YouTube airline review vloggers' impact on their followers'

purchase intent

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Abstract

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Background

Airline vloggers are a form of social media influencer who post reviews to platforms like YouTube. Social media influencers have been demonstrated to increase purchase intent when they positively review a product, and to detrimentally affect brand image when they review a product negatively. This research attempts to determine whether YouTube airline review vloggers influence their followers to fly or avoid flying with an airline based on their reviews.

Methods

An online survey measured vloggers' impact on future and past purchase intent of their followers. The survey recruited followers. It contained questions about participant demographics and about their perceptions of trust and information quality of vloggers' channels. A qualitative question asked participants directly what vloggers do or don't do to influence them. Quantitative data were analysed using regression analyses, qualitative data using thematic analysis.

Results

Vloggers influenced followers to try airlines (positive purchase intent) in both the past and future. Participants were less likely to be influenced to avoid flying with an airline (negative purchase intent), stating that they would prefer to make up their own mind. Economy passengers criticised the lack of content tailored to their cabin class, while first class passengers were most likely to be influenced. Vloggers' information quality and the trustworthiness of their channel content had a strong impact on their followers' purchase intent, where better quality and trustworthiness led to higher purchase intent.

Conclusions

Vloggers that positively review airlines are likely to persuade their followers to try that airline. Airlines are however relatively immune to the effects of negative reviews. Vloggers could increase their following by tailoring their content better to their followers' wishes and promoting their trustworthiness. Airlines could benefit by engaging with vloggers to increase sales.

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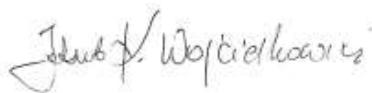
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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Appendices

List of Abbreviations

CBBE	consumer-based brand equity
ESM	earned social media
eWOM	electronic word of mouth
FFP	frequent flyer programme
K	thousand
M	million
NA	not available
Q	question
SM	social media
SMIs	social media influencers
UGC	user-generated content
WOM	word of mouth

1   Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine the power of YouTube vloggers, who review airline products and services, on the purchase intent of their followers. Data were obtained by means of an online questionnaire. Twelve vloggers were approached to post the questionnaire to their YouTube channel. Five of them posted it to their followers.

The questionnaire was comprised of questions asking vloggers' followers whether the channel's videos have influenced them to purchase or avoid purchasing flights with reviewed airlines. The questions were design to probe future and past influence. To better understand what factors would have an impact on the followers' purchase intent, an open ended, qualitative question was included. This question was not mandatory to complete.

As of 2019, no adequate research has been conducted on the marketing relevance of social media videos for airlines (Pásková, Hruška and Zelenka, 2019). Social Media is emerging as an important marketing tool used by companies (Poturak and Softić, 2019). There is strong evidence in the literature that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) impacts purchase intent and share price performance. Current research confirms that bloggers use eWOM as a popular type of recommendation and it is being utilised by consumers (Ing and Ming, 2018).

Vloggers and bloggers are Social Media Influencers, with the former using video messages as their platform and the latter utilizing written word (GRIN, 2019). YouTube videos detailing vloggers' experiences with an airline may be considered a form of eWOM. There is a little research studying the impact of vloggers on their followers and none of that research concerns airlines and their services. This research attempts to fill that gap.

1.1   Research Question
What impact do YouTube vloggers, who review airline products and services, have on the purchase intent of their followers?

To help answer the research question, several measurable research objectives were devised.
1. *To what extent do vloggers' positive reviews influence followers to try airlines?*
2. *To what extent do vloggers' negative reviews influence followers to avoid trying airlines?*
3. *What is the impact on the perceived trustworthiness and information quality of the vloggers' YouTube channel on trying/avoiding airlines?*
4. *What perspectives do participants have about whether and how vloggers influence them to try/avoid airlines?*

2   Literature Review

This chapter presents findings from the literature related to the dissertation research topic. The literature review was informed by studies which were identified by combining narrow and broad search terms representing themes of interest (Table 2.1). All databases available to NCI Library were searched from inception to August 2020.

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
YouTube	Airline	Influence
Viral Marketing	Aviation	Impact
Social Media		Effect

Table 2.1 Search terms used to inform literature review

Potentially relevant articles were identified from title and abstract review. On full-text review, the papers that were deemed relevant to this study were included. The following themes were identified from retrieved papers: electronic word of mouth, social media, social media influencers, YouTube and purchase intent. The relevance of these themes is discussed below.

No studies examined YouTube vloggers' impact on purchase intent of their followers within the airline industry. The research question proposed for this study has therefore not been answered in the literature, meaning that this research is novel.

2.1   Social media

Social media (SM) is becoming an increasingly important tool for companies to communicate their marketing strategies to their consumers (Poturak and Softić, 2019). These authors discuss how social media platforms offer customers an opportunity to interact with each other, meaning that firms are no longer a sole source of brand communication. They state that nowadays, consumers use social media for information and turn away from traditional media. Consumers' perception of a brand is therefore no longer influenced solely by what companies share, but what other consumers have to say. In fact, both companies and consumers' social media contributions may benefit brand communications (Gómez, Lopez and Molina, 2019).

Using unique characteristics of SM platforms, like the ability to post videos and interact with followers on YouTube, content can be tailored to the needs of audience, thus giving an advantage to marketers targeting products to specific end users (Lee and Watkins, 2016). These authors state that SM can be a useful tool, which could be used by luxury brand managers to establish close relationships with

consumers. Social media affects customer-based brand equity and in turn brand sales (Colicev, Malshe and Pauwels, 2018).

This is supported by other literature, which states that customers increasingly rely on peer-to-peer communication (Hughes, Swaminathan and Brooks, 2019). Goodman, Booth and Matic (2011) state that consumers use their own social media to broadcast their personal stories and experiences with a brand to the world, while Dinesh (2017) explored how people have used blogs to express their experiences with products. "Beauty lovers are increasingly consuming and sharing information digitally, through online communities" (Lacy, 2013). This gives consumers an online option to turn to for opinions about a given product before making a purchase.

According to a recent Pew Research centre report, six in ten Americans trust social media as a news source (Dinesh, 2017). The author states that 82% of consumers are likely to follow influencers recommendations. Customers rely on personal recommendations and reviews when making purchase decisions. As of 2016, American companies spend an average 10% of their marketing budget on social media (Colicev *et al.*, 2018). Pásková, Hruška and Zelenka (2019) reviewed studies published between 2007 and 2011 that pertained to tourism competitiveness. This review demonstrated the strategic importance of SM for such competitiveness. Social media are also capable of introducing novel products known only in one country to the masses. This was the case with a Korean beauty product made from traditional ingredients (Garbato, 2019). These products broke beyond the Korean market and became internationally popular following exposure by social media users, with sales increasing by 30% in 2016 compared to 2015.

Social media can also act as a double-edged sword for firms (Colicev *et al.*, 2018). These authors noted that positive earned social media (ESM), such as likes, shares or comments, have a positive effect on customer-based brand equity (CBBE), whereas negative ESM has a negative effect on CBBE. The negative comments by bloggers about the products quality or usefulness have been shown to affect customers' attitude toward it and the image of the company producing it (Ing and Ming, 2018).

2.2   Social Media Influencers (SMIs)

SMIs can be described as a new generation of independent third-party endorsers who have developed a sizable social network (Ki and Kim, 2019) and who use social media to mould their followers' attitudes (Freberg *et al.*, 2011). They have established credibility with large SM audiences through their expertise and knowledge of a particular topic. This credibility allows them to have an impact on their followers' decisions. Regular updates, including up-to-date news, are typical ways for SMIs to engage with their followers (Liu *et al.*, 2012). SMIs are very capable of conveying messages to a niche segment, thus they play a crucial role in creating brand loyalty and product engagement (Tapinfluence, 2020). They can

manipulate theirs followers' perception of brands (Goodman, Booth and Matic, 2011). Lee and Watkins (2016) showed in their study that SMIs, through the relationship they build and maintain with their followers, can also influence consumers' opinions of brands. SMIs have a major impact on brand marketing, with over 84% of markets in 2017 having an influencer as part of their campaign (Smart Insight, 2017). This includes the airline industry, which spends millions annually on celebrities to endorse their brand (Wang, Kao and Ngamsiriudom, 2017). As of 2019, nearly 75% of markets use influencers to spread awareness of their brand on social media (Hughes, Swaminathan and Brooks, 2019). SMIs hold a strong voice in the market and are capable of having an impact on company reputation through their followers, who are the product consumers (Goodman, Booth and Matic, 2011).

Vloggers are recognised as one form of SMI (GRIN, 2019). The term *vlogger* is short for *video logger*, which in turn was derived from the term *blog*. Blogging became a phenomenon in 1990s, where individuals posted personal stories, updates or experiences to an online web log (*blog*) using an informal or conversational style. Vloggers thus replicate this style of communication, but using video instead of text as a medium.

SMI marketing is an important new strategy in the world of marketing (Brown and Hayes, 2008). These authors suggest that influencers can be important to engage with for businesses, as their impact on their follower's purchase decision can be crucial. The power of SMIs increases the value of recommended brands, helps to generate engagement and affects intention to purchase products of recommended brands (Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019).

Celebrity attractiveness and trustworthiness can lift brand credibility and improve purchase intent toward the endorsed brand, which includes celebrities who endorse the airline sector (Lim *et al.*, 2017). These authors compared celebrity versus SMI endorsement and showed that consumers are more likely to follow the recommendations of their favourite SMI. The authors believe that this is because SMIs are perceived as more credible and trustworthy than celebrities. This was most prominent for businesses that target a younger generation. They state that compared to traditional celebrities, consumers find brand endorsements made by SMIs to be more relevant. Influencers are perceived as more trustworthy because they publicly share details about their personal lives, experiences and opinions (Ki and Kim, 2019). People respect influencers for 'being themselves' (Smart Insight, 2017). The credibility of endorsers, whether it is a traditional celebrity or an SMI, shows positive consumer attitude towards purchase intention (Goldsmith, Lafferty and Newell, 2000).

In a study conducted in the beauty industry, blog posts that were revealed to be sponsored did not have a negative impact on customers' purchase intent (Tran and Nguyen, 2020). These authors hypothesised that the consumer does not perceive a sponsored blog, as long as this sponsorship is revealed, as being misleading or trying to cheat them. Through this study, the authors showed that if the customers trust

the blogger, they are more likely to follow the recommendation. Bloggers who are believable, credible and honest increase their followers' purchase intent for beauty products. Similar results were found in a study that examined the effects of blogger sponsorship using a variety of goods and services (Lu, Chang and Chang, 2014). This study also found that sponsorship had no effect as long as it was disclosed and made the consumer feel as though the blogger was being transparent. These authors however also demonstrated that the type of remuneration to the blogger, be it cash or a product, does not affect consumer attitude toward the blog.

Consumers perceive vloggers as similar to themselves and develop social interactions with them. This leads consumers to believe that they will have same brand evaluations as SMIs (Lee and Watkins, 2016). SMIs are sources of information published on SM platforms. Message source trustworthiness has an impact on brand image, which in turn has a positive correlation with purchase intent (Kusumawati and Iqbal, 2016; Ing and Ming, 2018). When consumers place more trust in the source of the message, their intent to purchase the product increases. These findings were corroborated in an earlier study by Wu and Wang (2011), which found that a high source reputation directly translates into higher purchase intention, while low source reputation has an opposite effect on the customer's willingness to purchase. Wang, Kao and Ngamsiriudom (2017) showed through their study that trustworthiness and expertise are two factors that influence the credibility of a celebrity endorser, which is positively associated with purchase intention.

It is important to note that that similar to the trustworthiness of the message source, the quality of the message delivered by the SMIs has an effect on purchase intention. The effect of the information quality on brand image is positive, meaning that an increase in quality improves brand image (Kusumawati and Iqbal, 2016). The study conducted by these authors indicated that there is a direct effect of the message quality on the consumers' decision to acquire a product or service. There is a positive relationship between information quality and consumer attitude toward blogger recommendations (Ing and Ming, 2018). The higher quality of the content, the higher customers' purchase intent. Kusumawati & Iqbal (2016) summarise this effect as a feeling customers have toward the message delivered to them. When the information meets the expected quality, they are more willing to 'buy in' and purchase the advertised service. Wu and Wang (2011) report similar effects of the quality of the delivered message on consumers' perceptions of a firm and their willingness to purchase a product. Information quality also has a comprehensive and positive effect on brand image, in addition to consumers' buying decisions (Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008).

2.3 Word of Mouth (WOM) and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Online user-generated content (UGC) is one part of the phenomenon of consumer communication known as electronic word of mouth (Tirunillai and Tellis, 2012). These authors state that eWOM might be more impactful and important than traditional word of mouth (WOM), as it is instantly available, and is produced at a low cost. eWOM is easy to use, widely accessible, and has extended reach and subscriptions.

Tirunillai and Tellis (2012) argue that eWOM grows more rapidly and is easier for companies to measure and monitor than WOM. They suggest that UGC has a higher impact on consumer choices than traditional marketing activities by firms. eWOM is emerging, especially in the blogging sphere, as a promising marketing strategy to increase sales (Hsu, Lin and Chiang, 2013). The authors suggest that marketers, through free product offers, should make a use of high-reputation bloggers in their strategies. Through the trust effect, SMIs will influence consumers to shop.

eWOM has a direct and significant effect on product trust (Seo and Park, 2018). It also has an impact on brand image and purchase intent (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Charo *et al.*, 2015), with positive eWOM being closely followed by an increase in purchase intent (Kusumawati and Iqbal, 2016). Negative eWOM has a negative impact on stock return and the value of the company (Xun and Guo, 2017). Poturak and Softić (2019) showed through their analysis that both social media users and companies are significant creators of eWOM. Through engaging in eWOM communication, consumers further increase their interest in a product and therefore their willingness to own a reviewed product, further fuelling purchase intent (Kusumawati and Iqbal, 2016).

When failures occur in a service industry like airlines, customers will feel disappointed, angry and upset (Tsai, Liao and Hsieh, 2014). These authors showed that such feelings will lead to the spread of negative WOM, and that firms may lose customers as a result. It is argued that the consumers' motives behind that action is to warn and prevent others from similar incidents. The anonymity of the internet may facilitate the process of spreading WOM. However, the authors show in their research that having an intimate relationship with the customer reduces any potential increase in negative WOM. Managers who focus on fostering good relationships with their customers will reduce the risk of negative WOM and in turn might prevent negative impact on future purchase intent.

