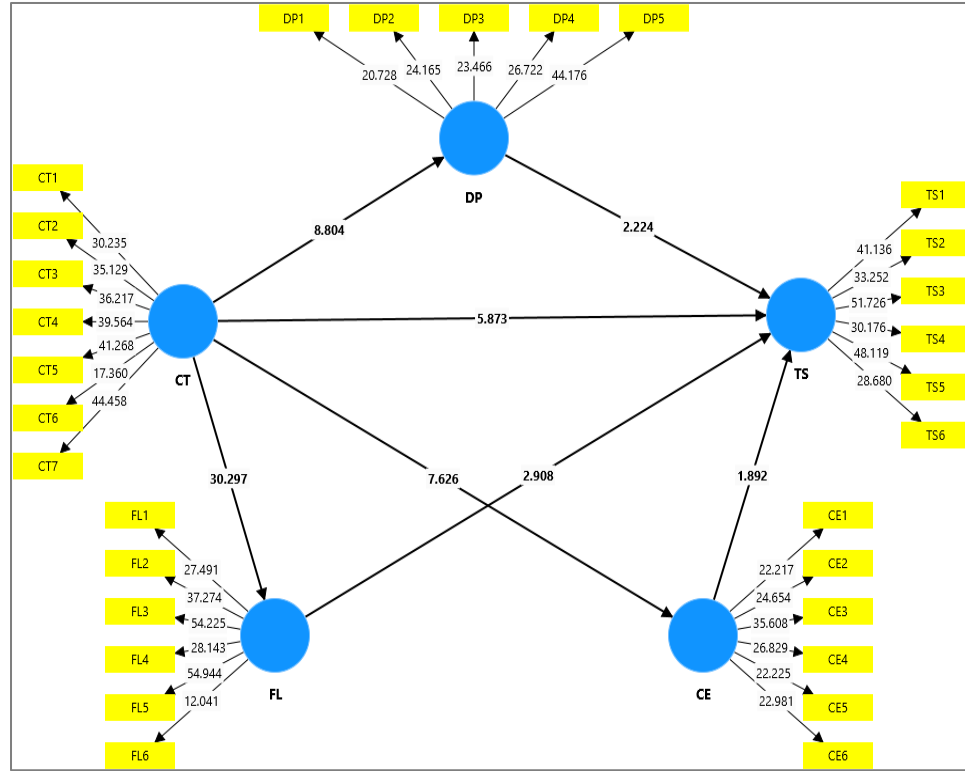


Figure 2: Structural Model Results

Besides direct associations, the research concludes that consumer trust in influencers has indirect influences on avoiding scams through three mediators: engagement, financial literacy, and data privacy concern. The mediation effect through consumer engagement ($\beta = 0.125$, $p = 0.002$) indicates that though influencers persuade followers to engage with financial information and engagement, the latter itself is not the key to avoiding scams. Rather, engagement creates a platform for learning, and, coupled with better financial literacy and risk perception, scam detection skills are strengthened. The indirect effect of consumer trust on avoiding scams through financial literacy ($\beta = 0.059$, $p = 0.049$) also complements the value of knowledge acquisition to increase financial resilience. The effect aligns with financial education hypotheses, highlighting that educated consumers can better detect fraud schemes and make more secure financial decisions. Similarly, consumer trust in influencers also impacts avoiding scams through data privacy concerns ($\beta = 0.097$, $p = 0.024$), indicating that influencers sensitize consumers to privacy risks. As consumers are more sensitive to the risks of digital security, they engage in risk-averse behavior towards online financial transactions and thus avoid being targeted by scams.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the critical role that FinTok influencers play in fostering consumer trust and enhancing financial literacy to mitigate online travel fraud (Ding & Ge, 2025; Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). In an era where digitalization has revolutionized both travel planning and financial education, the intersection of these domains highlights the unique potential of social media communities to address emerging consumer challenges. This discussion interprets the study's results in the context of existing literature, examining how trust, financial knowledge, and proactive consumer behavior contribute to fraud prevention (Xu, Murphy & Chen, 2024). Those who are following the FinTok influencers and actively using TikTok are much better prepared to understand the nuances of booking travel services through social media platforms and avoid possible scams (Ding & Ge, 2025). The study presented the result and shows the underlying connections between consumer trust in FinTok influencer and factors considered in avoiding travel scams (Xu, Pearce, & Chen, 2021). It was also found that trust in these influencers directly increase consumers' capacity to identify and avoid travel scams online (Beta = 0.565, $p = 0.000$). This can be better judged with the endorsement and assumed specialist that influencers provide. The followers look up to these influencers as individuals worthy of trust, and this makes them place a lot of stock in their advice. Through sharing timely information, FinTok influencers prepare their followers to be wiser and less susceptible to such scam tendencies when they are on the process of buying travel services online. Consumer engagement, which is the extent to which consumers are willing and able to interact and get involved with content, cannot be ignored. The result presented in this study indicates that, the level of consumer engagement has a positive mediating relationship with the ability to avoid travel scams (Beta = 0.100, $p = 0.029$). Frequent and post-purchase engaged consumers who spend time engaging with FinTok influencers in this study exhibit a higher likelihood of having awareness of general anti-scam techniques and measures (Guan, 2023).

