

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN TOURISM INDUSTRY

Abstract

The utilization of social media has matured during the past decade and has begun to influence almost all areas like belief, standard of living, assessments, decision-making and especially travelling. It also influence usage and purchase pattern of services and products. Social media has developed as dominant channel for all tourism industry to associate with their target audience.

Originally, the primary intention of social media was entertainment however, the rise in the use of internet and the development in communication and information technologies many firms diverted their business to social media to promote and market their products. Tour and Travel firms have been fast to move to social media to market and enhanced their products to connect with potential customers. Tourism entrepreneurs may reach more potential customers instantly and at cost next to nothing through the active utilize of social media.

On other side, social media has appeared as one of the unique place that influences tourists' travel options. Particularly tourists, who mostly procure intangible products, use of social media networking platforms as information sources in order to ensure that they buy right products prior they experience them. Nowadays, the rising numbers of tourists are also posting photos, videos, ratings, reviews and their vacation related experiences in social media.

The chapter investigates and explores the importance of Social Media Platform in Tourism Industry in terms of

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influencing tourists and their purchase decision. The chapter also examines online buying trends of tourism customers and the possible relationship between participant demographics and some of the variables like information acquired from social media, use of social media for tourism services, the act of buying influence and intention to share tour experiences.

Keywords: Social Media, Tourism, Consumer, Purchase Decision, Travel Experience.

I. INTRODUCTION

In current era, the use of social media has grown promptly since the past decade; it has become very popular and playing a significant role in all domains of our lives especially tourism industry. Social media has emerged as powerful channel for tourism business to connect with their target audience. It also acts an important role as information sources of travelers and potential tourists. Social Media emerged as a major component as it facilitates the interaction between customers and tourism domain. Originally, the basic purpose of social media platforms was enjoyment and refreshment only though with the rise in the use of the internet and improvement in information and communication technologies, people engaged in the tourism industry started conversing with each other and customers through social media. Social media has become a day-to-day part for the populace in the globe, so their users will effortlessly read any sort of information furnished. Taking advantage of social media to promote tourism products has confirmed to be a brilliant strategy.

Nowadays, tourists are becoming smarter and those who know how to use social media platforms can instantly obtain various information's seek inspiration and make decisions about their trips through smart phones, tablets and computers. Social media facilitate real time communication between tourists and tourism businesses; enable flawless customer services and personalized interactions. Hence, social media permits destinations to highlight their exclusive attractions, culture and offerings to global tourists, fostering interest and generating tourism revenue. Social media platforms have transformed the tourism industry, redefining how travelers plan, discover and share their experiences. These social media networking platforms ranging from YouTube, YouTube Shorts, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter/X have become necessary devices for both tourists and tourism sector. Through real-time interaction, engaging contents and captivating visuals social media has changed the way people explore the world and how tourism business connect with their target audiences. The tourism industry also does not rely on offline but online and many countries are preparing a sizeable digital tourism market to compete with attract foreign tourist.

Tourism businesses such as tour operators, travel agencies, airlines, hotels and destination marketing associations now leverage social media's enormous reach and engagement potential to endorse their offerings and connect with travelers on a personal level. Through carefully curretted posts, interactive stories and user-generated content, these businesses created an immersive online presence that resonates with desires and aspirations of modern travelers. Additionally, the prominence of social medias' are seen as the source of research data in numerous areas such as the mechanism of e-word of mouth, customer decision-making and travel recommendations have grown. Many states and countries view social media as a primary tool for supporting their tourism industries. Social media platforms have transformed the way travelers search, engage with and share their travel experiences in tourism industry.

II. SOCIAL MEDIA AND TOURISM

The online world has changed unexpectedly in the last ten years, gratitude to the invention of social media; people now exchange feelings, ideas, personal information, images and videos at a truly astonishing rate. Since time immemorial, people have been fond of

sharing their travel stories and social media made it easy to do so with a large audience than ever.

Among all social media platforms there is no doubt that Facebook is the king, with over 2.38 billion monthly active users, making it the biggest social network worldwide (Forever Vacation, 2023). Followed 1.9 billion YouTube followers and 1.5 billion Whatsapp followers' monthly active users respectively and Instagram along with over 1 billion monthly users has become the new 'landing page' for many business, not least those, which depend on, image driven marketing such as hotels and resorts.

Social media has had a relevant role in tourism industry on the way people plan and experience their travel. Social media is a collection of applications that combine basic human need with web 2.0 technology which allow user generated content to create and share information. Social media as a variety of online information sources that customers develop or share with others. People use social media platforms for a variety of reasons but the basic premise remains the same: to communicate with others, to strengthen relationships, to improve campaigns and to provide new experiences to users.