2.4 YouTube

YouTube is a popular social medium, which has a strong influence on the conscious and unconscious perceptions of its users (Pásková, Hruška and Zelenka, 2019). These authors noted that YouTube is the world's favourite social network for sharing videos and the second most visited website globally. They state that since 2015, 400 hours of media content has been uploaded to YouTube every minute. There

are 2 billion users logged-in monthly, and in United States of America, 81% of these are aged between 15 and 25 (Cooper, 2019). Millennials prefer YouTube over traditional television and 95% of the global internet population visits it (Omnicore, 2020). Cooper (2019) states that YouTube is the second most popular platform to watch videos for people aged 18 to 34-year-old after Netflix. The author claims that 80% of people who watched YouTube videos related to a product they were interested in purchasing went on to do so. Omnicore (2020) states that 62% of the platform users are males.

YouTube users upload videos, often about products they use on a day-to-day basis (Lacy, 2013). Some of those vloggers become YouTube celebrities, with millions of followers. Lacy (2013) describes the behaviour of shoppers, where fifty percent of them watch YouTube beauty videos while shopping for cosmetics. Lee and Watkins (2016) describe in their study how brand value and purchase intentions increased after participants watched a vlog about the company on YouTube.

Videos are a significant part of social media and increasingly affect tourism marketing (Pásková, Hruška and Zelenka, 2019). One customer disappointed with the lack of response by United Airlines to his complaint recorded and posted a song of complaint on YouTube (Sexton, 2015). Within four days, the number of views exceeded one million (Andres, 2019). The Times of London attributed a 10% drop in United Airlines' stock price to the viral video. The airline then decided to reach out to the customer and offer compensation. This incident shows the power the platform. People commonly navigate from YouTube videos to brand websites (Hosea, 2011). It could be argued this social medium therefore gives companies opportunities to source customers. People who rely on YouTube videos for purchase recommendations treat them as a form of information and inspiration rather than an advertisement (Cooper, 2019).

2.5   Purchase intent

Customers are embracing the internet and spend more time searching it for product information, which affects their willingness to purchase (Poturak and Softić, 2019). These authors show through their analysis that eWOM affects brand equity, which in turn has a significant effect on the purchase intent of customers. Their research showed that online recommendations and opinions of other consumers have a high impact on purchase decisions. Lee & Watkins (2016) suggest that using SMIs to establish a long-term relationship with the consumer is a good way of ensuring a repeat purchase behaviour. According to their study, there is a supporting evidence to use YouTube to develop that connection.

Social media alters consumer mindset metrics such as brand awareness, purchase intent and customer satisfaction (Colicev et al., 2018). Colicev and colleagues found in a statistical analysis that a positive valence of earned social media is associated with positive change in purchase intent. For example, positive

'likes' and 'shares' on Facebook or Twitter are associated with positive purchase intent. On the other hand, an increase in negative valence of ESM did not statistically significantly affect purchase intent. An example of negative valence ESM might include negative comments or re-tweeting of complaints.

Influencers are viewed as experts and tend to be more persuasive and capable of driving consumers' purchase intent (Lim *et al.*, 2017). Ki and Kim (2019) state in their study that consumers have a desire to mimic SMIs, which influences their purchase intent. Another study looked at vloggers' influence on luxury brand perception and on consumers' purchase intent (Lee and Watkins, 2016). This study concluded that vloggers have a positive effect on both, so that having an online ambassador in the form of an SMI should increase number of future purchases.

When shopping online, consumers value the advice of others, and blogs may have a significant influence on purchase intent (Wu and Lee, 2012). The independent metrics attributed to this phenomenon were; trustworthiness of the blogger, attitude towards the product and followers' interaction with bloggers, with the latter being the biggest contributor. A study carried out in Delhi found that consumers consult with and make their decisions based on blogs when shopping for electronic devices (Saxena, 2011). Another study produced similar results, whereby bloggers' trustworthiness had a significant impact on their followers' intention to purchase a recommended product (Hsu, Lin and Chiang, 2013).

There is a positive effect of brand image on the intention to purchase a product or service (Kusumawati and Iqbal, 2016). These authors state that an increase in the perception of a brand's image will directly translate to an increase in customers' willingness to buy whatever the firm is selling. Brand image directly affects customers' purchase intent (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012), with a positive and significant relationship (Torlak *et al.*, 2014; Charo *et al.*, 2015).

2.6   The need for this research

The existing literature demonstrates that social media is a useful marketing platform. When used optimally, it can lead to increased sales, open new markets, improve shareholder values and improve company reputation. Most of the literature however pertains to the use of social media by companies themselves to drive advertising. While some research has been carried out on the impact of SMIs on purchase intent, this has not included the airline industry.

This research seeks to explore the impact of YouTube vloggers on their followers' intention to purchase flights with an airline. This could help airlines to understand whether reviews by vloggers have any impact on their potential sales and respond appropriately. The research may also benefit vloggers by helping them to understand whether and how their content affects their followers. This could facilitate them to tailor content to their audience and achieve a greater following.

3 Methods

3.1 Study Design

This study was designed to answer the following research question:

"What impact do YouTube vloggers, who review airline products and services, have on the purchase intent of their followers?"

To ensure that the research question could be adequately answered, it was subdivided into several measurable research objectives.

1. *To what extent do vloggers' positive reviews influence followers to try airlines?*
2. *To what extent do vloggers' negative reviews influence followers to avoid trying airlines?*
3. *What is the impact on the perceived trustworthiness and information quality of the vloggers' YouTube channel on trying/avoiding airlines?*
4. *What perspectives do participants have about whether and how vloggers influence them to try/avoid airlines?*

A prospective, cross-sectional, observational study design in the form of an online questionnaire was chosen to answer the research question. Questionnaires are a useful way of gathering information from a large sample in a short space of time (Jones, Baxter and Khanduja, 2013). Given the large numbers that are often involved, they permit greater statistical accuracy when identifying associations when quantitative data are captured. Surveys are also useful for obtaining a snapshot of opinions and behaviours to identify areas for further exploration in the future. Since this research was the first to examine the effects of airline SMIs on purchase intent in their followers, a survey was an appropriate choice of methodology. One limitation of a survey design however is the inability to generate an in-depth understanding of the issues at hand. Qualitative research designs are more suited to such endeavours. In order to allow greater understanding of the data, one qualitative question was included in the survey. The survey was therefore a multiple methods design.

3.2 Survey Instrument

To answer the research question, the survey was designed to capture: participant demographic information, questions about purchase intent, participants' opinions of the trustworthiness and information quality of vloggers' channels, and any other information that participants felt was relevant to the topic. The survey was designed using Qualtrics (www.qualitrics.com) and the flow and layout were according to best practices (Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2014; Bourke, Kirby and Doran, 2016). To

maximise response rates, the number of questions required to answer the research question was kept to a minimum. As such, fourteen questions were included.

Demographic information of interest was participant age, gender, country of origin, frequent flyer programme membership, number of flights taken per annum and preferred cabin class when flying long-haul. Age was taken as an integer, while gender was classified as male/female/other (in order not to exclude transgender and non-binary individuals). Country of residence was captured via a pre-populated drop-down list and served as a surrogate measure of income level. Countries of residence were grouped into low, low-middle, upper-middle and high-income using an existing classification system based on gross national income per capita (The World Bank Group, 2020). Membership of a frequent flyer programme (yes/no), number of flights (integer) and preferred long-haul cabin class (radio button choices) were all intended to identify whether a certain persona of passenger was more or less likely to be influenced by airline SMIs. Preferred cabin class was specific to long-haul flights only, since not all classes are available in short-haul flights.

To maximise validity and reliability from the outset, survey questions were based on existing validated survey research that investigated influence, purchase intent, trustworthiness and information quality. Questions referred to both past purchase intent and future purchase intent. These existing questions were minimally modified to suit this study and each amendment was rationalised (Table 3.1).

Source	Original Question	Response Type	Amendment	Rationale
Ki and Kim (2019)	*In the future, I am likely to try one of the same brands that (SMI's name) endorsed or posted on his/her Instagram*	5-point Likert-type scale	*In the future, I am more likely to try an airline that XXX reviewed positively on his YouTube channel.*	Participants may not associate 'brand' with 'airline' so made this explicit. Vloggers may review products positively or negatively.
Ki and Kim (2019)	*In the future, I am likely to try one of the same brands that (SMI's name) endorsed or posted on his/her Instagram*	5-point Likert-type scale	*In the future, I am less likely to try an airline that XXX reviewed negatively on his YouTube channel.*	Participants may not associate 'brand' with 'airline' so made this explicit. Vloggers may review products positively or negatively.

Source	Original Question	Response Type	Amendment	Rationale
Ki and Kim (2019)	*In the future, I am likely to try one of the same brands that (SMI's name) endorsed or posted on his/her Instagram*	Yes / No	*In the past, I have been influenced **to fly with** an airline because of a review I saw on XXX's YouTube channel.*	Required question to examine past positive purchase intent.
Ki and Kim (2019)	*In the future, I am likely to try one of the same brands that (SMI's name) endorsed or posted on his/her Instagram*	Yes / No	*In the past, I have been influenced **to avoid flying with** an airline because of a review I saw on XXX's YouTube channel.*	Required question to examine past negative purchase intent.
(Seo and Park, 2018)	*I think that information in airline social media is trustworthy*	5-point Likert-type scale	*I think the information in XXX's YouTube channel is **trustworthy**.*	Changed question target (airline to vlogger).
(Seo and Park, 2018)	*I think that overall, information quality in social media is good*	5-point Likert-type scale	*I think the information in XXX's YouTube channel is of **good quality**.*	Changed question target (social media to vlogger).

Table 3.1 Questionnaire items capturing vlog impact on purchase intention

An open-ended question was added at the end of the survey. This was designed to allow participants to offer any insights into how airline SMIs may influence them. It was inserted to ensure that any alternative perspectives not considered by the survey author could be captured. The added question read: 'Before you finish, is there anything else you would like to say about whether or how XXX's YouTube channel influences your decision to fly or avoid flying with a particular airline?'.

In order to ensure the questionnaire was unambiguous and error-free, and to improve validity and reliability, a pilot phase was conducted according to best practices (Jones, Baxter and Khanduja, 2013). Volunteers were sought by email of invitation to the year 2 class list of part-time MSc International Business in NCI. They were invited to take the questionnaire and provide feedback on each question. In order to ensure that questions about purchase intent captured information adequately, a cognitive interviewing strategy was used (Drennan, 2003). This involved asking participants what they understood

by each question to ensure it matched the investigator's intent. The feedback gathered was incorporated to produce a final version of the survey (Appendix 2).

3.3   Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Participants were adults (≥18) who were followers of an airline SMI. Given the online nature of social media and of the survey instrument, only those with an internet connection were included. Those aged under 18 were excluded, so that all participants were able to provide legal consent to engage with the research.

3.4   Ethical Considerations

A survey introduction was used to describe the nature and intent of the research to ensure that participants were fully informed (Appendix 2). The Qualtrics survey platform was adjusted to ensure that no IP address or geolocation information was captured. Since no personally identifying information was gathered as part of the survey, these measures made the data fully anonymous. Fully anonymous data are not considered 'personal data' and are therefore not subject to special handling requirements (Data Protection Commission, 2019). This meant that the researcher was able to store and process the data in an unencrypted format.

Autonomy of decision to participate was ensured by two means. Firstly, gatekeepers were used to recruit participants. This was both to ensure that the researcher did not coerce prospective participants and to reach a wider audience. Secondly, the survey was self-selecting, meaning that participants chose whether to participate or not. They were also able to take the survey at a time and place of their convenience.

Survey completion indicated consent to participate. Participants were advised at the survey outset that they could close the survey at any time and that their data would not be counted for analysis purposes. This allowed a mechanism by which participants who may have felt uncomfortable or unwilling to continue with the research could withdraw. Since data were fully anonymous, withdrawal was not possible once the survey was submitted and participants were advised of this.

Ethical approval for the research was sought and obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of National College of Ireland.

3.5 Gatekeepers

In order to access prospective participants, twelve YouTube vloggers were approached. These were airline SMIs who review the airlines' hard product. Their reviews are posted as videos to their own YouTube channel. Reviews detail the SMIs' experience with a particular airline. The vloggers were chosen randomly from the YouTube platform, but two criteria were applied when making the selection. The first criterion was to choose vloggers who state that they receive no remuneration of any kind from the reviewed airlines. This was done to avoid bias from the vlogger, who could potentially get paid for posting a positive review. It also meant that responses to questions about trustworthiness and information quality would be more homogeneous. While previous research noted that SMI sponsorship did not cause audiences to question influencers' trustworthiness (Lu, Chang and Chang, 2014; Tran and Nguyen, 2020), this had never been tested in an airline context. Since airline products are more expensive, any sponsorship effects may be different to previous research that focused on cheaper products.

At the study design phase, the second selection criterion was to choose SMIs who regularly post videos to their YouTube channel, with an average of one review a month from 30.03.2019 to 01.04.2020 as an acceptable metric. This was to ensure that vloggers who keep uninterrupted contact with their followers were chosen. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused air traffic to become reduced, the once-a-month post requirement was not met by some vloggers in March or April 2020. Instead, an average per month for the preceding twelve-month period was used.

Vloggers were first contacted by email asking them to facilitate recruitment for the research by posting a short survey to their followers (Appendix 2). Vloggers were incentivised to facilitate recruitment by offering them a summary of the research findings once completed. They were given two weeks to respond and if no response was received, a follow-up email was sent. Vloggers were then given a further two-week time period to contact the researcher back. The email stated that if there was no response, the presumption would be that the vlogger had no interest in research participation.

Of the 12 vloggers approached, 6 responded and agreed to post the survey link on their SM channels. Each vlogger was emailed back with a personalised link for survey dissemination. By using personalised links, each questionnaire was specific to that vlogger alone. This meant that the survey could identify the vlogger by name (rather than referring to them generically as 'this vlogger'). It also allowed the researcher to identify how many responses were obtained from each SMI's audience. Of the 6 vloggers who agreed to post the survey, only 5 did so. The majority of the vloggers posted it on Twitter. One did so on their YouTube channel and one on Instagram (Table 3.2). All surveys were closed on June 30th 2020, meaning that the questionnaire was open for approximately one month.

SMI	No. followers	Average no. reviews per 12 months	Responded	Agreed to post	Actually posted	SM platform	Date posted
Vlogger A	145K	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Twitter	28/05/2020
Vlogger B	1.28K	3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Twitter	29/05/2020
Vlogger C	43.2K	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Twitter	30/05/2020
Vlogger D	417K	11	Yes	Yes	Yes	YouTube	31/05/2020
Vlogger E	159K	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Twitter and Instagram	30/05/2020
Vlogger F	375K	4	Yes	Yes	No	NA	NA
Vlogger G	150 K	6	No	NA	No	NA	NA
Vlogger H	98.3K	2	No	NA	No	NA	NA
Vlogger I	278 K	6	No	NA	No	NA	NA
Vlogger J	2.18M	3	No	NA	No	NA	NA
Vlogger K	33.2K	2.83	No	NA	No	NA	NA
Vlogger L	43.4K	2	No	NA	No	NA	NA

Table 3.2. List of approached vloggers. NA: not applicable.

