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Editor's Note

Tourism is a global economic powerhouse, contributing significantly to the GDP of many countries and providing employment to millions. However, the environmental and social costs associated with traditional tourism practices have raised concerns about its long-term sustainability. Green and sustainable tourism investments offer a promising solution to this dilemma by fostering economic growth while protecting the planet and benefiting local communities.

Green and sustainable tourism investments encompass a wide range of strategies and practices aimed at minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and society while maximizing economic benefits. These investments focus on responsible resource management, community engagement, and the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. Investing in renewable energy sources such as solar panels and wind turbines can power hotels, resorts, and transportation services, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. Sustainable tourism investments prioritize efficient waste management systems. Recycling, composting, and reducing single-use plastics are essential steps towards minimizing pollution.

Investing in the protection and maintenance of natural reserves and national parks ensures the long-term viability of tourism destinations while preserving biodiversity. Implementing water-saving technologies, promoting responsible water use, and protecting local water sources help conserve this precious resource.

Green and sustainable tourism investments prioritize hiring locally, empowering communities economically, and reducing income inequality. Supporting cultural heritage through investments in local arts, crafts, and traditions helps preserve the unique identities of tourist destinations. Sustainable tourism investments diversify the local economy, reducing dependence on a single industry and increasing overall resilience.

Green and sustainable tourism investments are not just an ethical choice; they are a smart economic strategy. By balancing economic growth with environmental preservation and social well-being, these investments create a win-win scenario for tourists, host communities, and future generations. As responsible stewards of our planet, it is our duty to support and encourage these investments, ensuring that tourism continues to thrive while safeguarding the natural and cultural treasures that make our world so beautiful.

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Influence of Social Media on Travelers:
A Conceptual Analysis

Nitesh Goyal, Geetanjali Thakur & Arun Singh Thakur

Abstract

Social media and web are two emerging technologies which has reshaped the way of living. Our lives are predominated by internet. Social media has gained a substantial popularity in online traveling. This study aims to provide a conceptual analysis on prior research work done on social media's influence on travelers and also provide a scope for further researchers. The social media websites assist consumers in sharing and posting travel related experiences and opinions which serve as information for others. The results of the study indicated that, consumers depend upon the experiences shared by others before planning a trip and most used websites for online traveling is tripadviser.com. The findings also suggest that consumer now prefer online travelling application for travel as they entice customers' friendly package deals and cost-saving solutions. The reports also suggested that the size of the global internet travel market was estimated to be 433 billion US dollars in the year 2022 and 691 billion US dollars by 2026 and two-thirds of the worldwide travel and tourism market's revenue as of 2021 came from online sales channels.

Keywords: Social Media, Travelers, Online Websites, Tourists, Experiences

Introduction

The evolution of internet has fundamentally reshaped the way of living. Social media and web has brought pervasive change in business all around the world. Social media has the greatest impact on people. Our daily lives are predominated by social media. In this era of technology, social media has become a participatory platform where people share information, experiences and opinions. In recent years, two "mega trends" have emerged on internet namely, social media websites and search engines (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009). These social media websites include various forms of consumer generated content such as blogs, reels, collaborating projects etc shared on sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter. Boyd & Ellison, 2008 defined social media sites as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". On the other hand search engines provide generous information within few seconds. Search engines have become a powerful gateway for providing abundant information according to consumer needs. The usage of social media and search engine is increasing at an alarming rate. These websites influence the consumer in one or another way. Now days, these social media websites have become an emerging platforms for sharing views, or reviewing things before actually buying them. Social media has gained substantial popularity in online travelers too. As many of these social websites assist consumers to post and share their travel related comments, experiences, opinions which further serve as information for others.

Within a short span of time, social media platform has gained a lot of popularity and consumer base and has become an ideal platform for the tourism industry and travelers. Social media sites have become an important center for collecting information to plan trips (Zeng & Gerristen, 2014). The travelers get insight knowledge about the place or ambience before the trip. Sometimes, social media sites also create curiosity to visit a certain

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place which was not planned earlier. Consumers, now a day's depend upon the experience of the other travelers to plan for vacation. The people evaluates the consumers rating giving by travelers and then plan a trip.

Consumers, are likely to plan their own vacations, particularly through OTAs(Online Travelling Agencies). These internet businesses enable customers to make reservations comfortably from their homes and frequently entice customers with package deals and cost-saving solutions. As a result, many travelers now book their vacations online instead of through conventional brick-and-mortar travel firms. Two-thirds of the worldwide travel and tourism market's revenue as of 2021 came from online sales channels. The size of the global internet travel market was estimated to be 433 billion US dollars of 2021, and 691 billion US dollars by 2026 (Statista Research Department, 2022).