1. The Following are Some of the Benefits of Social Media:

- People can build a public spot where you can converse with others.
- Business can get closer to its consumers.
- Social media has the capability to set up belief and credibility.
- Advocate for augmented transparency.
- Social media is likely to follow up in real time.
- Generate opportunities for third-party syndication and assistance.
- Social media allows viral dispersal.
- Social media is less expensive
- Social media is preferable to have a deeper understanding of human's lifestyles.
- Shorten the time it takes to obtain information.

Social media plays a vital role in tourism by enabling destinations, businesses and travelers to connect, share experiences and promote destinations. It helps travelers discover new places, share their experiences through photos and reviews and receive recommendations from peers. For businesses and destinations, social media provides a platform to market their offerings engage with customers and gain valuable insight through user-generated content. It has become a vital tool for shaping travel trends and motivating travelers' decisions.

Social media's relevance in the tourism industry cannot be overstated. Social media has profoundly transformed the tourism industry in various ways.

2. Some Key Points Highlighting its Significances are as Follows:

- **Destination Discovery:** Travellers often turn to social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, TikTok, Clubhouse and X/Twitter which allow travellers to discover maiden and exciting travel destination through captivating visuals and videos and finally sparking inspiration for their upcoming tour.

- **User-Generated Content:** Travellers share images, videos, and reviews, creating authentic content that influences travellers' decisions and serves as valuable testimonials for destinations and businesses. Positive experiences shared on social media can motivate others to visit a particular destination.
- **Real Time Updates:** Social media platforms enables instant sharing of events, promotions, and critical information like weather conditions, enhancing travellers' experiences which ensure that travellers have the latest information and plan their tour accordingly.
- **Engagement and Interaction:** Tourism businesses associate with travellers directly on social media platforms providing personalized help, answering queries, and building stronger customer relationships.
- **Brand Building:** Social media platforms allow tourism businesses to establish and enhance their brand identity, creating a strong online presence which resonates with potential tourists.
- **Targeted Marketing:** Tourism businesses can tailor their marketing efforts to specific demographics, interests and behaviours, increasing the effectiveness of their campaigns.
- **Influencer Collaboration:** Collaborating with travel influencers allows tourist destinations and businesses to leverage their large and engaged follower base to promote tourism offerings.
- **Virtual Tourism:** Live streams, 360-degree videos, and virtual reality content enables potential travellers to virtually explore destinations before making decisions.
- **Crisis Management:** During crises such as natural disasters or health emergencies, social media platforms provides a platform for quick dissemination of safety information, updates and substitute plans to travellers.
- **Feedback and Insights:** Social media platforms provide a direct one stop shop for gathering feedback; reviews and insights for travellers helping businesses ameliorate their services based on traveller opinions.
- **Booking and Reservations:** Some social media platforms offer integrated booking features allowing travellers to research, plan and book their tours without leaving the platform.
- **Global Reach:** Social media go beyond geographical boundaries allowing tourism businesses to attract diverse international viewers.

Overall, social media has become an integral tool for tourism, influencing how destinations are discovered, experiences are shared, and travel decisions are made.

III.RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FROM THE TOURIST'S PERSPECTIVE

As we enter the year 2023, it is transparent that social media platform has transformed the way people communicate, interact, and explore the world. Social media is a core pillar of the modern information community. Customer behavior has changed dramatically because of technological advancement and the widespread adaption of mobile devices, which has had a direct impact on how we connect and use social commerce to make decisions and buy online. Companies started using social media to engage with their customers, raise brand awareness, influence customer attitudes, collect feedback, improve current products and services and boost sales. Likewise, customers use social media to search for or explore information, such as product qualification, when they have a demand for or are interested in something.

Customers can use social media to quickly gather information and direct their attention to the point that they want. Social media remarkably influences travel motivation and destination image. When a customer wants to purchase a product to meet a need, this is the process. The procedure entails finding, purchasing, using, evaluation, and offering services.

As for travel becoming more inclusive, a report discloses that travelers tend to value cultural engagement as a key factor when deciding on a destination with 86 percent of travelers traveled abroad for this reason (Google/Storyline Strategies, 2022). The research also shows that three in four travelers will seek out information specific to their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Top sources include word of mouth, travel guide sites and social media influencers.