3.6   Data Analysis

Since greater response rates lead to improved statistical precision, no sample size estimate was applied. The maximum number of responses in the one month period was sought to support inferences from the data.

Responses to all twelve closed questions (6 x demographic, 4 x purchase intent, 2 x trustworthiness/quality) were analysed descriptively. Inferential statistical analysis used multiple independent and dependent variables. Independent variables were participant demographics (Q1-Q6) and perceived trustworthiness/quality (Q11, Q12). These were measured to see how they influenced future (Q7, Q8) and past (Q9, Q10) purchase intent, which were dependent variables.

Ordinal regression analysis was used for ordinal dependent variables (Q7, Q8) and binary regression analysis for binary dependent variables (Q9, Q10). Regression analyses are useful for building models that predict future trends from large datasets and these analyses were therefore appropriate to this study

design. Univariate ordinal and binary regression analyses take one independent variable at a time and examine its influence on the dependent variable for significant effects and direction of effect. When multiple independent variables are found to significantly influence the outcome, these may be combined together into a multivariate regression model to determine which predictors have the strongest influence on the dependent variable. Both univariate and multivariate regression analyses were adopted for this research.

The descriptive and inferential statistical analyses answer research objectives 1-3 given at the beginning of this chapter. These objectives quantitatively measure the extent to which vloggers influence purchase intent. The fourth research objective was designed to obtain participants' perspectives about whether and how airline vloggers influence participants. Qualitative data were prepared for analysis by excluding any comments unrelated to the question at hand e.g. "I simply love aviation". Also excluded were any comments that did not give a clear indication of whether they were related to the survey question, or merely statements about the vlogger/channel e.g. "One of the best you tube travel vloggers around".

A reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2020) was taken for qualitative data. This approach enables the research to identify themes within the data. Thematic analysis involves a six-step approach as follows:

Step	Action
1. Becoming familiar with the data	Re-reading data a number of times
2. Coding data	Systematically labelling important or interesting comments
3. Generating initial themes	Creating initial groupings for labels
4. Reviewing themes	Re-configuring the model until the groupings make maximum sense
5. Defining and naming themes	Classifying themes in the model to ensure transparency and reliability
6. Producing the report	Generating an analytic commentary with compelling examples from the data to explain and support themes

Table 3.3. Steps of thematic analysis approach

Participants' comments were interpreted by the researcher at a manifest level, which is to say that comments were taken at 'face value', rather than subject to deeper interpretation, which might misrepresent the participant's intention. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were combined to answer the research objectives, which were in turn used to answer the research question.

4   Results

This chapter summarises the results of the survey. It provides descriptive statistics related to participant demographics, as well as descriptive and inferential statistics for dependent and independent variables. Quantitative data in this chapter provide statistical information about whether or how much participants were influenced by vloggers. The chapter concludes with a qualitative thematic analysis of how and why (or why not) participants were influenced.

4.1   Responses

There were 1495 responses to the survey. Of these, 405 were eliminated as participants did not complete the survey, which was taken as study withdrawal as per the survey introduction page. A further 9 records were eliminated when data cleaning was performed. Five records contained unusually high ages (130, 130, 130, 129 and 89), which was notable since the survey software was set to limit responses to an 18-130 age range. The 89-year-old had an unrealistically high number of long-haul flights (300) all in first class, while country of residence was set to North Korea. Two records were removed as they included inappropriate comments and suggested the survey was not completed in good faith. One further record was excluded, as the respondent reported taking 9999999999 flights per annum. One record was excluded as the country of residence was North Korea, age was 69, number of flights was 69, and long-haul class was set to first. The final data set thus comprised n=1081 records. A precise response rate (number of responses/potential number of responses) could not be calculated, as the number of individuals who saw the survey was unknown.

4.2   Demographics

4.2.1   Age

The participants were aged between 18 and 76. Mean participant age was 27.07 years (SD ±11.56). Median age was 22 years (IQR 14). Data were non-normally distributed with 373/1081 (34.5%) of participants aged 18-19.

4.2.2 Gender

Respondent gender is in Fig. 4.1. The vast majority of participants were males.
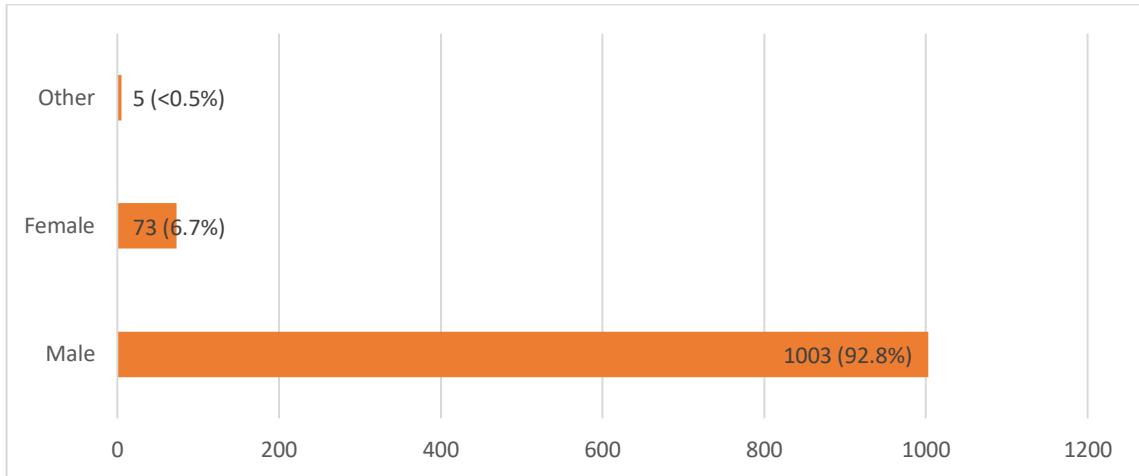
Figure 4.1 Participant gender.

4.2.3 Membership of frequent flyer program (FFP)

646 (59.8%) of those who took part in the study indicated membership of an FFP, while 435 (40.2%) answered *no* to this question.

4.2.4 Country of residence

Country of residence is presented in Fig. 4.2. The full list has been attached as Appendix 3.
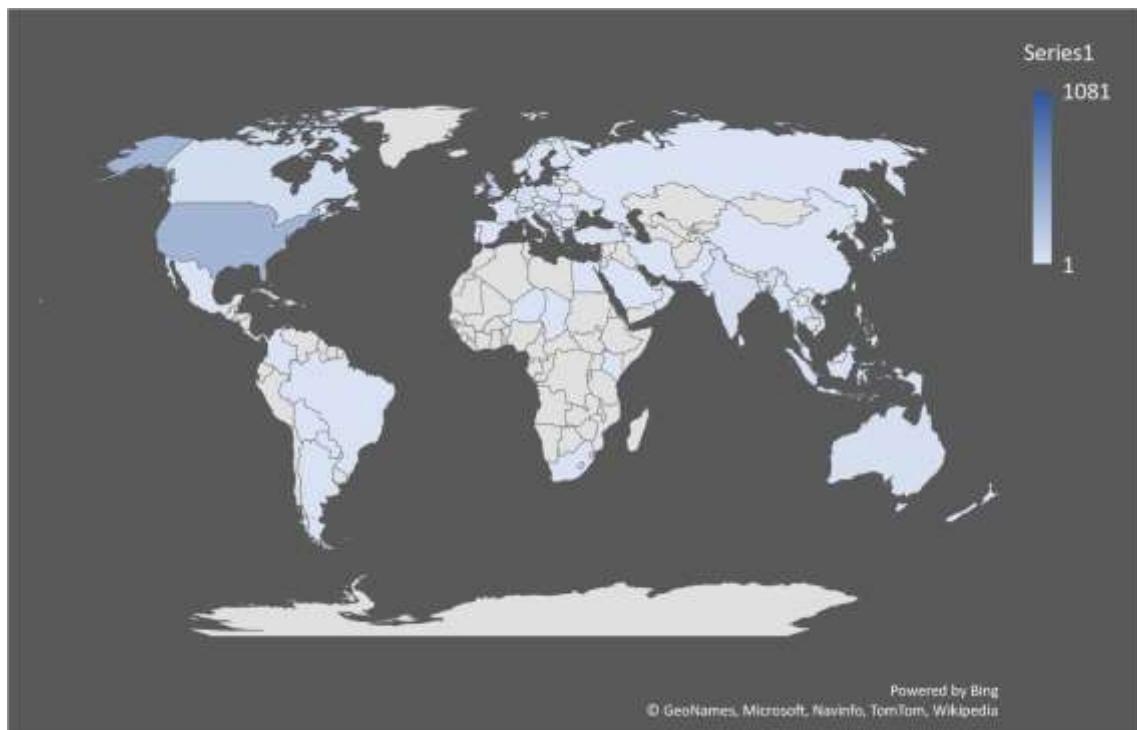
Figure 4.2. Participant country of residence.

4.2.5   Country of residence by income levels

Country of residence defined by income level is in Fig. 4.3. Niger was the only country from a low-income group. Statistical analysis for this group would not yield reliable results with only one country, so a decision was made to include it in the low-middle income category for the purpose of data analytics.
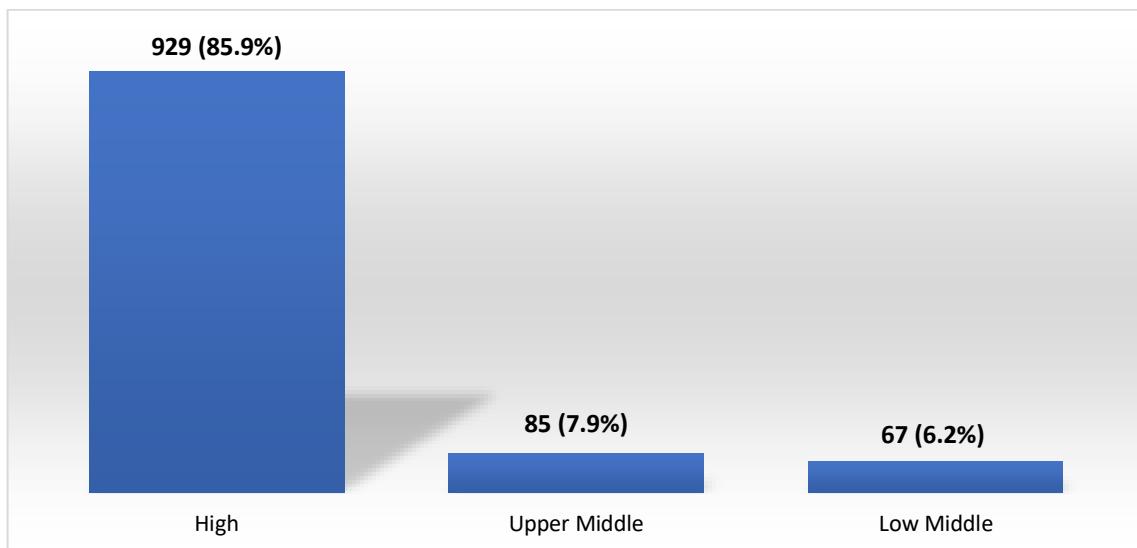
Figure 4.3. Country of residence represented by income level.

4.2.6 Number of flights taken a year

Mean number of flights taken per year (return flight counted as two separate flights) was calculated as 14.58 (SD ±28.19). Median was 6 (IQR 8). Range for the responses given was from 0 to 300.

4.2.7 Cabin class

Recorded responses for choice of cabin class while flying long-haul is represented by Fig. 4.4, where more than two thirds of respondents flew economy class.
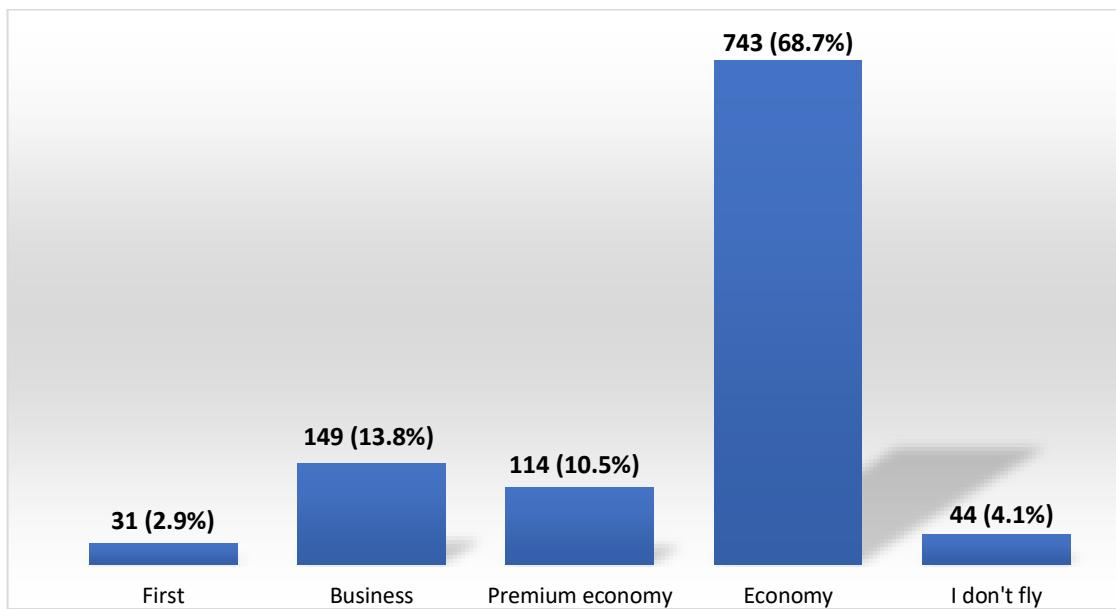
Figure 4.4. Choice of cabin class for long-haul flights.