Another internet travel company that has risen rapidly in recent years is Airbnb, which operates an online marketplace for holiday rentals with a focus on home stays. The gross booking value of Airbnb reservations globally reached a peak in 2021 of around 47 billion dollars (Statista Research Department, 2022).

The tourism sector generates huge revenue to every country. The highest revenue in tourism sector of 2023 is of US $ 190 billion followed by China and Germany (Statistic Research department, 2023). France receives the most visitors from throughout the world (Global connect, 2022). In terms of travel and tourism, India is placed tenth out of 185 nations in 2019 by the World Travel and Tourism Council. A total of 39 million workers, or 8% of all occupations in India in 2020, were employed in the tourist industry. The travel and tourism sector contributed $178 billion to the GDP in 2021; this amount is predicted to rise to $512 billion by 2028 (IBEF, 2023). Bangladesh accounted for the biggest percentage of international visitors to India in 2022 (24.89%), followed by the United States, the United Kingdom,

and Australia (India Tourism Statistics, 2022).

A survey found that the travel business had a greater average interaction rate with brand posts on Instagram last year than the fashion industry. Additionally, social media marketing was identified as the most significant digital transformation issue among hotels in Europe in 2022 (Statista Research Department,, 2023). The most popular travel and tourist websites were booking.com, tripadvisor.com, and airbnb.com (Statista Research Department, 2023).

This paper had made an attempt to evaluate the past literature on social media usage with reference to tourism and its influence on travelers. The authors have tried to provide a conceptual analysis on influence of social media on travelers.

Review of Literature

This section provides insight details about the previous work done on influence and usage of social media with reference to tourism sector and travelers.

Social media is extensively used by everyone for sharing their views, opinions and life experience. Currently, social media has become one of the ways to earn money, many people now a day's earn their livelihood through social media websites. Social media has great influence on travelers while planning for holiday trip (Yuan et al., 2022). It has been reported that 69 % of world's population use social media for tourism (Manyevere & Kurger, 2019). Also, 8 % leisure travel use internet to plan a trip. Social media act as guide or approver for travelers (Liu et al., 2020). This information provided on websites act as a primary motivation for travelers. Social media allows user to share user generated content and it is highly referred by travelers before actually visiting to the place. Few authors have developed models to study the effect of social media on travelers

Table 1 Variable Adoption in Past Literature

Author (s)	Objective	Population And Sample Size	Model/ Theory	Variables
Martin et al., 2020	To examines the influence of economic, social, physical, and technological attributes on tourism	Spain 382	Social Exchange Theory	Extrinsic variable (perceived economic, social, technological and perceived physical value) and Intrinsic value (experience, anxiety and risk)
Sakshi et al., 2020	To analyze the determinants of actual social media (SM) usage for travel planning	North India 561	TAM MODEL	Technological Convenience, Perceived Risk, Perceived Risk, Media Relation, Trust, Perceived Ease Of , Perceived Usefulness, Behavioral Intention And Actual Usage
Muslim et al., 2020	The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of social media on attitudes and behavioral intentions towards Umrah package among generation X and Y	Malaysia (muslim), 384		Social Media Experience (Interaction And Sharing Of Content), Attitude And Behavioral Intention

Bilgihan et al., 2016	To develop a theoretical model that tests the precursors of intention to share knowledge behaviors in the context of OSNs	USA 322		Perceived Ease Of Use, Utilitarian Benefits, Subjective Norms, Belief In Integrity, Switching Cost, Intention To Share Knowledge
Chung & Koo, 2015	To examine the travel information searches using social media as a new search behavior from a value perspective	695 Korea	VAM (value based model)	Benefits (Information & Reliability), Sacrifice (Complexity And Effort), Perceived Value And Social Media Usage
Aluri et al., 2015	to examine the effectiveness of embedded social media channels on hotel websites and their influence on traveler behavior	434 US	User and gratification approach	Perceived Enjoyment, Perceived Informativeness, Perceived Social Interaction , Satisfaction And Purchase Intention
Nusair et al., 2012	To evaluate Generation Y users' social interaction with online social networks (OSNs	US 515		Information Sharing, Social Interaction, Innovativeness, Perceived Risk And Perceived Utility, Social Interactions, Loyalty And Trust ,
Jeong , 2004	The study examined one actual B&B Web site in a Midwestern area and identified antecedent variables of customers' behavioral intentions to use a B&B Web	Mid eastern state of US, 123		Information Need, Web Site Quality, Satisfaction, Behavioral Intention

