



The Role Of Social Media In Shaping Tourism Behaviour: A Review Of Literature

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Abstract: This review examines the influence of social media on tourism behaviour, synthesising recent studies to explore how platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook shape destination choices, tourist engagement, and marketing strategies. The literature is organised thematically, covering the impact of social media content, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), influencers, destination image, psychological factors, and regional contexts. Findings highlight that visually engaging content, credible peer reviews, authentic influencer narratives, and culturally resonant strategies drive tourist decisions, with variations across demographics and regions. Gaps in research, particularly in regional and socio-economic contexts, are identified, suggesting directions for future studies. This review provides insights for destination marketing organisations (DMOs) to leverage social media effectively.

Keywords: *Social media, tourism behaviour, destination choice, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), influencers, destination image, psychological factors, regional contexts, destination marketing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook has transformed how tourists make travel decisions. These platforms provide rich, visual, and peer-generated content that influences destination preferences, engagement, and loyalty. Social media's role extends beyond information sharing to shaping perceptions through User-Generated Content (UGC), influencer endorsements, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). This review synthesises recent literature to understand how social media impacts tourism behaviour, focusing on content influence, e-WOM, influencers, destination image, psychological factors, and regional variations. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview for researchers and destination marketing organisations (DMOs) to optimise

social media strategies. The role of social media in shaping tourism behaviour has garnered significant attention in recent research, particularly with the rise of platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. This review synthesises the literature thematically, focusing on key aspects such as the influence of social media content, the role of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), the impact of influencers, the importance of destination image, and the mediating role of psychological factors like flow experience and trust. The studies collectively highlight how social media transforms destination choice, tourist engagement, and marketing strategies, with a particular emphasis on global and regional contexts.

II. METHODOLOGY

This review adopts a thematic synthesis approach, drawing on 51 peer-reviewed studies published between 2000 and 2025, sourced from academic databases and journals. Studies were selected based on their relevance to social media's role in tourism, covering platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. The literature is organised into six themes: social media content, e-WOM, influencers, destination image, psychological factors, and regional contexts. Both global and region-specific studies are included to provide a balanced perspective. The review also identifies research gaps to guide future investigations.

Objective of the Study: This review aims to evaluate how social media platforms influence tourists' destination choices through content, e-WOM, and influencers. It examines the role of destination image, psychological factors, and regional contexts in shaping tourism behaviour. The study identifies research gaps and proposes directions for future tourism marketing research.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Influence of Social Media Content on Destination Choice

Social media content, particularly user-generated content (UGC) and short-form videos, significantly influences tourists' destination choices by providing rich, visual, and relatable information. Harb, Sadiq, and Singh (2025) constructed a tourism-demand index using 47 million geo-tagged Instagram posts in GCC countries, demonstrating that social media signals predict quarterly tourist arrivals more accurately than traditional indicators like Google Trends. This suggests that real-time monitoring of platforms like Instagram enables marketers to adjust campaigns dynamically. Similarly, Quynh and Dang (2024) found that a 10% increase in #VietnamTravel posts on Instagram preceded a 4% rise in domestic flight bookings to featured provinces, indicating that visual content acts as a leading indicator for travel demand. Li and Xu (2024) explored the impact of Douyin (China's TikTok) videos on Chinese Generation Z travellers, revealing that immersive first-person filming, culturally resonant background music, and concise itinerary tips enhance viewers' intention to visit featured cities. The authors noted that sensory richness, beyond mere information, drives destination appeal. Likewise, Liu, Jiang, and Arshad (2024) confirmed that narrative coherence and suitable music in TikTok videos foster emotional absorption, motivating Generation Z and Millennials to choose unfamiliar Asian destinations. Seow and Azmi (2024) highlighted the importance of cultural resonance in Malaysia, where TikTok videos incorporating local

dialects and humour outperformed purely scenic content in shaping destination image. Kaye (2023) found that Generation Z travellers prefer TikTok and YouTube over traditional platforms like Facebook for travel advice, as short-form videos provide authenticity cues that guide first-time international trip planning. Tesin et al. (2022) noted that travel-related Instagram content significantly increases user interest in destinations, with influence varying by sociodemographic factors. These findings underscore the power of visually engaging and culturally relevant content in shaping travel decisions, particularly among younger demographics.