4.3   Future positive purchase intent based on positive reviews by vloggers

Survey question 7 stated "In the future, I am more likely to try an airline that XXX reviewed positively on his YouTube channel" and asked participants to describe how strongly they agreed or disagreed with that statement. Figure 4.5 shows responses.
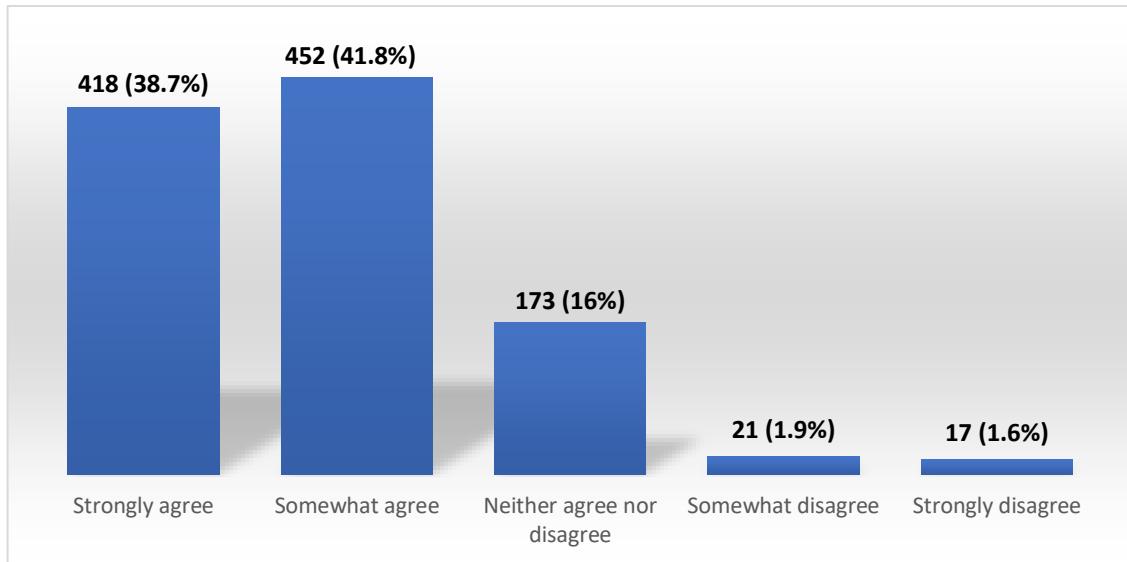
Figure 4.5. Likelihood to try an airline in the future based on positive reviews by vloggers.

4.3.1   Univariate predictors

Independent variables from the survey were examined to determine which factors predicted future purchase intent based on positive reviews by vloggers. A summary table of results shows that age, incoming level, cabin class, frequent flyer programme (FFP) membership and number of flights taken per year were significant predictors of likelihood to be influenced (Table 4.1).

Predictor	p-value
Age	**<0.001**
Gender	0.121
Income Level	**0.001**
Cabin Class	**0.016**
Frequent Flyer Program	**<0.001**
Number of Flights per Year	**0.004**

Table 4.1. Factors predicting likelihood to try an airline in the future based on positive flight reviews. Significant associations in bold (ordinal univariate regression analysis).

Age

Univariate ordinal regression analysis was conducted to determine whether there was an association between age and likelihood to try an airline that was reviewed positively by vloggers (Q7). There was a highly statistically significant relationship between these variables ($p<0.001$). Minitab output was as follows:

```
                                            Odds      95% CI

Predictor        Coef    SE Coef      Z        P    Ratio  Lower  Upper
Q1Age      -0.0213216  0.0049122  -4.34    0.000    0.98   0.97   0.99
```

This indicates that as age increased, participants were more likely to disagree with the statement that they would try an airline that was positively reviewed by vloggers. For each year older, the chances of disagreeing increased by 98% as indicated by the odds ratio.

Income Level

The income level of the country of residence significantly predicted whether a participant was likely to choose to fly in the future with an airline positively reviewed by vloggers ($p=0.001$).

Significance values are in Table 4.6.

Reference Level ↓	Lower Middle	Upper Middle	High
Lower Middle	-	0.217	**0.001**
Upper Middle	0.217	-	0.058
High	**0.001**	0.058	-

Table 4.2. Significance values (p-values) comparing income level and likelihood to try a positively reviewed airline. Significant results in bold.

Based on this analysis, there was statistically significant differences between the pair High ¦ Lower Middle. While the pair High ¦ Upper Middle approached statistically significant difference, it failed to meet significance.

High vs Lower-Middle

Participants who are residents of countries classified as High-Income were significantly more likely ($p=0.001$) than those based in a country classified as Lower-Middle Income Level to agree with the statement that a positive review by vloggers would influence them to fly with an airline. Those based in the high-income country were 2.21 times more likely agree than those based in the lower-middle income country.

```
                                                    Odds      95% CI
Predictor       Coef     SE Coef     Z       P     Ratio  Lower  Upper
LowMid       0.794888   0.247078   3.22    0.001    2.21   1.36   3.59
```

Cabin Class

Long haul cabin class significantly predicted whether a participant was likely to fly with an airline in the future based on a positive review by a vlogger (p=0.016). Significance values for each pairwise comparison of cabin classes are in Table 4.3.

Reference Level ↓	Economy	Premium Economy	Business	First	Don't Fly
Economy	-	0.994	0.073	0.254	**0.012**
Premium Economy		-	0.194	0.302	**0.027**
Business	0.073	0.194	-	0.062	**0.001**
First	0.254	0.302	0.062	-	0.416
Don't fly	**0.012**	**0.027**	**0.001**	0.416	-

Table 4.3. Significance values (p-values) comparing cabin class and likelihood to try a positively reviewed airline. Significant results in bold.

Based on this analysis, there were statistically significant differences between each of the following pairs: (Economy ¦ I don't fly), (Premium Economy ¦ I don't fly), (Business ¦ I don't fly).

Business vs don't fly

Participants who chose "I don't fly" were significantly more likely (p=0.001) than those who fly business class during long haul flights to agree with the statement that a positive review by vloggers would influence then to try an airline in the future. Those who chose "I don't fly" were 2.9 times more likely to agree than those who fly business.

```
                                                    Odds      95% CI
Predictor        Coef     SE Coef     Z       P     Ratio  Lower  Upper
I don't fly    1.06422   0.333799   3.19    0.001    2.90   1.51   5.58
```

Economy vs don't fly

Participants who chose "I don't fly" were significantly more likely (p=0.012) than those who fly economy class during long haul flights to say that they would agree that a positive review by vloggers would influence then to try an airline in the future. Those who chose "I don't fly" were 2.15 times more likely to agree than those who fly economy.

```
                                                      Odds      95% CI
Predictor              Coef      SE Coef     Z      P     Ratio  Lower  Upper
I don't fly         0.765262   0.304640   2.51   0.012   2.15   1.18   3.91
```

Premium Economy vs don't fly

Participants who chose "I don't fly" were significantly more likely (p=0.027) than those who fly premium economy class during long haul flights to say that they would agree that a positive review by vloggers would influence then to try an airline in the future. Those who chose "I don't fly" were 2.15 times more likely to agree than those who fly premium economy.

```
                                                      Odds      95% CI
Predictor          Coef      SE Coef     Z      P     Ratio  Lower  Upper
I don't fly     0.763786   0.344367   2.22   0.027   2.15   1.09   4.22
```

Membership of FFP

Membership of an FFP and likelihood to try an airline that was reviewed positively by vloggers was highly statistically significant (p<0.001).

Participants who were not members of an FFP were 1.64 times more likely to agree that an airline reviewed positively by vloggers would persuade them to try that airline in the future.

```
                                                            Odds      95% CI
Predictor                   Coef      SE Coef     Z      P     Ratio  Lower  Upper
Q4 Frequent flyer No     0.493957   0.116889   4.23   0.000   1.64   1.30   2.06
```

Number of flights taken per year

Univariate ordinal regression analysis determined whether there was an association between the number of flights taken a year by respondents and likelihood to try an airline that was reviewed positively by vloggers. There was a highly statistically significant relationship between these variables (p<0.004). Minitab output was as follows:

```
                                                             Odds      95% CI
Predictor              Coef        SE Coef      Z      P     Ratio  Lower  Upper
Q5 No of Flights    -0.0061474   0.0019932   -3.08   0.002   0.99   0.99   1.00
```

This indicates that as number of flights taken per year increased, participants were more likely to disagree with the statement that they would try an airline that was positively reviewed by vloggers. For each additional flight, the chances of disagreeing increased by 99% as indicated by the odds ratio.

4.3.2   Multivariate model

Multivariate ordinal regression analysis was conducted to determine which demographic variables were most likely to influence the response to Q7. Only variables found to be predictive during univariate analysis were included in the model. These were: age, income level, cabin class, frequent flyer status, number of flights. The model was statistically significant ($p<0.001$) on its first iteration. Each variable was also statistically significant, so no variables were removed from the model and it was considered saturated by its first iteration. Variables predictive of being influenced to try an airline based on positive reviews by vloggers are in Table 5.1.

Predictor	Level	p-value	Odds Ratio	95% CI OR
Age	Younger	<0.001	1.02	1.01 – 1.03
Income Level	Low-Middle Income Country vs High Income Country	0.006	1.99	1.21 – 3.26
Frequent Flyer	No	0.007	1.41	1.1 – 1.81
No. Flights	Fewer	0.014	1.01	1.0 – 1.01
Cabin Class	First vs business	0.006	2.93	1.37 – 6.28
	First vs economy	0.003	3.1	1.47 – 6.54
	First vs premium economy	0.03	2.4	1.09 – 5.32

Table 4.4. Variables predictive of being influenced to try an airline based on positive reviews by vloggers.

The analysis indicates that those most likely to agree that they would be influenced to try an airline reviewed positively by vloggers in the future are:

- Younger
- From low-middle income countries (as compared to high income countries – no difference was found with upper-middle income countries)
- Not members of FFPs
- People who fly less often
- First class passengers (as compared to economy, premium economy or business – no difference was found with any other cabin class combination)

Measures of association were used to describe how well the model fit the data. Concordant pairs was 59.8%. This indicates that almost 40% of the predictive value of the model cannot be explained by the variables above and may be accounted for by factors not examined as part of this research.

```
Pairs        Number    Percent
Concordant   226925      59.8
Discordant   148760      39.2
```

4.4   Future negative purchase intent based on negative reviews by vloggers

Participants were presented in question 8 with the statement "In the future, I am less likely to try an airline that XXX reviewed negatively on his YouTube channel" and responded with how much they agreed with that statement (Figure 4.6).
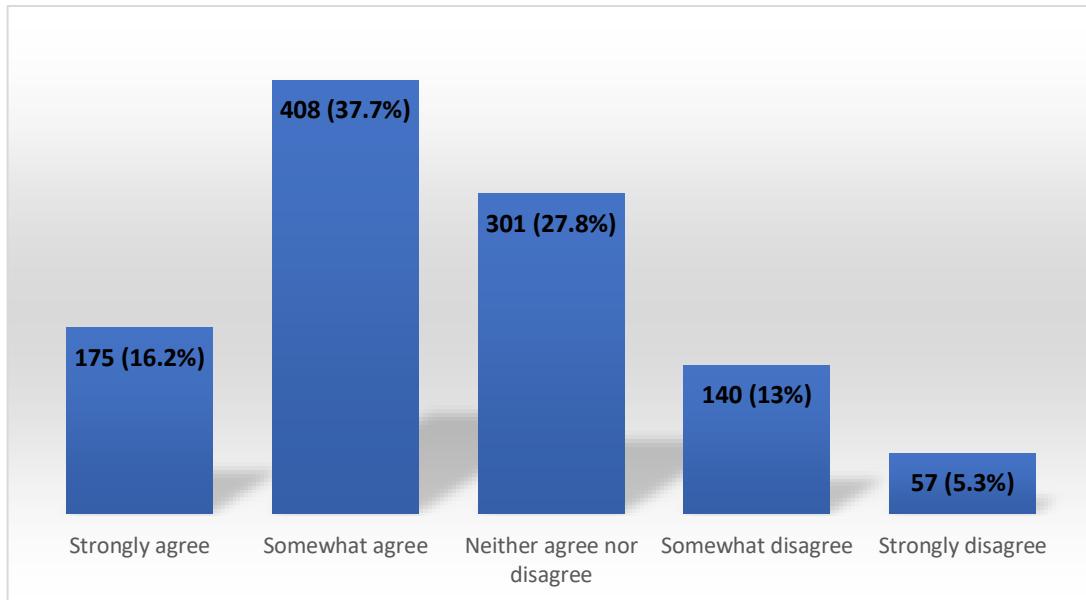
Figure 4.6. Likelihood to avoid an airline in the future based on negative reviews by vloggers.

4.4.1   Univariate predictors

Independent variables from the survey were examined to determine whether they predicted that a participant would avoid trying an airline based on negative reviews by vloggers. A summary table of results shows that gender was the only significant predictor of likelihood to be influenced (Table 4.4).

Predictor	p-value
Age	0.387
Gender	**0.025**
Income Level	0.892
Cabin Class	0.707
Frequent Flyer Program	0.319
Number of Flights per Year	0.100

Table 4.5. Summary table of factors predicting likelihood to avoid trying an airline in the future based on a negative flight review. Significant associations are in bold (ordinal univariate regression analysis).

Gender

The gender of respondents significantly predicted likelihood to avoid choosing to fly in the future with an airline negatively revived by vloggers (p=0.025). Significance values (p-values) reflecting participant gender and likelihood are in Table 4.5.

Reference Level ↓	Male	Female	Other
Male	-	**0.024**	0.114
Female	**0.024**	-	0.341
Other	0.114	0.341	-

Table 4.6. Significance values (p-values) comparing gender and likelihood to avoid trying a negatively reviewed airline. Significant results in bold.

Based on this analysis, there was statistically significant differences between the pair Female¦Male.

Male vs Female

Participants who identified as males were significantly more likely (p=0.024) than those who identified as females to agree with the statement that a negative review by vloggers would influence them to avoid flying with an airline. Males were 1.65 times more likely to agree than females.

```
                                            Odds      95% CI
Predictor      Coef      SE Coef     Z      P      Ratio  Lower  Upper
Female      0.499420   0.221387   2.26   0.024   1.65   1.07   2.54
```

4.4.2 Multivariate model

Only one variable was significant in univariate analysis, therefore no multivariate model was possible.

4.5   Past positive purchase intent based on reviews by vloggers

For question 9, participants were asked whether they agreed with the statement "In the past, I have been influenced to fly with an airline because of a review I saw on XXX's YouTube channel". Responses are in Figure 4.7.
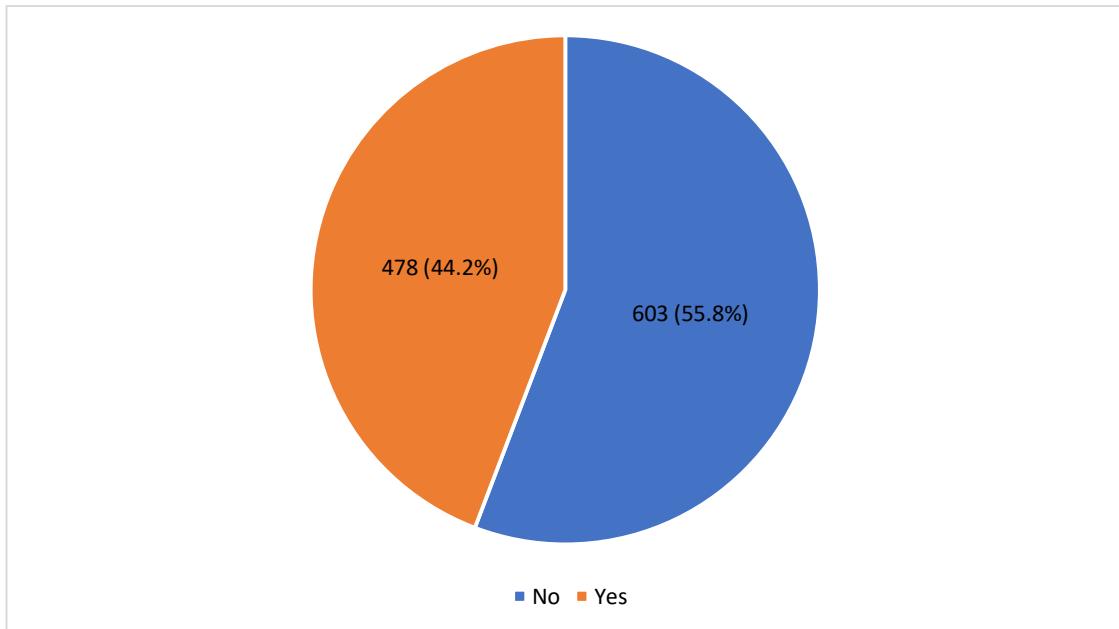
Figure 4.7. Past positive purchase intent based on reviews by vloggers.