The study done by Chung & koo, 2015 used VAM (value based adoption model) which examined the travel information searches using social media in Korea. The study revealed that benefits have positive and significant influence on travel information search whereas that perceived sacrifices were the major barrier to social media. The factors which influence consumer's value perception were perceived enjoyment. Perceived enjoyment also had positive impact on perceived ease of use (Sakshi et al., 2020). Respondents were also satisfied with the information provided by websites which lead to increase in behavioral intention too (Jeong, 2004). Room location and reputation also affect the respondent's satisfaction. Aluri et al., 2015 indicated that perceived informativeness and perceived enjoyment had the major role in improving travelers purchase intention; people were satisfied with website which lead to have positive impact on purchase intention; respondents who used hotel websites embed with social media has positive had higher level of satisfaction than others. It was also found that, people trusted more on the recommendation given by their friend and family (McCarthy et al.,2010, Fabricius & Eriksson, 2017) and positive word of mouth is the major factor which influenceinf factor for people to visit a particular destination (McCarthy et al.,2010; kiralova et al., 2015; Zivlovic et al., 2014; Leung et al., 2013). Nusair et al., 2012 conducted study on generation Y (17-30years) of America and resulted that they were highly active and engaged on social media sites for online travel information search and considered innovativeness in technology as the most important criteria in social interaction but perceived risk had negative influence on social usage the results of this study were in line with the result of work of

Martin et al., 2020. Perceived risk also had negative impact on behavioral intention and trust (Sakshi et al., 2020). It was also found that there exists a high correlation between influences of social to the changes made in holiday plans (fotis el al., 2011)

The individual prefer different sources for planning a business and leisure trips (McCarthy et al.,2010). As 40 % people select the same hotel for business trips as recommended by organization but for leisure trips they rely more on the recommendation given by peers and family. Further, social media is also used for different purpose at different phases of vacations. At pre trip phase of vacation, it is used for searching accommodation and attraction options, during trip used to locate a specific leisure attraction and post trip social media is used to share experiences, post photos and videos (Yuan et al., 2021).

Jeong, 2004 reported that search engines were the most used method to find B&B sites whereas the result of study done by Xiang & Gretzel, 2009 were different and stated that people used Google for searching info related to travelling and 50 % of millienals referred to user generated content for travel information. Additionally study done by Muslim et al., 2019 on generation X and Y of Malaysia, reported that social media had no influence behavioral intention as people of this country were not familiar with the technology and they had more trust on advice given by their friend and family and most used online website for booking was Umarh travel due to their low prices packages. Martin et al., 2020 analyzed factor which affect online purchase intention of travelers

and reported that perceived social value had the largest impact on purchase intention, whereas negative emotion posted by other travelers lead to create anxiety among people which had negative impact on purchase intention. Further previous experiences and physical factors lead repeat purchases. Moreover, perceived economic value and perceived technological value has positive impact on electronic word of mouth.

Lastly there were few studies which stated that cash and credit will be mostly used in future for travel purpose (Singh & Ranjan, 2019) and internet and travelling agencies will be the priority in future for booking a trip. A study done by Munar et al., 2013 found that social media was not perceived as trustworthy information source but people highly trusted official hotel websites to search for information.

Effect of Cultural Differnce in Decsion Making Process

The literature also provided few studies which did comparison between two nation and analyzed the behavior and decision making process of consumer of two different nation.

The travelers of Asia pacific region were more likely to share their experiences through blogs after their trips (Zivkovic et al., 2014). Majorly women's of Spain buy travel and tourism services online but Colldan et al., 2019 indicated that men were pre dominantly using social media in all areas, expect for Paris.

Amaro & Duarte, 2017 indicated the culture of two different countries that is UK and Portugal. They found that Britishers tend to book trips online more often than Portuguese. The behavioral intention was almost similar in both countries towards social media. The only difference lies in search of information as Portuguese search for general information about place, attraction and activities whereas Britishers search for prices, amenities and hotel room. These differences were due the collectiveness, feminism and power distance. Law et al., 2008 studied travel website uses and cultural influence between China and US travelers, indicated that for Chinese quality of information and destination were main attribute on social media whereas functionality of website were considered by Americans. Moreover, Americans travelers had higher propensity to book a trip through travel websites. Lastly, Manyevere & Kruger, 2019 examined the influence of social sites on trip decision making process. The study results were as follows; Roman people used YouTube for planning a trip and millennial generation US preferred Instagram; whereas people of turkey were influenced by personal experience comments, opinions of other travels posted on social media sites.