Role of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) is a critical driver of tourist decision-making, as it provides credible, peer-generated insights. Albarq (2014) demonstrated that e-WOM positively influences tourists' attitudes and intentions to visit Jordan, with online communities fostering trust. Lončarić, Ribarić, and Farkaš (2016) described e-WOM as a cost-effective tool for tourism companies, offering objective presentations of products that enhance competitiveness. Kanwel et al. (2019) showed that e-WOM, combined with a strong destination image, improves visitor satisfaction and loyalty in Pakistan. Bigne et al. (2019) found that positive and specific online reviews enhance destination image and visit intention, particularly for familiar destinations, though unfamiliar ones require a baseline level of awareness for e-WOM to be effective. Azazz and El Labban (2018) noted that kind remarks and reviews on social media significantly influence repeat visits to heritage sites. Al-Mamari et al. (2023) highlighted that highly edited Instagram images, or "imaginary landscapes," increase destination appeal among Emirati millennials, but only when peer comments validate authenticity, underscoring the interplay between aesthetics and e-WOM. Park, Lee, and Han (2007) revealed that the quality and quantity of online reviews impact purchase intentions, with high-involvement consumers particularly sensitive to review quality. Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008) noted that e-WOM compensates for the lack of personal relationships in electronic travel agencies, as customer reviews provide reassurance traditionally offered by travel agents. These studies collectively affirm that e-WOM amplifies trust and influences travel decisions through peer validation.

Impact of Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers play a pivotal role in shaping destination preferences by leveraging parasocial relationships and credible storytelling. Kusumawati and Hertati (2024) found that Indonesian Generation Z travellers prioritise parasocial bonds with TikTok travel creators over price when selecting weekend getaways, challenging classical utility theory. Sokolova et al. (2019) suggested that parasocial interactions, rather than physical attractiveness, drive engagement with influencers, particularly among younger audiences. Nogueira and Silva (2023) investigated Portuguese Instagram influencers, noting that captions emphasising personal growth and environmental care encourage followers to visit lesser-known nature sites, while overtly sponsored content diminishes trust. Xu and Pratt (2018) found that congruence between influencers and destinations enhances visit intentions among Chinese Generation Y travellers. Palazzo et al. (2021) highlighted that different influencer types create varied engagement levels depending

on the destination, with implications for promoting sustainable tourism. Magno and Cassia (2018) provided evidence that travel bloggers influence followers' travel intentions by creating relatable narratives. These studies suggest that influencers' authenticity and alignment with destination values are critical for fostering trust and motivating travel decisions.

Destination Image and Brand Equity

Destination image is a cornerstone of tourism marketing, significantly shaped by social media. Gallarza, Gil Saura, and Calderón García (2002) described destination image as a complex, multidimensional construct that influences tourist perceptions. Gaffar, Abdullah, and Putri (2018) showed that social media marketing enhances the image of nature-based destinations in Indonesia. Kanwel et al. (2019) linked destination image to tourist satisfaction and loyalty, while Uboegbulam and Akpakpan (2021) found that a strong destination image at Port Harcourt Pleasure Park significantly boosts satisfaction. Mim et al. (2022) noted that destination image, alongside other factors, positively influences tourists' choices in Bangladesh, though travel motivation was less impactful. Asnawi et al. (2022) found that social media and product destinations significantly affect local destination choices in North Sulawesi, but destination image had a limited role. Hilal (2019) demonstrated that social media marketing efforts like entertainment and e-WOM contribute to Sri Lanka's brand equity, though interaction and trendiness require more attention. Valente, Moura, and Carvalho (2024) showed that Instagram engagement with intangible-heritage festivals enhances perceived authenticity, strengthening visit intentions. Önder, Gunter, and Gindl (2019) found that Facebook likes serve as a leading indicator for tourism demand in Austrian cities, highlighting the role of social media metrics in shaping destination image. These studies indicate that a strong, authentic destination image, amplified through social media, drives tourist interest and loyalty.