4.5.1   Univariate predictors

Independent variables from the survey were examined to determine whether they predicted that a participant was influenced to try an airline in the past based on reviews by vloggers. A summary table of results shows that the income level of a country of residence and cabin class flown in long haul were significant predictors (Table 4.6).

Predictor	p-value
Age	0.079
Gender	0.253
Income Level	**0.007**
Cabin Class	**0.005**
Frequent Flyer Program	0.866
Number of Flights per Year	0.313

Table 4.7. Summary table of factors predicting past likelihood to try an airline based on flight reviews. Significant associations are in bold (ordinal univariate regression analysis).

Income

The income level of the country of residence significantly predicted whether a surveyed participant was likely to have chosen to fly in the past with an airline revived by vloggers (p=0.007).

```
Deviance Table

Source          DF   Adj Dev  Adj Mean  Chi-Square  P-Value
Regression      2     9.94     4.968        9.94     0.007
  IncomeLevel   2     9.94     4.968        9.94     0.007
```

Based on Minitab output analysis, the lower-middle income level participants were 2.241 times more likely than high-income participants to have flown with an airline reviewed by vloggers. This ratio decreases to 1.079 in the pair upper-middle ¦ high, and to 0.481 for a pair of upper-middle ¦ lower middle.

```
Odds Ratios for Categorical Predictors

Level A       Level B     Odds Ratio      95% CI
IncomeLevel
  LowMid      High          2.2414    (1.3434, 3.7396)
  UpperMid    High          1.0787    (0.6899, 1.6865)
  UpperMid    LowMid        0.4813    (0.2502, 0.9257)
```

Cabin Class

Long haul cabin class significantly predicted whether a participant was likely to have flown with an airline in the past based reviews by vloggers (p=0.005).

```
Deviance Table

Source          DF   Adj Dev  Adj Mean  Chi-Square  P-Value
Regression      4    15.10     3.774       15.10     0.005
  Q6 Cabin LH   4    15.10     3.774       15.10     0.005
```

Odds ratios based on cabin class from the Minitab output are presented below. Odds ratios below 1 were inverted to present the likelihood in a descending order (Table 4.7).

```
Odds Ratios for Categorical Predictors

Level A           Level B        Odds Ratio      95% CI
Q6 Cabin LH
  Economy         Business         0.6726    (0.4726, 0.9572)
  First           Business         2.3480    (1.0142, 5.4355)
  I don't fly     Business         0.8004    (0.4076, 1.5717)
  Premium economy Business         0.8645    (0.5306, 1.4085)
  First           Economy          3.4909    (1.5857, 7.6855)
  I don't fly     Economy          1.1901    (0.6459, 2.1927)
  Premium economy Economy          1.2853    (0.8653, 1.9090)
  I don't fly     First            0.3409    (0.1284, 0.9052)
  Premium economy First            0.3682    (0.1561, 0.8686)
  Premium economy I don't fly      1.0800    (0.5374, 2.1707)
```

Cabin class pairs	Odds ratio
First vs Economy	3.49
First vs don't fly	2.93
First vs Premium Economy	2.71
First vs Business	2.35
Business vs economy	1.49
Premium economy vs economy	1.29
Business vs don't fly	1.25
Don't fly vs economy	1.19
Business vs premium economy	1.16
Premium economy vs don't fly	1.08

Table 4.8. Cabin class pairs and odds ratios of likelihood to have been influenced to fly with an airline in the past based on airline reviews by vloggers.

Surveyed participants who fly long haul in first class were significantly more likely than those in any other cabin class to have been influenced in the past to fly with an airline reviewed by vloggers on their YouTube channel. First class travellers were more than twice as likely to have been influenced than any other cabin class.

4.5.2   Multivariate model

Multivariate binary regression analysis was conducted to determine which demographic variables were most likely to influence the response to Q9. Only variables found to be predictive during univariate analysis were included in the model. These were: income level and cabin class. The model was statistically significant ($p=0.002$ for income level and $p=0.001$ for cabin class) on its first iteration. Each variable was also statistically significant, so no variables were removed from the model and it was considered saturated by its first iteration. Variables predictive of being influenced to try an airline based on reviews by vloggers in the past are in Table 5.2.

Variable	Level	Odds Ratio	95% CI OR
Income Level	Low-Middle Income Country vs High Income Country	2.48	1.48 – 4.16
	Upper-Middle income Country vs High Income Country	1.18	0.75 – 1.85
	Low-Middle income Country vs Upper-Middle Income Country	2.11	1.09 – 4.06
Cabin Class	First vs business	2.40	1.04 – 5.56
	First vs premium economy	2.85	1.21 – 6.73
	First vs economy	3.41	1.27 – 9.13
	First vs don't fly	3.79	1.72 – 8.36
	Business vs premium economy	1.19	0.73 – 1.94
	Business vs Economy	1.58	1.11 – 2.25
	Business vs don't fly	1.42	0.72 – 2.82
	Premium Economy vs economy	1.33	0.98 – 1.98
	Premium economy vs don't fly	1.20	0.59 – 2.43
	Don't fly vs economy	1.11	0.60 – 2.07

Table 4.9. Variables predictive of being influenced to try an airline based on reviews by vloggers in the past.

The analysis indicates that those most likely to agree that they were influenced to try an airline reviewed positively by vloggers in the past are:

- From low-middle income countries as compared to high income countries and to upper-middle income countries. This was followed by those from upper-middle income countries, who were more likely to be influenced than those from high income countries.
- First class passengers

Binary regression analysis produced an r-squared adjusted, which indicates how well the model fits the data. For this model, the value indicates that the two significant variables only explain 1.46% of the reasons why participants were influenced to try an airline reviewed positively in the past by vloggers. Other factors not accounted for in this research may explain the balance.

```
Model Summary

Deviance     Deviance
  R-Sq       R-Sq(adj)      AIC
  1.86%       1.46%       1470.44
```

4.6 Past negative purchase intent based on reviews by vloggers

Question 10 asked participants whether they agreed with the statement "In the past, I have been influenced to avoid flying with an airline because of a review I saw on XXX's YouTube channel". Responses are in Figure 4.8.
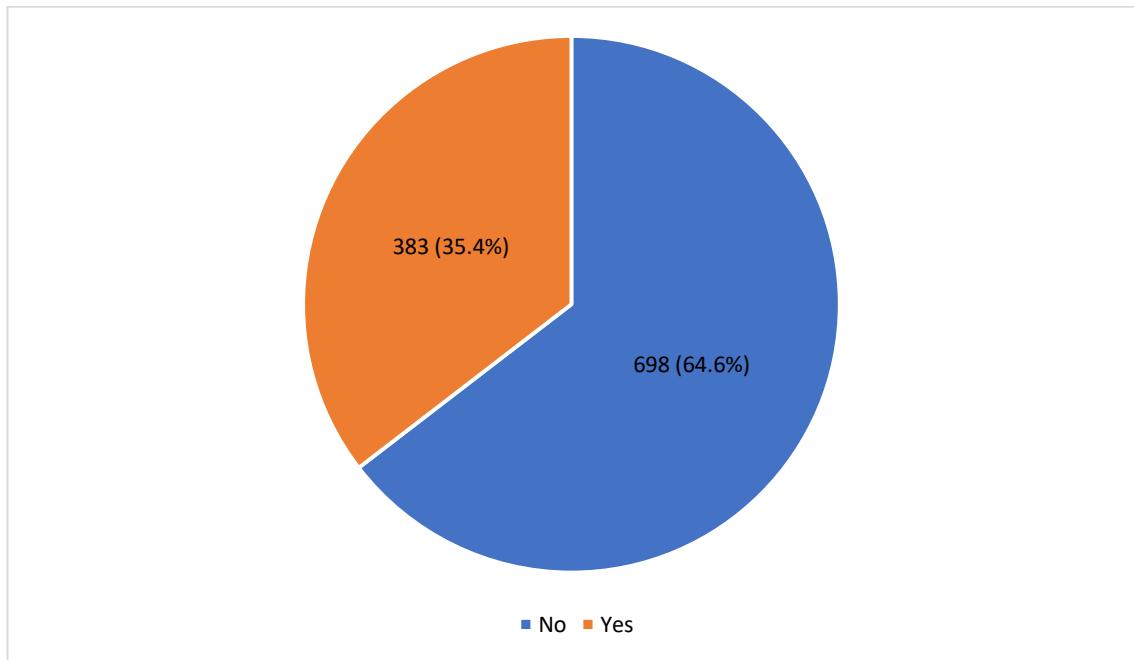
Figure 4.8. Past negative purchase intent based on reviews by vloggers.

4.6.1 Univariate predictors

Independent variables were examined to determine whether they predicted that a participant was influenced in the past to avoid trying an airline based on a review by vloggers. A summary table of results shows that there were no significant predictors of likelihood to be influenced (Table 4.8).

Predictor	p-value
Age	0.699
Gender	0.160
Income Level	0.265
Cabin Class	0.109
Frequent Flyer Program	0.148
Number of Flights per Year	0.194

Table 4.10. Summary table of factors predicting likelihood to avoid trying an airline in the past based on flight reviews.

4.6.2   Multivariate model

None of variables from univariate analysis were significant, so no model was constructed.

4.7   Trustworthiness

In question 11, participants were asked how much they agreed with the statement "I think the information in XXX's YouTube channel is trustworthy". Levels of agreement are in Figure 4.9.
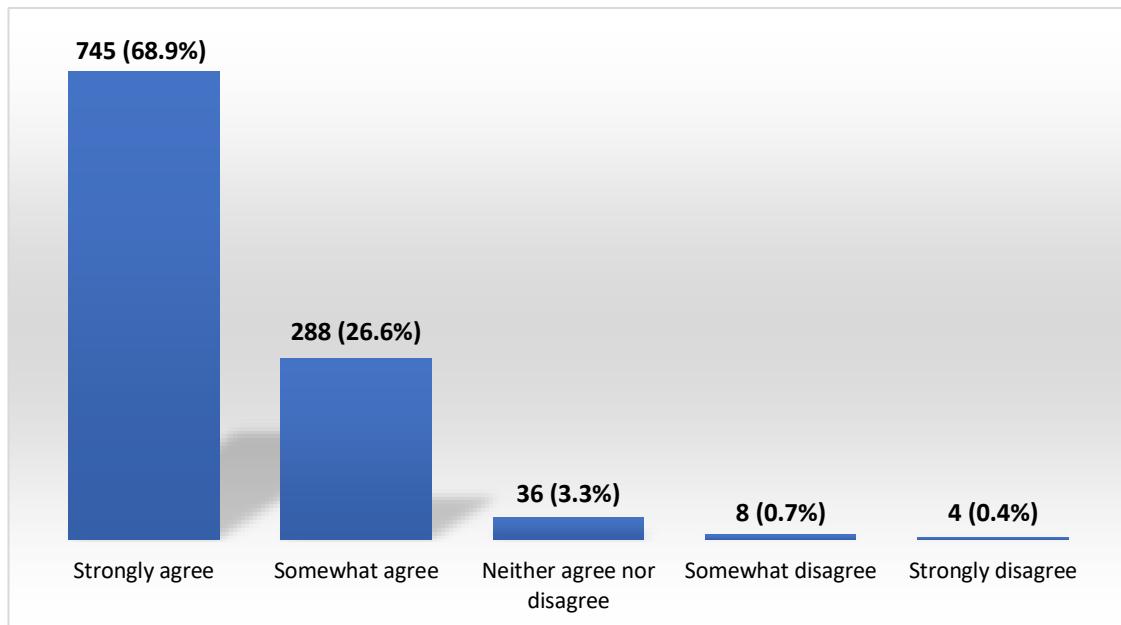
Figure 4.9. Levels of agreement that information on vloggers' channels is trustworthy.

4.7.1   Future intent to try an airline by reviewed positively

Univariate ordinal regression analysis was conducted to determine whether there was an association between trustworthiness and future likelihood to try an airline that was reviewed positively by vloggers. There was a highly statistically significant relationship between these variables (p<0.001). Minitab output was as follows:

```
                                          Odds      95% CI
Predictor       Coef     SE Coef      Z       P    Ratio  Lower  Upper
Q11TrustNum   1.16613  0.0973315   11.98   0.000   3.21   2.65   3.88
```

As trustworthiness of the information on the vloggers' channel increases, participants were significantly more likely to try an airline positively reviewed in the future. For each level of increase in agreement that the channel information is trustworthy, the chances of being influenced increased by 3.21 as indicated by the odds ratio.

4.7.2 Future intent to avoid trying an airline reviewed negatively

Univariate ordinal regression analysis showed a highly statistically significant relationship between these variables (p<0.001). Minitab output was as follows:

```
                                           Odds      95% CI
Predictor         Coef     SE Coef     Z      P    Ratio   Lower  Upper
Q11TrustNum   0.553627   0.0892995   6.20  0.000    1.74    1.46   2.07
```

As trustworthiness of the information on the vloggers' channel increases, participants were significantly more likely to avoid an airline negatively reviewed in the future. For each level of increase in agreement that the channel information is trustworthy, the chances of being influenced increased by 1.74 as indicated by the odds ratio.