This kind of awareness is as a result of the improved frequency of reading informative articles and cautionary tales that inform them of the latest scams, and how to protect themselves online. Other reasons that make most people avoid traveling scams include data privacy issues. The findings also show that there appears to be a significant positive association between data privacy concerns and successful evasion of travel scams (Beta = 0.155, $p = 0.013$). Users who take their time while selecting their social networks are safer from scammers' tricks. This awareness is observed among FinTok influencers and their followers by stressing data privacy and sharing alerts about possible privacy invasion on several travel application interfaces (Fernandez & Aman, 2021). This proactive method assists the consumer to make more secure decisions within a given market, thus reducing their likelihood of coming across con jobs. Financial literacy, an ingredient part of scam resistance, has a significant and positive relationship with the capability of avoiding travel

scams ($\text{Beta} = 0.161, p = 0.002$). FinTok consumers who follow the influencers that promote financial literacy are in a better position to identify and avoid shady travel deals.

These influencers enlighten their followers with important facts on financial management and scams in the online transaction sector, enabling anyone who comes across dubious travel deals to be wise enough to decline them (Wells, Nguyen, & Harbarth, 2024). Improving financial literacy allows the consumer to better evaluate the authenticity of the travel offer and avoid falling into a scam. It also underlines the mediated relationships between consumer trust in influencers and travel scam evasion, which include; consumer interaction, data privacy, and financial literacy (Lone & Bhat, 2024). For example, as is shown in the tables above, trust in influencers has a significant positive impact on consumer engagement ($\text{Beta} = 0.593; p = 0.000$), which in its turn leads to improved scam avoidance ($\text{Beta} = 0.125; p = 0.002$). Likewise, trust impacts data privacy concerns and financial literacy and thereby improves scam prevention. Such insights support further discussions of the complex influence FinTok influencers exert on customers' behaviors and improved internet security. Thus, it has been identified that FinTok influencers have a significant influence in the matters of combating online travel scams by shaping consumer trust, participation, data protection issues and financial competence (Ly, Yi, & Fok, 2022). It greatly helps avoid scams when they are able to educate the followers, grab their attention, and build trust with them. Since the role of social media is expanding further, it is effective to use FinTok influencers as credible sources that can contribute towards enhancing the concept of online safety and preventing people from scam travel deals.

6. Conclusion

The study insights have important implications regarding the improvement of FinTok influencers' followers' capability to detect false online travel offers. Firstly, it underlines that active participation in FinTok communities may help detect scams because of the significant association between consumer engagement and the number of scams. The two findings indicate that credible influencers are able to establish authentic interactions with the audience, which leads to more extensive interaction with the content that they share. The direct effect of financial literacy on scam identification is very high, which implies that consumers who understand basic financial issues well are in a better position to recognize genuine promotions from fake ones. Although high privacy concern is likely to divert consumer's attention away from detecting scams, when such concerns are taken by trusted influencers, it results in a positive impact on the consumption of scams. This implies that such influencers build trust, teach followers about data privacy, and improve the characteristics that reduce these problems and increase the ability to identify scams. To sum up, for the citizens of today's world scrolling through TikTok, following the influencers who spread information about personal finance and the protection of data can create an immutable line of defense against fraudsters.

The mediating roles of consumer engagement, data privacy, and financial literacy on the trust in influencers and scam detection indicate that these variables form a networked relationship. This study finds support here as trust works directly with scam detection, and also indirectly as it boosts engagement and financial knowledge. This shows that comprehensive intervention where the influencers work on earning the consumers' trust and at the same time encouraging them to be active financially is most protective. Concerning the online bookers, the findings presented in the paper stress the role of financial literacy and the bond with trustworthy influencers. Thus, consumers who frequently expose themselves to financial content shared by other sources, including financially-informed individuals, are somehow protected from such cons. Such a proactive strategy in studying and active participation can be very helpful in preventing one from being scammed into traveling with a 'too good to be true' offer. Therefore, the study supports the need for FinTok influencers to play a pivotal part in improving the general capacity to identify scams among followers. In this context, people's involvement, the reliance on trustworthy sources, and concern regarding monetary and personal data literacy are critical in safeguarding oneself against OTAs fraud schemes. In the case of active TikTok users and online travel consumers, using the information from the FinTok influencers may mean adopting a safer experience.