1. From a Tourist's Perspective, Social Media Holds Enormous Relevance. The Following are the Details:

- **Destination Inspiration:** Social media platforms provide a wealth of visually captivating content that inspires travellers to explore maiden destinations.
- **Travel Planning:** Tourists can research and organize trips by reading reviews, watching videos, and following hashtags related to their desired destinations.
- **Real-time Information:** Social media platforms offers real-time updates on events, weather conditions, local news, and travel advisories, helping tourists make informed decisions.
- **Local Insights:** Connecting with local communities and other travellers by using social media allows tourists to gain insights into authentic experiences, hidden gems, and cultural practices.
- **Itinerary Ideas:** Tourists can find sample itineraries and suggestions from other travellers, assisting them make the most of their time at a destination.
- **Virtual Exploration:** By using live streams and virtual reality content, tourists can virtually traverse a destination before physically visiting, enhancing their anticipation.
- **Personalized Experiences:** Engaging with tourism businesses on social media enables tourists to receive personalized recommendations and assistance.
- **Travel Communities:** Social media platforms foster communities of like-minded travellers, providing a space to share stories, advice, and tips.
- **Safety Information:** During the time of emergencies or unexpected situations, social media can provide vital safety information and alternative plans.
- **Memory Sharing:** Tourists share their own travel experiences on social media platforms, preserving memories and inspiring others to embark on similar holidays.
- **Interacting with Influencers:** Following travel influencers allows tourists to get insights, tips, and recommendations from experienced travellers.
- **Booking and Reviews:** Social media platforms often integrate booking options and allow tourists to read reviews, helping them choose accommodations, activities, and services.

In essence, social media empowers tourists with information, connectivity, and the opportunity to enhance their travel experiences from inspiration to sharing cherished memories.

IV. RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TOUR OPERATORS AND ALLIED SECTORS

The use of social media platforms has become a habitual behaviour in people's everyday's life. When people browse social media platforms, they are exposed to vast numbers of images and post describing various characteristics, attributes or other aspects of a particular destinations. These contents might inspire them to add a specific destination or venue to their 'bucket list' for future trips. The tourism services supported by social media platforms in the current scenario are becoming a very essential medium in promoting the services to prospective tourist customers in a fast and effective way. By using user-generated content and influencer collaborations, social media has become a powerful tool for shaping travel trends and driving tourists' choices. Social media has made tourism industry highly competitive and this has benefitted customers, travel entities have reduced their profits and they pass on the benefits of reduced cost to the consumers as well to stay in business and increase business share

1 Social Media is Highly Relevant for Tour Operators and Allied Sectors due to its Potential To Influence Various Aspects of their Business:

- **Marketing and Promotion:** Social media platforms offer cost-effective and targeted marketing opportunities, allowing tour operators to reach a wide audience and promote their products.
- **Brand Building:** Establishing a strong social media presence helps tour operators build brand awareness, credibility, and recognition within the industry.
- **Engagement and Customer Interaction:** Direct interaction with potential customers fosters engagement, allowing tour operators and allied sectors to address inquiries, provide personalized recommendations, and build customer relationships.
- **Highlighting Experiences:** Tour operators and allied sectors can use social media to highlight their products, share images and videos of destinations, and give potential customers a glimpse of what to expect.
- **User-Generated Content:** Encouraging travellers to share their experiences on social media platforms generates authentic content that acts as testimonials, influencing others to choose their services.
- **Influencer Collaborations:** Collaborating with travel influencers allows tour operators to leverage their reach and credibility to promote their tours.
- **Crisis Communication:** During crises or disruptions, social media provides a vital platform to communicate updates, safety measures, and alternative plans to travellers.
- **Customer Feedback and Insights:** Social media feedback helps tour operators and allied sectors improve their offerings based on customer opinions and preferences.
- **Market Research:** Social media platforms provide insights into industry trends, customer behaviour, and competitors' activities.
- **Sales and Booking:** Integrated booking features on platforms facilitate direct sales and reservations, streamlining the booking process for customers.
- **Employee Advocacy:** Encouraging employees to share their experiences and perspectives can humanize the business and create a sense of trust.
- **Networking and Partnerships:** Social media enables tour operators to connect with other businesses in the travel ecosystem, fostering collaborations and partnerships.

- **Education and Information Sharing:** Tour operators can use social media to educate potential customers about destinations, cultures, travel tips, and relevant news.

Social media offers tour operators and allied sectors a multifaceted platform to connect with customers, promote services, build brand identity, and adapt to the dynamic nature of the travel industry.

V. RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN FUTURE

As technology and social media platforms continue to evolve, their relevance in the tourism industry is expected to further expand, influencing how travelers plan, experience and reminisce about their holidays. In this ever-evolving landscape, the synergy between social media platforms and the tourism industry has transformed the way people dream, plan, and embark on their holidays. This integration has not only amplified businesses marketing efforts but has also empowered travellers with unprecedented access to information, creating a dynamic environment that continues to shape the future of travel.

