

Social media marketing on tourism development: A conceptual study

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ABSTRACT

In 21st century, tourism has emerged as a significant focus for the Indian economy, with numerous events organized to foster tourism development nationwide. Nevertheless, the importance of social media marketing in the travel industry is still undervalued. There remains a lot to explore about the roles and effects of social media marketing on the tourism behavior within a country. The study investigated the significance and influence of social media platforms in promoting tourism, specifically Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat. The overall findings indicate that various enhancements could improve customer satisfaction. The researcher assessed several popular social media marketing tactics (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat) and their effectiveness in boosting Indian tourism. The findings indicate that social media marketing significantly contributes to the positive development of the travel and tourism sector. The study utilized qualitative research methods, drawing from sources such as books, journals, websites, theses, and other secondary data related to social media marketing strategies and the travel sector. The findings suggest that effective collaboration between central and state governments is vital for promoting both domestic and international tourism and supporting sustainable development. Furthermore, the study highlights the necessity to examine factors influencing consumers' perceived value of destinations through social media strategies. Such measures are essential for enhancing India's tourism industry on the global platform.

KEYWORDS- Social Media, Marketing, Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites are utilized for social interactions more frequently than in-person conversations. One of the most prominent social networks is Facebook. Additional instances of social media platforms consist of Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube. People no longer have to wait for physical interactions to gain specific information about a destination they wish to visit for tourism purposes. Travelers use social media to plan trips, make informed decisions regarding travel, and share their individual experiences with particular hotels, restaurants, or airlines (Živković, Gajić, & Brdar, 2014). The online community perceives this type of user-generated content as more trustworthy and genuine, with many hotels, eateries, and attractions experiencing significant declines for not placing in the top five rankings. With over 200 million ratings and reviews on TripAdvisor and more than 800 million active Facebook users posting updates and sharing photos, social media prevails in the industry. In recent years, social networks have witnessed rapid growth. By December 2012, approximately 56% of individuals utilized social media, and nearly all (98%) of those aged 18 to 24 engaged with social media. Facebook, the leading social media platform, now boasts over 1.2 billion users.

1.1 Concept of Social Media

As stated by Pratika and Lestari (2020), social media encompasses a collection of online applications that allow users to create and share content publicly, rather than relying on marketers or businesses for dissemination. Therefore, social media is often referred to as consumer-generated media, leading to significant creation, sharing, and exchange of relevant information. Consequently, social media has emerged as a digital tool that promotes the development of international personal and professional connections, as relevant information and conversations can rapidly spread worldwide (Al-Sawaei, Tarhini, and Al-Badi, 2017).

1.2 Definition of Tourism Marketing

Travel has the potential to generate substantial revenue for any country, and the media plays a vital role in this industry by emphasizing aspects like decision-making behaviors, best practices for customer engagement, and information searching. Although educational tourism is among the fastest-growing sectors in travel and tourism, it is often neglected by marketers and industry professionals. Marketing approaches have dramatically shifted with the advent of social media. Social media platforms enable the viewing, creation, and sharing of data, ideas, career aspirations, and various forms of expression within virtual communities and networks. These platforms are available to individuals, businesses, governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and other entities. Studies indicate that social media plays a vital role in advancing educational tourism, contributing to the political, social, cultural, and economic dimensions of a country.

2. Literature review

Armutcu et al. (2023) examined the effects of digital and social media marketing on travelers and proposed a comprehensive model that highlights the significance of Tourist Destination Online Content (TDOC) and how tourists select their destination-based online content. Researchers found a positive relationship between TDOC perception and tourist satisfaction, indicating that effective online content enhances travel experiences. However, Shriharsha (2023) highlighted the consequences of social media in tourism marketing, emphasizing its cost-effectiveness and direct communication with target people. Additionally, the research discussed various government initiatives, such as the “Incredible India” online campaign, demonstrating how these efforts leverage social media to boost tourism. Meanwhile, Deb, Santus, Mallik, & Nandita (2023) explored the effect of social media in tourism marketing, focusing on enhancing tourist satisfaction through user-generated content. The study addressed key factors like advocacy, travel inspiration, and positive brand impression are highlighted as important for effective social media marketing. Respondents widely acknowledge the essential contribution of social media in promoting destination image and products.

Chatterjee and Dsilva (2021) explored several important socio-economic and cultural elements that are crucial for fostering sustainable tourism. The research highlighted the effective application of social media and websites to promote tourism products such as temple tourism, sand art, handicrafts, etc. Simultaneously, Vanlalhriati & Singh (2019) examined the purpose of social media as a key information source about tourism products among students at Mizoram University. The study highlighted that India ranked first with 300 million Facebook users. Researchers also recommended maintaining a strong public relations team to manage social comments daily, enhancing customer engagement and satisfaction.