4.7.3 Past intent to try a reviewed airline

Trustworthiness highly significantly predicted whether participants were likely to have chosen to fly in the past with an airline revived by vloggers (p<0.001). Minitab output presented below.

```
Deviance Table

Source          DF   Adj Dev  Adj Mean   Chi-Square  P-Value
Regression       1    24.31    24.315      24.31      0.000
  Q11TrustNum    1    24.31    24.315      24.31      0.000
```

As trustworthiness of the information on the vloggers' channel increases, participants were significantly more likely to have tried an airline. For each level of increase in agreement that the channel information is trustworthy, the chances of being influenced increased by 1.68 as indicated by the odds ratio.

```
Odds Ratios for Continuous Predictors

              Odds Ratio        95% CI
Q11TrustNum       1.6787    (1.3522, 2.0840)
```

4.7.4 Past intent to avoid trying a reviewed airline

Trustworthiness of the information on the vloggers' channel significantly predicted whether a surveyed participant was likely to have chosen in the past to avoid an airline revived by vloggers (p=0.001). Minitab output presented below.

```
Deviance Table

Source          DF   Adj Dev  Adj Mean   Chi-Square  P-Value
Regression       1    11.07    11.067      11.07      0.001
  Q11TrustNum    1    11.07    11.067      11.07      0.001
```

As trustworthiness of the information on the vloggers' channel increased, participants were significantly more likely to have avoid an airline reviewed by vloggers. For each level of increase in agreement that the channel information is trustworthy, the chances of being influenced increased by 1.43 as indicated by the odds ratio.

```
Odds Ratios for Continuous Predictors

              Odds Ratio       95% CI
Q11TrustNum     1.4350    (1.1502, 1.7902)
```

4.8   Information Quality

Question 12, asked participants how much they agreed with the statement "I think the information in XXX's YouTube channel is of good quality". Levels of agreement are in Figure 4.10.
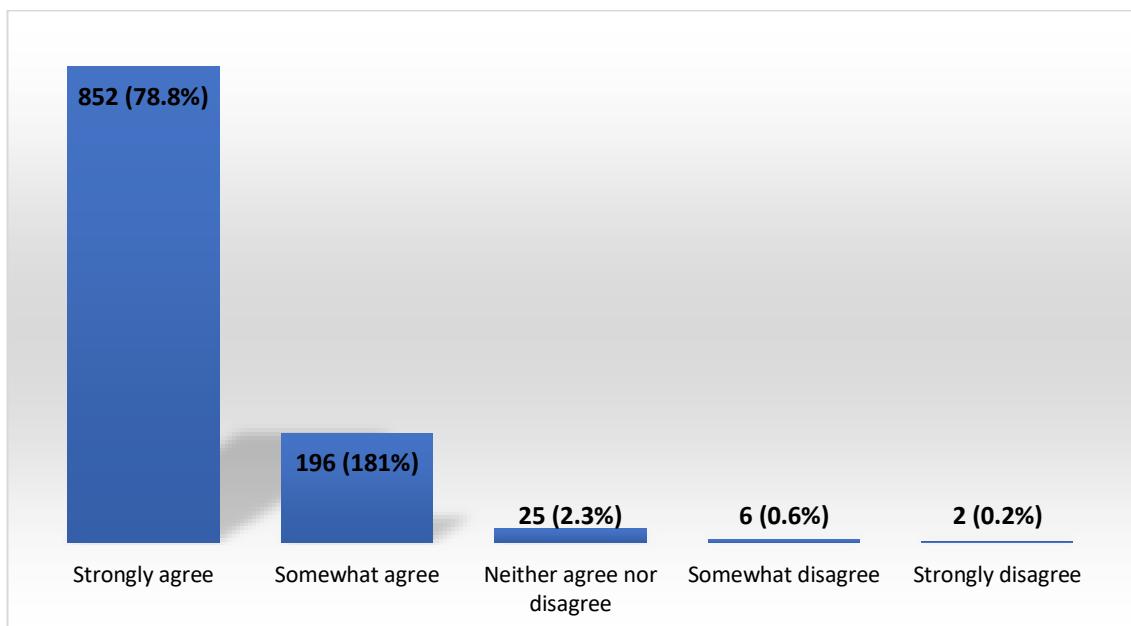
Figure 4.10. Levels of agreement that information on vloggers' channels is of good quality.

4.8.1   Future intent to try an airline reviewed positively

Univariate ordinal regression analysis was conducted to determine whether there was an association between quality and likelihood to try an airline that was reviewed positively by vloggers. There was a highly statistically significant relationship between these variables ($p<0.001$). Minitab output was as follows:

```
                                         Odds      95% CI
Predictor        Coef    SE Coef      Z     P   Ratio  Lower  Upper
Q12QualityNum  1.31995  0.113072  11.67  0.000   3.74   3.00   4.67
```

As quality of the information on the vloggers' channel increased, participants were significantly more likely to try an airline in the future. For each level of increase in agreement that the channel information is of good quality, the chances of being influenced increased by 3.74 as indicated by the odds ratio.

4.8.2 Future intent to avoid trying an airline reviewed negatively

Univariate ordinal regression analysis was conducted to determine whether there was an association between quality and likelihood to avoid an airline that was reviewed negatively by vloggers. There was a highly statistically significant relationship between these variables (p<0.001). Minitab output was as follows:

```
                                              Odds      95% CI

Predictor            Coef    SE Coef      Z       P    Ratio  Lower  Upper
Q12QualityNum     0.452868   0.102360   4.42   0.000    1.57   1.29   1.92
```

As quality of the information on the vloggers' channel increases, participants were significantly more likely to avoid an airline negatively reviewed in the future. For each level of increase in agreement that the channel information is of good quality, the chances of being influenced increased by 1.57 as indicated by the odds ratio.

4.8.3 Past intent to try a reviewed airline

Quality of the information on the vloggers' channel highly significantly predicted whether surveyed participant was likely to choose to fly in the past with an airline reviewed by vloggers (p<0.001). Minitab output is presented below.

```
Deviance Table

Source            DF   Adj Dev  Adj Mean   Chi-Square  P-Value
Regression         1    27.34    27.342       27.34     0.000
  Q12QualityNum    1    27.34    27.342       27.34     0.000
```

As quality of the information on the vloggers' channel increased, participants were significantly more likely to have tried an airline reviewed in the past. For each level of increase in agreement that the channel information is of good quality, the chances of being influenced increased by 1.93 as indicated by the odds ratio.

```
Odds Ratios for Continuous Predictors

               Odds Ratio        95% CI
Q12QualityNum    1.9251     (1.4793, 2.5053)
```

4.8.4 Past intent to avoid trying a reviewed airline

Quality of the information on the vloggers' channels significantly predicted whether a surveyed participant was likely to avoid an airline reviewed by vloggers in the past (p=0.036). Minitab output is below.

```
Deviance Table

Source              DF   Adj Dev   Adj Mean   Chi-Square   P-Value
Regression           1    4.38      4.381        4.38       0.036
  Q12QualityNum      1    4.38      4.381        4.38       0.036
```

As quality of the information on the vloggers' channel increased, participants were more likely to avoid an airline reviewed in the past. For each level of increase in agreement that the channel information is of good quality, the chances of being influenced increased by 1.29 as indicated by the odds ratio.

```
Odds Ratios for Continuous Predictors

                Odds Ratio        95% CI
Q12QualityNum     1.2949     (1.0098, 1.6606)
```

4.9 Thematic Analysis

Participants were asked at the end of the survey whether or how vloggers' YouTube channels influence their decision to fly or not fly with particular airlines (Q13). Responses were divided into a global theme and three organising themes. A description of each theme is provided below. Supplemental examples are available in a code book in Appendix 5.

4.9.1 Global Theme: "Solid information about certain trips makes decisions easy"

Given the nature of Q13, opinions were split into those who said they were influenced, those who were not and those who were ambivalent. Regardless of opinion, there was a universal message that the information provided by vloggers helped respondents to make a decision, either because they were influenced by that information, or because they felt they could safely ignore it. Figure 4.11 represents the thematic network derived from the data.
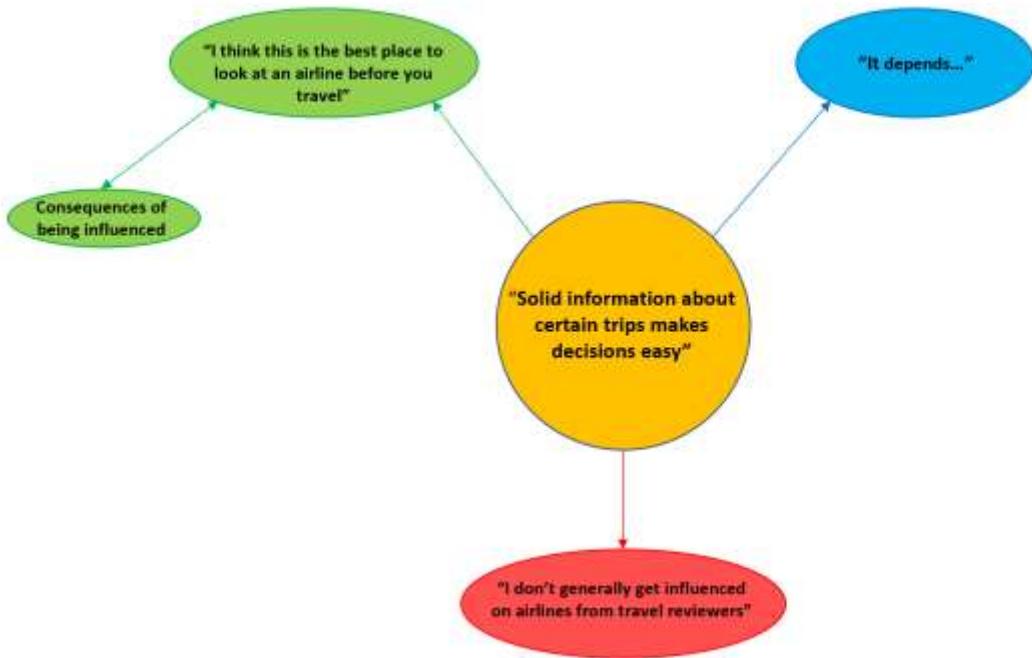
Figure 4.111. Thematic network map.

4.9.2   Organising Theme: "I think this is the best place to look at an airline before you travel"

Definition: This theme encapsulates responses that indicate that participants have been (or would be) influenced by vloggers.

The strongest responses under this theme concerned the trust that participants placed in the vlogger. While the question referred to the *vlogger's channel*, participants attributed trust to the vlogger themselves, often referring to vlogger by name. One facet contributing to trustworthiness that was evident from several examples in the data was that vloggers were not sponsored by airlines and therefore more likely to post reliable reviews.

"Noel seems to have no agenda with his choices of who he flies with"

"Simply Aviation's YouTube channel gives honest review so the customer can make their decision to fly/avoid flying with some airline"

"His honest, no bull approach to his reviews is a refreshing change compared to some other vloggers (mentioning no names like Sam Chui) that suck up to the particular airline. I've stopped watching the videos where it's obvious that the vlogger is in the pocket of the particular airline."

Alongside trust, another strong theme identified from the data concerned the value that participants placed on the content and the quality of that content in the vlogger's channel. This was frequently influential of their decision as to whether to fly or not fly.

"When it comes to choosing which airlines to fly, flight reviews like Simply Aviation give me information about an airlines product, onboard service and food"

"The detail he puts in the reviews are quite important to whether or not his opinion influences mine, especially in regards to airport lounges and such - as well as flying different cabins in the same airline"

While this survey question did not explicitly ask participants what happened as a result of watching flight review videos, many described the consequences of watching vloggers' reviews. The most common consequence was that participants were influenced (or would be influenced) to try a particular airline, though they also commented that they would fly specific routes and even consider an upgrade in cabin class.

"Jeb Brooks made me see how incredible Delta Air Lines is, and I have since switched all my travel to them"

"Noel seems to have no agenda with his choices of who he flies with; it seems a genuine attempt to see if the airline is noteworthy or not. As a result, I view his videos as being trustworthy and impartial and they influence my decision to a certain extent (above and beyond my own strong feelings towards a carrier)"

"The detail he puts in the reviews are quite important to whether or not his opinion influences mine, especially in regards to airport lounges and such - as well as flying different cabins in the same airline. His videos have influenced me to try out premium economy, and they had influenced me to purchase business class tickets but that trip was cancelled due to COVID-19"

Participants also reported that flight reviews by vloggers persuaded them to avoid particular airlines.

"I won't fly Air China after Simply Aviation's review"

"There are times where I've seen a Jeb Brooks review before booking a ticket and avoided the airline"

4.9.3 Organising Theme: "I don't generally get influenced on airlines from travel reviewers"

Definition: Responses under this theme reflect the diverse opinions as to why participants would not be influenced by vloggers, or would take their advice lightly.

The strongest response reflecting lack of influence was related to practical considerations that overrode any views or information provided by vloggers. These were comprised of four primary concerns: logistic constraints, airline loyalty, cost/value for money and cabin class restrictions. Logistic constraints mainly involved vloggers' airlines not flying from/to the participants' origin or destination, but also included cases where flights were simply inconvenient for participants.

"For business travel I usually have to fly with the airline that will get me closest to my destination. The choice is less about preferences, and more about convenience"

Airline loyalty was another factor that mitigated any influence by vloggers. This predominantly referred to membership of a frequent flyer programme, but also included a simple preference to fly with certain airlines.

"I only fly American Airlines and one world. So I'm not really influenced either way"

Ticket cost and value for money also prevented participants from being influenced by vloggers, with many citing that price would be the ultimate tipping point when it comes to flight choice.

"I don't really look for reviews, I look for the cheapest flights and the best deals without giving consideration to what vloggers say"

Since most vloggers focus on premium cabin classes, this prevented those that fly in more affordable classes from being influenced.

"Personally, I find the content Jeb posts is eye opening in the sense of what business class and first class travel is like with various airlines. However, because I generally fly economy and fly infrequently, I am not influenced by Jeb's reviews to fly particular airlines"

Respondents to the survey also commented frequently about how they like to form their own opinions. This was not usually based on a lack of trust in the vlogger, but rather a recognition that flight review videos are a snapshot in time and only offer one person's perspective.

"I take any YouTube vlogger's advice lightly. I am smart enough to know to not rely on a vlogger's or "influencer" 100%. You need to diversify opinions and advice"

While most participants had reported being influenced because of trusting the vlogger and because of the information content and quality in the vlogger's channel, some reported the opposite. They stated that they found the content not to be useful. Some expressed mistrust of the vlogger, or suspected bias from them.

"Videos like his show a bit of the airline and their operation, but obviously are heavily edited. Of all the travel vloggers, he does seem to be one of the most 'moany' and also contradictory in what he says, so it doesn't make a difference to my spending"

"Not influenced as feel he may have loyalty to some airlines over others so not entirely impartial"

Finally, a group of respondents stated that the vloggers' videos did not influence them, because they viewed the channel for entertainment purposes only, which suggests purchase intent was never in question.

"I find vlogs entertaining as an enthusiast and traveller, but would not be encouraged or discouraged because of any other person's review"

4.9.4   Organising Theme: "It depends…"

Definition: Some respondents stated that they may or may not be influenced depending on certain factors or circumstances, or stated influencing factors without stating direction of influence. This theme captures such responses.