6.1 Implications of the Study

6.1.1 Practical Implications

Based on this study, there are several practical implications that may be drawn for the active users of TikTok following financial performers and for the consumers procuring travel services remotely. Firstly, getting daily engaged with the FinTok content opens up a very high chance of developing very strong scam detection skills. Users need to follow competent and reliable thought leaders in their sphere, and such specialists should give comprehensive lessons about the evaluation or potential fraud as a result of certain travel deals. Further, those influencers who promote the protection of the users' data will also help them avoid having to worry about the particular issues that may divert their attention to scams. In this case, reliable influencers can act as helpful navigators for proper behavior on the Internet as well as safe search and booking of accommodation.

6.1.2 Theoretical Implications

The theoretical contributions made by this study can be summed up as the relationship between consumer behavior, trust, and financial literacy within the risky situation of online scams. The study emphasizes that consumers' interactions with FinTok influencers contribute substantially to the improvement of scam identification. Realistic influencers having positive trends of actually using the sites and apps can help lessen data privacy issues by demonstrating the epitome of reliability, which creates a safer online space. However, the role of financial literacy also indicates its important impact on the abilities

of consumers oriented to detecting scams while practicing digital transactions. These findings advance theory pertaining to the nature of digital impact, effects on consumer defenseless, and part of social media in dispute, financial literacy and consumer emancipation. The findings in this study align with consumer trust theory, which posits that trust is a fundamental mechanism in reducing perceived risk and affecting consumer behavior, particularly in uncertain digital environments. The study confirms that consumer trust in FinTok influencers enhances financial literacy, care for data privacy, and consumer engagement, ultimately improving scam detection and avoidance. This supports the theory's argument that trust, based on perceived reliability and credibility, results in confidence in decision-making. The study, however, refines consumer trust theory in contending that trust alone is not sufficient; it must be accompanied by financial literacy to effectively protect consumers from scams. While trust reduces uncertainty, blind trust in influencers without shedding light on financial awareness may increase vulnerability to false advice or counterfeit schemes, implying that trust must be accompanied by informed skepticism. The study also identifies the role of social media platforms in shaping trust in peer-to-peer digital communities, expanding traditional consumer trust theory, which is focused on business-to-consumer relationships. The findings suggest that trust not only serves as a risk-reduction mechanism but also as a double-edged sword that, if left unchecked, may render consumers vulnerable to financial trickery. By combining insights from social media influence, digital financial literacy, and scam avoidance behavior, this study refines consumer trust theory and contends that trust must be balanced with financial awareness in digital financial transactions.

6.2 Limitations and Future Suggestions

Although this study offers rich evidence of the influence of consumer trust in FinTok influencers on financial literacy, data privacy concerns, consumer engagement, and avoidance of travel scams, some limitations need to be noted. One such limitation is the use of self-reported questionnaire data, which is prone to social desirability and recall biases, and therefore may result in over- or under-reports of financial literacy and vulnerability to scams. Future studies could improve reliability by using multi-method designs, e.g., monitoring behavior or qualitative interviews, to triangulate the findings. Common method bias is also a risk because independent and dependent variables are gathered from the same respondents, which can be addressed by using temporal separation in data collection or implicit response measures. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study, which limits the potential to establish causal relationships. Although structural equation modeling offers statistical insights, experimental or intervention-based studies could offer stronger validation by measuring changes in consumer trust and avoidance of travel scams through longitudinal measurement. Future studies could conduct pre-post experimental studies where participants are exposed to various types of financial influencer content to measure its effect longitudinally. Further, this study does not control for some trust-building mechanisms like influencer credibility, transparency, expertise, or authenticity, which are significant determinants of consumer trust in financial influencers.

Using theoretical frameworks like the source credibility theory or the Elaboration Likelihood Model could offer richer insights into how consumers build trust in financial influencers and how such trust influences their financial choices. Psychological constructs like fear of missing out (FOMO) and risk perception can also be examined as possible moderators of consumer engagement and scam detection. Additionally, the present study does not examine cross-cultural and cross-generational differences in consumer trust and avoidance of scams. Since mechanisms of trust vary by culture—where collectivist cultures may be more reliant on word-of-mouth promotion and individualist cultures on independent verification—follow-up studies can have a cross-cultural comparative design. Similarly, intergenerational differences can influence digital financial literacy since Gen Z and Millennials, more experienced in the digital environment, may perceive and respond differently towards TikTok financial advice than older consumers. Another limitation is that travel scam avoidance is measured as an undifferentiated construct without distinct consideration of the various types of scams, whereas there are evident differences between phishing, social engineering, identity theft, and false bookings. Future studies can segment travel scams and examine whether some FinTok content is more effective in preventing a certain type of fraud. An examination of the credibility of the content, of warning signs for scams, and of algorithmic influence on exposure to financial advice can give a more nuanced picture of how social media platforms condition consumer financial behavior. While the above limitations exist, this study is a good starting point for the analysis of the interface of consumer trust in FinTok influencers, financial literacy, data privacy concerns, and avoidance of scams. Bridging the above areas through experimental verification, cross-cultural comparison, extended theory models, and scam-specific examination will contribute to the field of digital financial literacy and enhance consumer protection in online environments.

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