Alghizzawi, Salloum, & Habes (2018) studied how tourism companies support ICT (Information and communication technology) and social networks to offer competitive deals to customers. The

study was conducted to reach a result about the expansion of social media networks in developing tourism in Jordan, and concluded that overall, 74.1% of tourist encouragement dimensions. Simultaneously, Hamouda (2018) found a significant relationship between social platform advertising and factors such as information, entertainment, and Facebook. Facebook is identified as the best tool for communicating tourism products and services. It also affects the attitude of consumers. Keshavarz & Jamshidi (2018) highlighted a relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, indicating higher customer satisfaction with better service quality. It is suggested that hoteliers should focus on process and result in quality to make customers loyal, thereby increasing the levels of international tourists.

Chatzigeorgiou (2017) examined how rural businesses can attract Millennials using social media and the Internet. The study emphasizes the key factors related to rural tourism, with social media identified as the best tool to reach a large audience and increase purchasing power, particularly among Millennials. Similarly, Gadoo (2017) explores that the quality of service significantly influences tourist satisfaction, yielding positive outcomes, especially for the development of an economy. The research emphasizes that high-quality management can lead to increased profits and underscores the relevance of continuously improving service quality.

Hayati and Novitasari (2017) investigated how service quality influences tourism, particularly in relation to visitor satisfaction. The purpose of the hypothesis testing in this study is to identify a positive correlation between the independent variables (tourist attraction, facilities and services, accessibility) and the dependent variable (tourist satisfaction).

Titu, Raulea, & Titu (2016) found the rapid expansion and diversification of the tourism industry, highlighting its emergence as a significant economic sector. The primary objective of the research is to identify issues related to customer expectations. The study emphasizes that service quality is a crucial element in tourism, with most tourists seeking enhancements to improve the industry's overall image. Similarly, Rout, Mishra, & Pradhan (2016) examined various trends and progress of tourism in India from 1995 to 2015, using various indicators to evaluate the sector's development. The study reveals that India has the potential to harness the multiple benefits of tourism in the future.

Dayananda (2016) explored multiple impacts of tourism on India's economic development, noting that it provides various opportunities at a relatively low cost. The study concluded that the diverse nature of India's tourism offerings attracts a wide range of tourists, providing them with numerous choices and experiences.

Sahin & Sengun (2015) investigate the impact of social media marketing on the tourism sector. Their research indicates that social media affects tourism enterprises in both beneficial and detrimental manners, with the feedback and experiences of the younger demographic being particularly influential. However, Attallah (2015) evaluated the service quality provided by various tourism sectors, including airlines, hotels, and travel agencies. The study discovered that more tourists are satisfied with the service quality attributes. The research recommended that manager should improve their weakness and maintain a proper sound plan to attract and retain tourists.

Rao (2014) described that tourism impacts the economy in various aspects, including GDP, employment, and airlines. The research indicated that destination exploration is essential for managing and enhancing the industry's position in the future. The study recommended adopting new marketing strategies and increasing tourism-related projects to support this growth.

Vethirajan & Nagavalli (2014) explained that tourism offers numerous benefits to the economy, functioning as a multifaceted sector that generates revenue from various areas such as food,

beverages, tours and travel, and resorts. The research also highlights the increase in the number of tourists arriving in India from 2002 to 2013.

Kapiki (2012) stated that quality in tourism requires the consistent distribution of goods and services according to expected standards. To meet consumer expectations, organizations must understand all the service quality attributes that ensure customer satisfaction. The study highlights significant factors such as customer satisfaction, customer retention, and word-of-mouth advertising. The research is exploratory as it examines how tourism stakeholders perceive service quality in the tourism industry.

Sharma, Johri, and Chauhan (2012) illustrate that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is essential for the growth of India's tourism industry. The research indicates that increased FDI contributes to local economic growth and development, as foreign companies bring significant funds and modern technologies.

Rousan, Mohamed, & Fernando (2011) determined the dimensions for assessing the quality of service in 5-star hotels. The research used descriptive analysis to measure tourist perception scores and applied multiple regression methods to identify various factors influencing consumer satisfaction. The study successfully identified TSQ (Tourist Satisfaction Quality) dimensions.