While most respondents were clear about whether and how vloggers influenced them, some were ambivalent. The factors that led to an 'it depends' response were identical to those from previous organising themes, but with a different perspective. The most common factor was due to a lack of review of more affordable cabin classes, particularly economy class flights.

"If I had a choice of airlines and Jeb gave one a very high rating, this would possibly influence me to fly that airline. However, it would also depend on cost and the class I would travel in, likely economy, so I would still make some judgement myself, rather than solely use his word, although I do trust him!"

Flight cost/value for money and logistic concerns were also present under this theme. Participants also reported that they would blend their own opinions with those of the vlogger for a more informed choice.

"It depends on where I'm flying and if the airline you recommend in question flies there and has a good price, I'd try them out. I usually fly to places I need to do things, not just to fly"

"I think that Jeb's enthusiasm and innate love for aviation comes across in his videos. I appreciate that type of passion when watching or reading reviews. You can also tell that he's done a great deal of research when flying on a new plane or with a new airline. I always do my own research but I do truly value his opinion!"

5   Discussion

The main objective of this research was to determine whether YouTube vloggers, who review airline products, have any impact on the purchase intent of their followers. The aim was to investigate for associations between reviews (negative or positive) and their impact on participants' willingness to try (or avoid trying) an airline in the future, or to have done so in the past. The potential influences of the information quality and trustworthiness of vloggers' YouTube channels were also examined. These were addressed through measurable research objectives.

1. *To what extent do vloggers' positive reviews influence followers to try airlines?*
2. *To what extent do vloggers' negative reviews influence followers to avoid trying airlines?*
3. *What is the impact on the perceived trustworthiness and information quality of the vloggers' YouTube channel on trying/avoiding airlines?*
4. *What perspectives do participants have about whether and how vloggers influence them to try/avoid airlines?*

Both the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that vloggers do influence purchase intent of their followers. The precise mechanisms of these are nuanced. The mechanisms by which survey respondents were influenced are described in this chapter. Also included are hypotheses about how such mechanisms function and how these may be of interest to both vloggers and airlines in the future.

5.1   Participant profile

Out of total of 1081 responses, 678 (62.7%) were aged between 18 and 25 years old. This closely matches figures provided by Cooper (2019), who states that 81% of YouTube viewers in the U.S. are in those age brackets. Whether the age profile of respondents closely matches the average of people who watch airline review videos is unknown, but it did closely match the age profile of those who watch YouTube in general.

Males accounted for almost 93% of responses, which is significantly higher than 62% of YouTube users being males as stated by Omnicore (2020). The difference could possibly be explained by the topic; aviation attracts a higher number of males than females. A 2016 survey conducted with listeners of a podcast about aviation found that 97.2% declared their gender as male (Airplane Geeks Podcast, 2016).

This survey was answered by people who reside in 75 different countries, which allowed for a robust generalisation of the findings. Countries of residence were grouped into income levels (The World Bank Group, 2020). As there was only one country in the low-income level, for statistical purposes it was combined with lower-middle group. 85.9% of the respondents fell into high level, 7.9% into upper-middle level and 6.2% into lower-middle level. This would be consistent with the Airplane Geeks Podcast (2016) survey finding, where the majority of listeners (over 90%) were based in a high-income country.

Respondents to this survey therefore appear to be reflective of 'airline fans' as a whole, which improves the generalisability of findings.

59.8% of participants declared membership of an FFP. It is known that 66.1% of air travellers are FFP members (Chin, 2002). This is important, as it shows the participants of this study reflect the demographics of the air travellers and therefore, reflect accurate opinions.

When examining number of flights taken, the mean was calculated as 14.58, which means on average the respondents took approximately 15 flights per year. Chin (2002) reported in his study that the FFP members took on average 16.02 flights a year, while non-members on average took 3.21. It is important to note that Chin (2002) examined only travellers of one airline, limiting the robustness of those findings. It could however be argued that on the basis of the study by Chin, this study reflects the average number of flights FFP members take a year and therefore should accurately reflect flyers' opinions.

The vast majority of people who took the survey (68.7%) declared that they fly economy class for long-haul travel. This was followed by business class (13.8%), premium economy (10.5%) and first class (2.9%). A total of 4.1% stated they do not fly. Lufthansa, a major European airline and a member of Star Alliance, has on board its long-haul aircraft an average of 70.5% seats in economy, 9.92% in premium economy, 17.4% in business and 2.2% in first class (Lufthansa, 2020). The results of this research reflect closely the seat capacity of a major airline.

The sample recruited by this study was used to predict the typical behaviours of the population of individuals who watch YouTube aviation review videos. The profile of individuals who completed this study is broadly in line with existing knowledge of the demographics of those who interested in aviation, those who fly and those who watch YouTube videos. In any piece of research, statistical significance is only advantageous if the sample represents the population. In the current study, the statistical and qualitative analyses are likely to be highly relevant to the population, which means the generalisability of the findings are likely to be robust.

5.2   Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of vloggers' channels was found to have a significant impact on future purchase intent, regardless of whether the review was positive or negative. It had significant impact on past purchase intent too. This finding was corroborated by the qualitative part of this research. Comments from participants strongly showed that that there is a particular emphasis on trust in connection to whether they are influenced by vloggers. Trust was also inherently associated with perceived sponsorship. Participants suggested that they trust vloggers, because they either disclose that they were invited by an airline to review the product, or that they did not receive any remuneration for the video post. This finding is consistent with the previous research carried out on the topic. Ki and Kim (2019) and Lee and Watkins

(2016) suggested that influencers are being seen as trustworthy. The positive effect of trustworthiness on purchase intent has repeatedly been demonstrated in the literature (Wu and Wang, 2011; Kusumawati and Iqbal, 2016; Wang, Kao and Ngamsiriudom, 2017; Ing and Ming, 2018). It is already known (Lu, Chang and Chang, 2014; Tran and Nguyen, 2020) that as long as sponsorship received is disclosed, it has a positive impact on the trustworthiness of the blogger. Consumers trust influencers, as they don't feel the SMI is trying to deceive them. Vloggers should maintain their trustworthy relationship with their followers. This could allow them to build a business profile where they could openly advertise flight and airlines. This finding is an important factor to consider for airlines or any other travel industry. Airlines that adopt or use a vlogger in their advertisement strategy could potentially benefit with higher sales, so long as that vlogger discloses their sponsorship relationship.

5.3   Information quality

The quality of the information on the vloggers' channels was found to be a significant predictor of both future and past purchase intent. This is consistent with previous research (Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008; Wu and Wang, 2011; Kusumawati and Iqbal, 2016; Ing and Ming, 2018), where it was proven that content quality had a positive effect on purchase intent. The quantitative findings from this research are consistent with the qualitative findings. The participants suggested that the quality of the vloggers' videos is something that really matters when deciding on the purchase of a ticket on one of the reviewed airlines. Vloggers should pay particular attention to the quality of the information they share on their YouTube channel, as this is a factor that will influence purchase intent of the followers. If there is a business to be built by those SMIs, quality of the information is something they cannot ignore. While the value of information quality in terms of influence is undisputed by this and previous research, future research could examine what exactly followers define as 'good information quality' and what they want to hear about from vloggers. This could help vloggers to enhance their content and generate more eWOM.

5.4   Age and FFP

As age of responders increased, the influence of vloggers on purchase intent decreased. As people age, they are willing to spend more on flights that are convenient for them (Levine, 2017). It is important to note that as people get older and enter the workforce, they increasingly fly for business purposes. This may make them more likely to belong to an FFP. About 79% of business travellers belonging to an FFP (Toh and Hu, 1988). Members of FFPs are loyal to the airline and its alliance partners (Seelhorst and Liu, 2015) and in the current study, non-members of FFPs were the influenced group.

The current study confirms previous research. This was evident when analysing the qualitative responses. A number of participants stated that they were not influenced by vloggers as they rely on their own

experience for airline choices and are loyal to their FFP airlines, regardless of whether they watched a positive or negative review. This level of loyalty was demonstrated by previous research (Seelhorst and Liu, 2015), which not only found that FFP members are loyal to their airlines, but that the extent of their loyalty goes so far as to impact itinerary choice.

This finding is important to the airline sector as it confirms that having an FFP and large number of members will guarantee loyalty of its customers and should bring in higher revenues. Chin (2002) stated that the average fare of FFP members compared to non-members is $519 higher. The effects of an FFP could potentially insulate airlines against negative reviews by vloggers and negative eWOM. Vloggers themselves could also consider producing more content based on airlines that are FFP alliance members, which may restore influence over followers.

5.5   Income levels

Participants who were resident in a high-income level country were found to be most influenced to try an airline in the future. This could be connected to the disposable income they have to spend on a ticket and are not to cost conscious. Conversely, when examining past purchase intent, the residents of lower-middle income level countries declared they have been influenced to try a reviewed airline. This might be due to the fact that those participants took their flight as a reward, or to get the best experience possible, and so they relied on the vloggers' review. Future research could examine why lower-middle income residents have been persuaded by SMIs in the past, as this research was not designed to generate such findings in explicit detail.

It is important to point out that the review of the qualitative data identified that vloggers focus on business and first class when reviewing airline offerings. Many participants suggested that because they cannot afford a high class of travel, they are not being influenced. It could be argued that if there was greater focus from vloggers on economy class reviews, the purchase intent on their followers would increase. This could also potentially lead to better 'information quality' on vloggers' channels, generating more influence. Conversely, it would be disadvantageous to airlines for this to happen, as they generate more revenue from premium class passengers than economy class (Smith, 2017), so a focus on economy reviews would be detrimental to them.

5.6   Cabin class

Participants who selected 'I don't fly' were statistically more likely to be influenced to fly an airline in the future over any other class. It could be hypothesised that such participants are looking to get the best possible experience and are relying on the reviews to decide which airline to fly. They would not have much experience and knowledge of airline market and are more likely to follow vloggers'

recommendations. Whether this would translate into actual sales is unknown, since respondents could have speculated that they would be influenced, but may not commit to a financial transaction in reality. A longitudinal study that asked participants for their purchase intent at one moment in time, then followed up on that intent later would be beneficial to exploring this gap.

When examining past purchase intent, those who fly first class declared that they chose airlines based on a flight review, possibly because they want the best experience for their money. Since the only predictors of likelihood to have tried an airline in the past based on a review were cabin class and income level, financial reasons would seem to be the common factor.

5.7   Number of flights

With increasing number of flights taken per year, participants were less likely to be influenced by vloggers to purchase a ticket with an airline. Comments from the qualitative analysis would suggest that the reasons why are related to travel experience. As with FFP members, those who fly more often have developed their own perspectives on what they like in terms of air travel. There was no statistically significant relationship between number of flights per year and intent to avoid flying with a negatively reviewed airline. This implies that negative flight reviews have no influence over those who fly more often.

It seems unlikely from the data that vloggers could do much to persuade followers to fly or avoid flying when their advice goes against the perspectives of experienced flyers, who are more than willing to make up their own minds about whether to choose an airline. The corollary is that airlines stand to gain from this. Assuming they ensure a positive flight experience for passengers and assuming that those passengers return for more flights in the future, passengers are likely to continue to be loyal to them. This means that positive eWOM about a different airline is unlikely to tempt passengers away, while negative eWOM is unlikely to discourage previously loyal passengers, who have already formulated their own views.

5.8   Strengths and Limitations

The high number of participants (1081) and almost worldwide diversity of the participants (75 countries) was a strength of this research. The collection of qualitative data allowed the researcher to explain and strengthen the findings from the quantitative data. The choice of a carefully-designed and piloted survey methodology was therefore effective at gathering a substantial amount of valuable information in a short space of time with little responder burden.

Sampling bias was also well-managed in this study. The researcher approached multiple airline vloggers and offered all of them the opportunity to participate by advertising the survey to their followers. Any vlogger that expressed an interest was invited. Since vloggers advertised the survey using their own social

media, and since access to social media is equitable for most individuals, this may explain why the sample was highly representative of the population in question.

The lack of gender diversity could be considered a limitation for this study. Since 92.8% of participants were males, this limited the ability to get an insightful view on the opinions of females or people who identify as other on whether SMIs influence them. The researcher would also like to point out to the high number of participants from the high-income level countries. However, it is important to note that air travel is not cheap and therefore cannot be commonly afforded by people who do not have much by way of disposable income. As such, the strong representation of those from high-income countries may be a realistic display of those who fly.

As with any research, this survey was unable to answer all the questions as to whether or why followers were influenced by vloggers. Within the survey, the questions about future purchase intent (Q7, Q8) determined whether *positive* or *negative* reviews influenced participants. With reference to past purchase intent (Q9, Q10), the language used was whether *reviews* influenced intent to fly or avoid flying. It was assumed that readers would implicitly understand that this referred to positive reviews influencing intent to fly and negative reviews influencing intent to avoid flying, but this could have been made more explicit.

In the multivariate statistical analyses, r-squared and concordant pairs values demonstrated that participants' responses to questions could not be entirely predicted from the variables captured as part of this research. As such, there remains scope for further investigation of other factors that influence followers' purchase intent.

6   Conclusions and Recommendations

Quantitative analyses are often used as a precursor to more in-depth profiling. As such, this research suggests that further qualitative, more in-depth studies should be conducted to examine how followers of vloggers perceive them and to what extent they, as consumers, rely on the recommendations posted. It would also be beneficial for future studies to focus on negative eWOM and its relationship with purchase intent, which was not well-explained by this study. Perhaps one of the biggest unanswered questions lies in combining the subjective experiences of trustworthiness and information quality with the objective factors that describe participant profiles, such as gender and age. It would be of interest to see whether a follower's sense of trust in a vlogger is more influential than their membership of an FFP for example.

The practical implications of this research for vloggers would be to focus on their followers' needs when reviewing airlines. It has been shown that the lack of economy class reviews is something of a gap. As quality has an impact on the purchase intent, the vloggers should pay particular attention to what the post on their channel. Participants have stated that the trust they have in a vlogger has influenced them to follow the recommendation. Vloggers should maintain this trust by continuing to disclose any potential conflicts of interest and allowing their videos to tell the stories of their own lives, to which followers respond.

A strong suggestion for the airline sector is to pay attention to vloggers' comments in relation to travel experiences. Airlines can take comfort in the fact that negative reviews (and subsequently, negative eWOM) may not have a significant effect on purchase intent. By contrast, there is an opportunity for airlines to exploit the positive effect that vloggers' eWOM has on purchase intent. Since positive eWOM generates higher purchase intent, airlines could re-tweet or advertise positive airline reviews, though they would need to be careful not to allow people to assume that a sponsorship arrangement exists.

Overall, this research has conclusively demonstrated that SMIs, through their SM channels, have an impact on their followers' purchase intent.