Top Rated Websites By Travelers

It was found that 94 % websites of hotel were linked to atleast one social media websites (Aluri et al., 2015) and approximately 50 % people downloaded travel application to search for destination (Zivkovic et al.,

2014). The most preferred social media websites site for information search were Facebook, twitter and YouTube (Manyevere & Kruger, 2019, Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Pabel & Prideaux, 2016; Ana & Istudor, 2019; Kiralova & Pavliceka,2015). People also trusted and relied on the blogs, live experience posted by people to plan a trip (Pabel & Prideaux, 2016; Munar & Jacobesen, 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, Zivkovic et al., 2014) and many a times people changed their plans after reading the reviews, opinions and photos posted on social media by other travelers (Muslim et al., 2019; Kiralova & Pavliceka,2015). Further, the top rated website which is accessed by almost every individual for planning a trip is Tripadvisor.com (Amaro & Duatre, 2016; Mccarthy et al., 2010; Kiralova & Pavliceka,2015; Manyevere & Kruger, 2019; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, Manyevere & Kruger, 2019; Pabel & Prideaux, 2016). These social media websites are used to get information related to prices, amenities, pictures (Liu et al., 2020) and B&B official websites are accessed only to know about the property. The other sites which people also used are iqougo.com (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), Agoda (Decena & Delfin, 2022), Wechat, sinoweibo and Ctrip and during the vacation goggle maps were used to search for attraction in the destination (Zivkovic et al., 2014). It was also highlighted that time response factor was a crucial factor in deciding whether an individual will use the website again or not. The consumers preferred these websites due their easy minimalistic design and the factors which affect customer's satisfaction were customer rating and reviews, payment convenience and image quality of destination. Lastly, the authors also suggested that hotel websites should be upgraded and updated with latest technology to have more consumer base (Aluri et al., 2015).

Findings of The Study

The above analysis of literature indicated that, social media had great impact on choice of travelers while planning a trip. The usage of social media for dismantling information related to search for destination or planning a trip is not new. Zeng & Gerristen, 2014, opined that the trend of using social media platforms for tourism industry got its popularity after 2010. The most used websites by travelers is tripadivor.com followed by official websites of destination. The consumers' rely more on the information shared by other travelers and plan their trips according to ratings and reviews given (Narangajavana et al., 2017; Sakshi et al., 2020). 68% of global respondent trust consumer opinions posted online but people also have rely on word of mouth of their friends and family (Kiralova & Pavliceka, 2014).

It was found that people are satisfied with information provided by websites. The factor which had positive impact are perceived enjoyment and perceived informativeness on purchase intention but perceived risk and negative emotion had negative impact on choice of

travelers. In the study of Sakshi et al., 2020, technology convenience had the highest impact on PEOU towards actual use of social media for travel planning. In Malaysia, social media had no influence on behavioral intention of travelers whereas millennial of US highly used social media to search for travel information. It was also found that young generations are more active during trip on social media platforms than older generation. Furthermore, the major factor which had positive impact on behavior of consumers was advice given by family and friend and positive word of mouth related to the destination.

Different people have different behavior towards social media for travel purpose. The business travelers always prefer companies' recommendation whereas, leisure travelers will follow suggestions and recommendations given by their close ones (Narangajavana et al., 2017). Additionally, for consumers image of destination is a deciding factor for finalizing the place. The image of destination if affected by user generated content (UGC) (Riera et al., 2015). Narangajavana et al., 2017, also concluded that people make UGC to socialize and create relation only.

Moreover, the cultural differences were also observed. Romans used YouTube to plan trips, us people referred to Instagram and people of turkey relied on comments and reviews posted by others travelers; Britishers tend to books trips more often than Portuguese; Americans had higher tendency to book trip through social media website than Chinese; Chinese considered quality where American considered functionality of social media website and for Russians, social media act as an inspiration to plan next holiday trip (Fotis et al., 2011).

The study of Fotis et al., 2011, resulted that social media is most preferred or used after the trip or vacation for sharing their experiences. The findings of study Fotis et al., 2011 and in line with study done by Riera et al.,2015 which also stated that UGC is most trusted than tourism websites, travel agency and advertisements. The social media is used for different purpose while planning the trip. For example, before trip, consumer gather ideas about places to visit and narrow down their choices, while during the trip it is used only to stay connected with their family and friends and post trip is it used to post pictures and their experiences (Fotis et al., 2011).

The usage of social media website by travelers is due to their ease of use, convenience, shared reviews and rating by other travelers.

Conclusion and Future Scope

This paper has studied the influence of social media on travelers. It was revealed that usage of social media is increasing day by day for different purposes. Social media websites have become a platform for travelers to share their views, experiences of places travelled. These posts serve as information of new travelers. Social media is the most important source for gathering information related to destination or planning a trip.

The social media has great influence on traveler's choice while planning a vacation. Perceived enjoyment and informativeness and positive impact on social media usage but perceived risk and negative emotion were barriers in social media usage. People were satisfied with the information provided by travelling application due their ease of use. The UGC, exerts a influence or motivated people to visit a new place.

Lastly, people lives are predominated by these social media for different purposes. The social media give a 360 degree view about travel places in advance to consumers.

The future research could be conducted on the following topics. Firstly, study based on conceptual and theoretical model to know impact of social media on consumers. Secondly, a comparative study on online travelling modes and offline mode of booking a trip. Thirdly, a comparative study may be conducted between hotels and airbnb options of different nations.

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