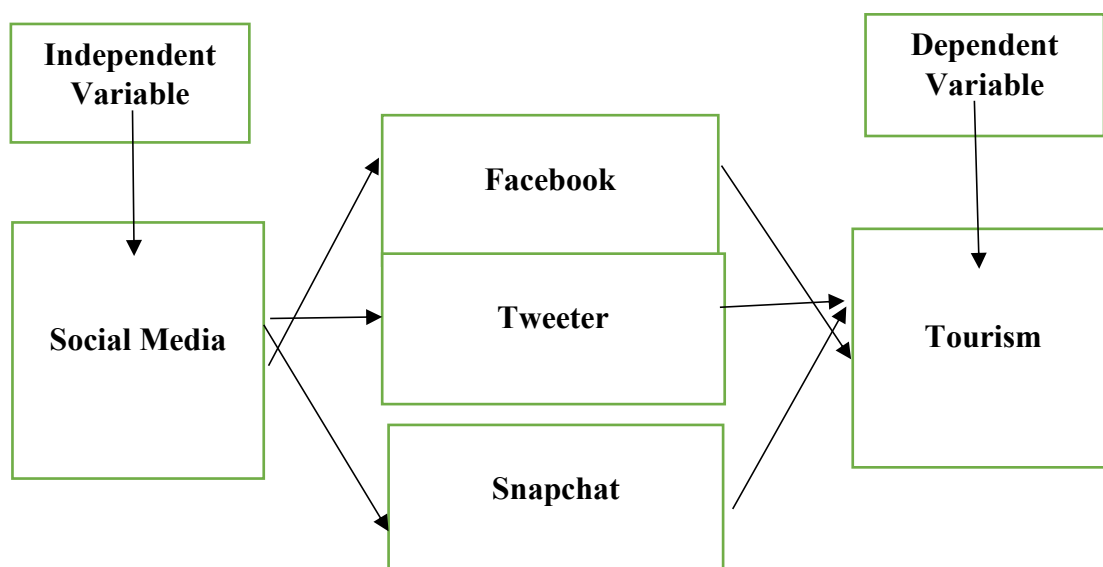
3. STUDY OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the concept of social media marketing.
2. To assess the effect of social media marketing on the tourism sector.
3. To offer recommendations for enhancing the tourism sector.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher examined a variety of well-known social media marketing techniques (including Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat) and their impact on the success of the tourism sector promoted by higher education institutions in India. The investigation utilized qualitative research methods to evaluate how social media marketing practices contribute to the promotion of the tourism industry. This research is based on an array of secondary data gathered from journals, books, theses, periodicals, and various online sources.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY



Source: Self-Construct

Fig:01

5.0 SOCIAL MEDIA AND TOURISM

Social media particularly plays a vital role in decision-making and information gathering, traveler marketing, and best practices for customer service, among other areas of tourism. Marketing travel-related products through social media is a lucrative approach. As a knowledge-driven industry, tourism can greatly benefit from the latest advancements in information and communication technology, facilitating extensive sharing, transport, reusing, storage, and production of information. Additionally, tourism is an industry that relies significantly on information. Therefore, it is crucial to keep an eye on technological developments and consumer culture trends that influence how travel-related information is communicated and accessed (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Social networking sites have significantly contributed to marketing and promoting tourism in the global travel industry. Social media allows individuals to connect based on mutual interests, thus altering the nature of communication among travelers (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). Nowadays, tourists, especially leisure travelers, can choose their destinations through social media. This trend has influenced people's perceptions and decision-making processes. The tourism sector should take into account travelers' attitudes towards social media and devise strategies to ensure that travel-related information on these platforms is more widely acknowledged. For example, hotels can leverage platforms such as Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to disseminate information, modify their services, and enhance their branding (McCarthy, Stock, & Verma, 2010). Furthermore, social media platforms, including online travel communities, play a crucial role in internet marketing and e-commerce (Casallo et al., 2010).

Social media encompasses a wide range of means by which individuals connect through blogs and forums, images, audio recordings, videos, links, and profiles on social networking platforms (Eley & Tilley, 2009). As social media has evolved, the internet has shifted from merely a channel for distributing information to an interactive platform where users themselves become sources of information exchange. Social media is defined as a collection of programs that facilitate the creation and alteration of content generated and structured on the fundamentals of internet technology (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). With the increasing trend of internet usage and advancements in technology, tourists are employing their devices, such as smartphones, computers, and tablets, to look for information about their travels and tourist attractions.