1 The Relevance of Social Media is Expected to Continue Growing in the Future, with Several Trends and Factors Shaping its Importance:

- **Advanced Technology Integration:** Social media platforms will likely incorporate more advanced technologies like virtual reality, augmented reality, and AI-driven personalization, offering users even more immersive and tailored experiences.
- **E-Commerce Integration:** Social commerce is expected to expand, allowing users to directly purchase products and services within platforms, including travel-related bookings and experiences.
- **Video Content Dominance:** Video content will likely remain a dominant format, with live streaming, short-form videos, and interactive video experiences gaining prominence.
- **Influencer Evolution:** The influencer landscape might evolve, with micro-influencers and nano-influencers gaining traction, resulting in more authentic and niche-focused content.
- **Privacy and Data Protection:** As concerns about data privacy grow, platforms might focus on enhanced privacy features and user control over data sharing.
- **Virtual Travel Experiences:** Virtual tourism could become more sophisticated, offering users virtual tours, 360-degree videos, and immersive travel experiences from the comfort of their homes.
- **AI-Enhanced Customer Service:** AI-powered chatbots and customer service tools will likely continue to improve, providing quicker and more accurate responses to user queries.
- **Localized and Hyper-Targeted Content:** Social media platforms may further refine content delivery, offering highly localized and hyper-targeted content to users based on their preferences and locations.
- **Environmental and Sustainable Travel:** Social media could play a role in promoting environmentally conscious and sustainable travel practices, influencing both businesses and travellers.

- **Crisis Communication and Resilience:** Social media will remain crucial for crisis communication, helping businesses and travellers adapt to unexpected disruptions like natural disasters and pandemics.
- **New Platform Innovations:** The emergence of new social media platforms with innovative features could affect how users interact, share, and engage with content.
- **Social Responsibility and Activism:** Social media might continue to serve as a platform for raising awareness about social and environmental issues, encouraging responsible travel and activism.
- **Integration with Everyday Life:** Social media could become even more integrated into users' daily routines, shaping how they plan, communicate, and share experiences.

In the future, social media's relevance is expected to extend beyond just communication, becoming a central hub for various activities, including travel planning, e-commerce, education, and advocacy. Apart from all these, travellers nowadays are becoming more conscious and aware of the impacts their tours. There has larger push for more sustainable travel options and activities.

- 83% of travelers are experiencing travel guilt about their past trips they now worry may not have been sustainable (passport-photo.online)
- 67% of travelers claim they have purchased carbon offsets at least once when booking plane, bus or train tickets in the past two years (passport-photo.online)
- 89% of travelers claim they will travel more sustainable in the next 24 months (passport-photo.online)
- 81% of travelers confirm that sustainable travel is important to them, with 50% saying that recent news about climate change has influenced them to make more sustainable travel choices (booking.com)
- 59% of travelers say they want to leave the place they visit better than when they arrives, with 33% revealing that they chose to travel outside of peak season to avoid overcrowding (booking.com).
- 64% of travelers say that they would avoid popular tourist destinations and attractions to ensure more even dispersal of the impact and benefits of their visit (booking.com)
- 66% of travelers want to have experiences that are representative of the local culture (booking.com)

VI. CONCLUSION

The importance of social media platforms in tourism is undeniable, as they have transformed the way travelers explore, engage with and share their travel experiences. The usages of social media for promoting travel have cost implications as well. Promotion through social media is inexpensive and at the same time, it ensures the growth of the business. Companies save a lot of money since the advertising and marketing campaigns require less expenditure now. Social media platforms have affected the tourism industry in a very positive manner. People want to visit unexplored destinations and share photos and videos of their travels on social media; these social media posts serve as a free advertisement for unexplored places and attract new customers. Social media offers easy and abundant information about the places people are planning to visit, travelers use this information and

are expected to have a memorable time since they already know what to expect of a particular place.

Apart from Above Mentioned Points the Other Reasons are:

- Social media allows tourism businesses to reach a vast audience globally. It is an effective way to engage with potential travellers, display destinations, and share appealing visuals.
- Tourism businesses can provide real-time updates about events, promotions, and travel advisories, keeping travellers well informed.
- Travellers often share their experiences through photos, videos, and reviews on social media. This user-generated content serves as authentic recommendations and testimonials, influencing others to explore similar destinations.
- Social media helps tourism businesses build and enhance their brand awareness. They can establish a distinct online presence, making it easier for potential tourists to find and choose their services.
- Platforms like Twitter and Facebook enable direct interaction between tourists and businesses. This fosters better customer service, as travellers can ask questions and receive quick responses.
- Social media allows tourism businesses to target specific demographics, interests, and behaviours. This precision enhances the effectiveness of marketing campaigns.
- Collaborating with travel influencers can significantly boost a destination's visibility. Their content can inspire their followers to explore new places.
- During crises like natural disasters or pandemics, social media can be used to provide timely updates, safety information, and alternative plans to travellers.
- Tourism businesses can gather valuable insights from social media data. This includes feedback, preferences, and trends that help them tailor their offerings.
- Some platforms offer integrated booking and reservation features, allowing travellers to plan and book their trips directly.

Finally, I would like to conclude by saying social media platforms play a pivotal role in the tourism industry by connecting businesses with travellers, fostering engagement, and shaping travellers' perceptions and decisions.

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