7   Appendices

Dear XXX,

My name is Jakub Wojciechowicz. I am a final year student doing a Master of Science in International Business in the National College of Ireland. I am researching how much influence airline vloggers like yourself have on consumers. Specifically, I will look at how much vloggers influence their followers to fly or avoid flying with an airline.

To do so, I have designed a short (two minute) survey. I would kindly ask you to share this survey with your followers on your social media. By answering the questions in this survey, I can identify how likely your followers are to be influenced by your videos.

If you agree to post this survey to your followers, I would be more than happy to share my findings with you when the project is completed. I will also be approaching other airline vloggers for this research.

I would be very grateful for your response. If I do not hear from you within two weeks, I will assume you are not interested.

Many thanks,
Jakub Wojciechowicz

Dear XXX,

I emailed you a couple of weeks ago with the below query about my research. This research examines how airline vloggers influence their followers. As I mentioned, I would be happy to share the results with you. These results might be informative in terms of helping you to figure out how to maximise your audience.

I would be very grateful if you would consider posting a link to the survey. I look forward to hearing from you and providing you with the details.

Many thanks,
Jakub Wojciechowicz

Vloggers' impact on their followers' purchase intent - XXX

Survey Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine how much YouTube airline vloggers influence their followers to fly or avoid flying with particular airlines based on flight reviews.

Instructions

You should try to complete this survey in one sitting. It will take about two minutes. You can take this survey on your phone or on a computer. Please do not take this survey if you are under 18 years of age.

Who is running this survey?

Jakub Wojciechowicz (x18112927@studnet.ncirl.ie), who is a student in the School of Business in National College of Ireland. This research is supervised by Niall O'Brien (Niall.OBrien@ncirl.ie).

Your rights

This survey is fully anonymous. No identifying information about you will be collected, not even your IP address. You do not have to complete this survey if you don't want to. If you start the survey, but decide you don't want to continue, you can quit at any time and your response will not be counted. You cannot, however, withdraw your response after you have submitted it, since there is no way of identifying which survey is yours. Survey responses will be combined together and results will be reported as a group.

Has this research been approved?

Yes, it was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Business, National College of Ireland.

Who should I contact for information or complaints?

Principal Investigator: Jakub Wojciechowicz (x18112927@student.ncirl.ie)

Supervisor: Niall O'Brien (Niall.OBrien@ncirl.ie)

The Data Controller for this research is National College of Ireland.

Q1 What is your age in years?

Q2 What is your gender?

- ◯ Male

- ◯ Female

- ◯ Other

Q3 What is your country of residence?

Q4 Are you a frequent flyer program member of any airline?

- ◯ Yes

- ◯ No

Q5 How many flights on average do you take a year? A return flight counts as two flights.

Q6 In what cabin class do you usually travel when you fly long-haul?

- ◯ Economy

- ◯ Premium economy

- ◯ Business

- ◯ First

- ◯ I don't fly

Q7 In the future, I am **more likely** to try an airline that XXX reviewed **positively** on his YouTube channel.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q8 In the future, I am **less likely** to try an airline that XXX reviewed **negatively** on his YouTube channel.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q9 In the past, I have been influenced **to fly with** an airline because of a review I saw on XXX's YouTube channel.

○ Yes

○ No

Q10 In the past, I have been influenced **to avoid flying with** an airline because of a review I saw on XXX's YouTube channel.

○ Yes

○ No

Q11 I think the information in XXX's YouTube channel is **trustworthy**.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q12 I think the information in XXX's YouTube channel is of **good quality**.

○ Strongly agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Q13 Before you finish, is there anything else you would like to say about whether or how XXX's YouTube channel influences your decision to fly or avoid flying with a particular airline?

Appendix 3. List of participants and their country of residence

Country of Residence	Frequency	Percent
Albania	1	0.1
Andorra	1	0.1
Argentina	5	0.5
Armenia	1	0.1
Australia	32	3.0
Austria	13	1.2
Bangladesh	2	0.2
Belgium	6	0.6
Bolivia	1	0.1
Brazil	6	0.6
Bulgaria	3	0.3
Canada	51	4.7
Chad	1	0.1
China	2	0.2
Colombia	1	0.1
Costa Rica	1	0.1
Czech Republic	3	0.3
Denmark	5	0.5
Egypt	1	0.1
Estonia	2	0.2
Finland	9	0.8
France	16	1.5
Georgia	1	0.1
Germany	66	6.1
Greece	6	0.6
Hong Kong (S.A.R.)	12	1.1
Hungary	2	0.2
India	46	4.3
Indonesia	22	2.0
Iran, Islamic Republic of	1	0.1
Ireland	24	2.2
Israel	3	0.3
Italy	10	0.9
Jamaica	1	0.1
Japan	11	1.0
Kenya	1	0.1
Latvia	2	0.2
Lebanon	2	0.2
Lithuania	1	0.1
Luxembourg	1	0.1
Malaysia	7	0.6
Malta	1	0.1
Mexico	9	0.8
Myanmar	1	0.1

Country of Residence		
Netherlands	30	2.8
New Zealand	5	0.5
Niger	1	0.1
Norway	4	0.4
Oman	1	0.1
Pakistan	3	0.3
Paraguay	1	0.1
Philippines	4	0.4
Poland	17	1.6
Portugal	4	0.4
Romania	1	0.1
Russian Federation	4	0.4
Saudi Arabia	2	0.2
Serbia	2	0.2
Singapore	17	1.6
Slovakia	4	0.4
Slovenia	3	0.3
South Africa	6	0.6
South Korea	8	0.7
Spain	11	1.0
Sri Lanka	1	0.1
Sweden	13	1.2
Switzerland	10	0.9
Thailand	1	0.1
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	1	0.1
Turkey	7	0.6
Ukraine	2	0.2
United Arab Emirates	1	0.1
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	167	15.4
United States of America	351	32.5
Viet Nam	6	0.6
Total	1081	100.0

Appendix 4. List of countries classified by income level

Low Income	Lower-Middle Income	Upper-Middle Income	High Income
Niger	Bangladesh	Albania	Andorra
	Bolivia	Argentina	Australia
	Egypt	Armenia	Austria
	India	Brazil	Belgium
	Pakistan	Bulgaria	Canada
	Philippines	China	Czech Republic
	Sri Lanka	Colombia	Denmark
	Ukraine	Costa Rica	Estonia
	Viet Nam	Georgia	Finland
		Indonesia	France
		Iran, Islamic Republic of	Germany
		Jamaica	Greece
		Lebanon	Hong Kong (S.A.R.)
		Malaysia	Hungary
		Mexico	Ireland
		Paraguay	Israel
		Russian Federation	Italy
		Serbia	Japan
		South Africa	Latvia
		Thailand	Luxembourg
		The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Netherlands
		Turkey	New Zealand
			Norway
			Poland
			Portugal
			South Korea
			Romania
			Saudi Arabia
			Singapore
			Slovakia
			Slovenia
			Spain
			Sweden
			Switzerland
			United Arab Emirates
			United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
			United States of America

Organising Theme: "I think this is the best place to look at an airline before you travel"

Definition: This theme encapsulates responses that indicate that participants have been (or would be) influenced by vloggers.

"I feel his opinions to be sound, his YouTube videos give a very good representation of what the airlines are like i.e. service standards"

"His opinion doesn't influence me. What he shows me does influence me"

"Comes across as a nice, genuine guy. Like his presenting style. Has interesting content rather than the usual lounge, seat, take off, service videos"

"The detail he puts in the reviews are quite important to whether or not his opinion influences mine"

"The reviews help choosing the airline. The videos are amazing and they give all the information we watchers want"

"As the team at Simply Aviation are frequent flyers, I trust what they have to say in terms of quality, as they have far more experience as compared to myself"

"I know that they are always honest and that helps me"

"Given they've flown thousands of times on many airlines, I trust their opinion as it seems they know what to expect in each class of travel"

"They provide reliable reviews of airlines and do not have a bias opinion"

"The channel covers all the aspects one cares while choosing an airline to fly. Thus, it is of great help and they do not just share their experience orally but even show it, making them extremely trust-worthy"

"Yes, because I can analyse, from a neutral point of view, the pros and cons of an airline, and that influences in my final decision when choosing a flight"

"While opinions about airlines can be subjective, Jeb Brooks explanations why he like/dislike certain things help viewers to relate better, which makes him a more trustworthy reviewer"

"I find Jeb to be very honest and thoughtful with his reviews and I feel it saves me time and bad experiences I might have without his advice"

"In certain routes, where there are multiple airlines to choose from (f. ex. Europe - NYC), getting a little taste of what to expect is a major deciding factor for me - I am also keen to see what the airlines that are foreign to me are like cabin- and amenity wise. Simply Aviation also tells honestly about an airline (Air China video is a great example), so I am more able to expect little less and maybe be positively surprised should I fly with them some time in the future"

Organising Theme: "I think this is the best place to look at an airline before you travel"

Definition: This theme encapsulates responses that indicate that participants have been (or would be) influenced by vloggers.

"They make me want to fly more later in the future, with all airlines in this world, I want to try them all. I really want to be a frequent flyer one day, just like Felix and David!"

"However generally I'd say the videos do encourage me to fly more in the future also on routes and airlines reviewed in the videos"

"It lets me know about routes that I didn't know were flown. So that's always valuable information"

"In the future i plan to fly to Korea and it would be foolish of me not to take a ride on the Korean air 747 since its first class was so highly revered. (Maybe I'll splurge and fly first who knows). As of right now it hasn't influenced me but if I were to fly routes, he has flown on I would pay particular attention to the videos as they are great reviews"

"I started watching his videos just before air travel was shut down. Once we start flying again, I will use his reviews to make choices as to which airline I should fly"

"My choice in carrier is much more greatly influenced by my loyalty to and status with United and their Star Alliance partners. However, Jeb Brooks? in depth coverage of Delta and SkyTeam has led me to seriously consider switching to Delta as my preferred carrier in the past"

"Has made me consider using delta in the future"

"It's influenced me to try business/fist class using miles as I used to only fly economy"

"When selecting economy class product, I relay in simply aviation. When business, I don't"

"I wish I had known about you earlier than I did or else When I went to Australia for my dream trip in 2017, I wouldn't have picked United and would have gone with somebody else instead because of how bad the customer service was at United"

"Videos help me have a preview of the airline and   don't buy a ticket if it is really bad or absolutely not what i was expecting"

"Before I choose an airline which I don't know, I always look for a trip report or a review of simply aviation to figure out if I would have an enjoyable flight or not"

"Solid information about certain trips makes decisions easy. It helps me decide where flying business or premium is not worth"

"It helps me narrow down options to help me get the most for my money"

Organising Theme: "I don't generally get influenced on airlines from travel reviewers"

Definition: Responses under this theme reflect the diverse opinions as to why participants would not be influenced by vloggers, or would take their advice lightly.

"I love seeing their reviews, but I mostly want to try out airlines and build my own opinion"
"I never avoided any airline based on reviews of others. I want to try everything myself and form my opinion on It myself"
"I personally build my own views through trial and error to decide whether I'd travel with a particular airline again"
"His opinion doesn't influence me. What he shows me does influence me"
"I really do enjoy his reviews as its quality content but it does not influence my choice of airline or class of service"
"Videos show me what to expect when flying a new airline. They have no influence on what I book"
"If a video is sponsored by an airline even if he says that he was allowed to express his own opinion about the flight then I wouldn't really trust his opinion/review of the flight"
"It's fun to see him take his trips, and he obviously loves the planes and the airports, but as consumer advice, they're not helpful much if at all"
"Sadly, I only have the option to fly with who I can afford to fly with"
"Even if airline is not recommended if the fare is very cheap, I'll take it"
"Everyone ultimately will fly for the best value for money"
"Being that I come from a country that is not that well off, I try to focus on the deals more than quality of the airline"
"Since I fly mostly domestic (USA) flights with Alaska and his domestic carrier of choice is Delta, I have not really even flown on stuff he reviews"
"Flight timing might be everything. Availability of the last seat might be key"
"In my type of travel, I have certain restrictions which means I cannot always fly the airline I wish to, so while I have my preferences (a mix of experience and YouTube bloggers) I don't always get to travel with them"
"Due to the nature of my travel, I tend to fly a specific airline because it takes me exactly where I'm going"
"I've joined one of Star Alliance FFP and I prefer to fly with Star Alliance members"

Organising Theme: "I don't generally get influenced on airlines from travel reviewers"

Definition: Responses under this theme reflect the diverse opinions as to why participants would not be influenced by vloggers, or would take their advice lightly.

"I enjoy the benefits that I get from my frequent flyer program, so I generally stick with one airline and its partners"

"It doesn't influence decisions at all. I like to fly based on schedule and would take an extra flight to try a different airline. Also, I like to stick with a particular alliance for mileage earning and status reasons"

"He reviews mostly business class flights (which I find entertaining) while I purchase flights based mostly on price, almost entirely in economy class so it doesn't have a lot of direct influence on my choices"

"A lot of our travel doesn't really overlap, and since he is flying premium cabins, it isn't as relevant"

"I'm a sensitive traveller who always flies economy so Jeb's business class only reviews are purely for my entertainment"

"The channel is viewed mostly for entertainment purposes"

"Mainly view for entertainment value. I only fly on 2 airlines so I'm not really using the channel to help with airline decision making"

"I am not interested in fluff that most vloggers look at such as food and wine. All I need to know is if I can work and sleep. I mix my class of travel from first to economy"

"Quintin's videos are fine, but not terribly informative. His ratings are crazy"

"Usually I don't rely on simply aviation when selecting business class product, since they don't pay any attention to inflight cabin service, nor they comment they experiences"

Organising Theme: "It depends…"

Definition: Some respondents stated that they may or may not be influenced depending on certain factors or circumstances, or stated influencing factors without stating direction of influence. This theme captures such responses.

"Using Noel, and other similar channels, helps me work out which airlines I would prefer to travel with if I was to take a particular journey. For example, if I was to fly transatlantic and Noel had reviewed United as a bad airline and British Airways as a good airline, I would be more likely to choose BA, depending on price, over United"

"The opinions of Jeb and the other youtubers who make flight review videos are one (minor) factor in my decision making, but price is generally the most important factor"

"When it comes to choosing which airlines to fly. Flight Review like Simply Aviation gives me information about an airline's product, onboard service and food. Price is still the biggest factor when it comes to choosing an airlines"

"The channel mainly focuses on economy class travel, so if the economy class is reviewed negatively for example, it doesn't mean that the First or Business class is also of poor quality"

"Love the reviews and with the decision to fly based off of Jeb's reviews the airline could be better he just got a bad day. But yes, his reviews do go into consideration!"

"The channel makes me more excited when I decide to make my vacation trips. It also gives me an inside look at some of my favourite planes that I have not flown in yet"

"I think I am more willing to fly with an airline Jeb says is good in a long-haul capacity. Short haul it won't affect my air travel decision, but I am now looking at different airlines to try when planning trips abroad"

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