6.1 Facebook

According to Facebook, individuals utilize the platform to discuss travel and vacation ideas while also sharing images and information. The volume of travel-related material on Facebook and other social media sites is growing each year. Many users turn to Facebook to escape their daily routines and reality, contributing to the rising popularity of travel photos and articles on iconic Indian locations on social media, with numerous users sharing their personal travel stories.

6.2 Twitter

Ahmad (2015) noted that the global number of Twitter users reached 288 million in 2015, reflecting a 20% increase from the previous year. Furthermore, the company generated USD 479 million in revenue. This growth trend is expected to continue in the forthcoming years.

6.3 Snapchat

As stated by Ahmad (2015), Snapchat is one of the newest social networking platforms to emerge. It allows users to swiftly share personal updates such as photos, videos, and their identities. Research indicates that due to significant technological advances, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat have expanded rapidly. Innovations in technology have facilitated the quick growth of these channels, enabling users to access information and interact with others via messaging and communication tools.

6.4 Role of Social Media in Encouraging Tourism

Social media has influenced various aspects of people's lives, including consumption patterns, significantly impacting businesses by allowing the adoption of innovative marketing strategies. Given that tourism is one of the world's most flourishing industries, it is affected by this trend. Marrying social media with tourism marketing can greatly benefit businesses. This study outlines the essential elements of social media in tourism marketing, detailing its definition and effective usage. The interaction between these elements can elevate the quality of the tourist experiences available. Tourism is promoted through social media platforms, online marketing, and electronic commerce (Casaló et al., 2010).

6.5 Social Media as a Significant Instrument for Tourism

Social media platforms can assist in establishing an organization's brand and provide valuable information about it. With its capacity to motivate travelers to explore various parts of the world, social media marketing has revolutionized the tourism industry. People are turning to search engines like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to aid in planning their next trip and schedule. Users can easily find exactly what they seek on Instagram, thanks to its popular hashtags and geolocation features. When utilized effectively, social media can help individuals promote their businesses and make it more convenient for clients to discover them.

6.6 Influence of Social Media in India

Being aware of social media has become a crucial element of daily life for the youth of today. Many individuals spend a substantial portion of their day on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, and others. The internet has transformed from merely a tool for emailing or searching for information to a means of connecting with others and staying informed through chats, sharing photos and videos, updating statuses, and more. With every fifth person, half of them utilize social media to express their achievements or happiness, making it a vital part of people's lives. From a business perspective, social media has proven to be an excellent avenue for increasing consumer awareness of brands and product lines. It serves as a platform for businesses to build an impression of their potential customers, engage with them to understand their opinions, and improve their offerings. Additionally, social media offers a wonderful source of entertainment and enjoyment. Its impact has spread to all areas of life, expanding beyond mere communication to other sectors. As more individuals gain access to smartphones and networks, social media usage is rapidly increasing. Users of social media are often encouraged to explore new products and information due to their trust in what they encounter. Consequently, businesses are strategizing on how to leverage social media to connect with as many customers as possible for their products. A survey indicates a significant and rapid increase in social media users. It reported that in 2018, there were over 283 million users of social networks in India, up from approximately 216.5 million in 2016.

7. Conclusion

The influence of social media on India's tourism sector has been immense. It has altered how individuals plan and organize their travels, as well as how they communicate their travel experiences with others. Social media provides tourism-related businesses with an opportunity to engage in extensive and innovative interactions with potential clients. Nevertheless, some challenges and concerns must be addressed, including the need to maintain authenticity and oversee online reputations. The travel and tourism industry should leverage social media as a means for growth and enhancement while being mindful of potential adverse effects. Social media has swiftly transformed how individuals create trustworthy brands. Traditional marketing tools like brochures and billboards have lost their effectiveness in the tourism arena. The key to thriving on social media is gaining positive user feedback, encouraging social sharing, and ensuring customer satisfaction. This study aimed to illustrate that social networks present a considerable opportunity for tourism enterprises. To capitalize on these advantages, the Digital Agency Network can assist individuals in finding the most suitable tourism marketing agency. In summary, social media has revolutionized India's tourism industry and will continue to influence its future.

8. Suggestions/ recommendations

- Social media includes online platforms that allow users to share and distribute content, particularly on social networking sites.
- Promoting recommendations through word-of-mouth and positive reviews from previous visitors can encourage others to discover these locations.
- Emphasizing visuals: Various social media platforms, such as Vimeo and YouTube for videos and Instagram, Pinterest, or Flickr for images, are specifically intended for showcasing visual content.
- Gathering feedback: Some organizations carry out focus groups and send out post-study surveys on social media.

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