Mediating Role of Psychological Factors

Psychological factors like flow experience, trust, and perceived authenticity mediate the relationship between social media content and travel decisions. Li and Xu (2024) and Liu, Jiang, and Arshad (2024) identified flow experience as a full mediator between video appeal and destination choice, driven by sensory richness and emotional absorption. Khuong and Huong (2016) highlighted trust as a mediating factor between online ads and purchase intention in Vietnam's tourism industry, with online communities indirectly influencing decisions through trust. Jamaludin et al. (2017) found that trust in social media content, including platforms like Instagram and TripAdvisor, significantly influences travellers' destination choices. Narangajavana et al. (2017) noted that trust in UGC shapes expectations about tourism attractions, enhancing destination appeal. Kang and Schuett (2013) showed that perceived satisfaction and identification mediate the sharing of travel experiences on social media, encouraging further engagement. Matikiti-Manyevere and Hattingh (2020) revealed that perceived ease of use, usefulness, and enjoyment positively influence attitudes toward social media use among South African youth, with perceived behavioural control and subjective norms further shaping intentions. These findings highlight the

critical role of psychological engagement in translating social media exposure into actionable travel decisions.

Regional and Cultural Contexts

The influence of social media varies across regions and cultural contexts, with local nuances shaping its effectiveness. Narayana and Jawahar Babu (2021) noted that social media enables global reach for India's tourism industry, allowing tourists to assess destinations and costs online. Venkatesh and Suresh (2016) identified culture and information search as key drivers of Indian tourism promotion, with factors like location, technology, and travel reviews also influential. Kumar (2014) emphasised the role of media, including social platforms, in shaping positive tourism images in India through cultural integration. Samanta and Sahoo (2017) explored Odisha Tourism's use of social media, highlighting its role in presenting destination images and engaging consumers. Hamid et al. (2016) found that social media enhances Malaysia's image as an Islamic tourism destination, with visual appeal and user-friendly applications driving engagement. Kavoura and Stavrianeas (2015) noted that social media fosters strong visitor bonds in Athens, Greece, through co-created experiences. Alghizzawi, Salloum, and Habes (2018) stressed the need for accurate and accessible information on Jordan's tourism social media platforms to drive purchase decisions. Nyman, Westin, and Carson (2018) highlighted the importance of accessible destination content for families with disabled children, suggesting a nuanced approach to social media marketing. These studies underscore the need for culturally tailored and context-specific social media strategies to maximise tourism impact.

Practical Implications for Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs)

DMOs increasingly rely on social media to enhance marketing effectiveness, but strategies vary in sophistication. Molina et al. (2020) found that DMOs use Facebook as a supplement to traditional marketing, focusing on scenic beauty, culture, and cuisine to engage users. Királ'ová and Pavlíček (2015) argued that social media is integral to competitive destination marketing, requiring creative and interactive content to meet modern travellers' expectations. Roque and Raposo (2016) identified shared social media practices among DMOs, emphasising the need for strategic communication plans. Icoz, Kutuk, and Icoz (2018) noted that while social media increases knowledge about tourism services, younger demographics like university students in Turkey rarely purchase through these platforms, suggesting a need for targeted strategies. Mariani, Mura, and Di Felice (2017) found that sharing visual content and posting on weekends boosts engagement on DMO Facebook pages, though UGC is often underutilised. Prem Kumar, Mishra, and Yedla (2021) highlighted the effectiveness of Indian DMOs' Facebook strategies in promoting destinations, though customer service and research applications remain limited. Tham, Mair, and Croy (2019) emphasised the importance of context in social media influence, including engagement levels, destination familiarity, and planning complexity. These insights suggest that DMOs must adopt dynamic, data-driven social media strategies to enhance destination appeal and convert online engagement into actual visits.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

Despite the extensive literature, several gaps remain. Most studies focus on national or urban contexts, with limited attention to regional areas like the Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh, where unique household structures, income levels, and travel habits may influence social media's impact. The literature often isolates single social media cues (e.g., likes, music, or visuals) without integrating these with socio-economic factors like age, income, or family size. Additionally, studies rarely differentiate between commercial influencers and casual bloggers or explore the grounds for trust in social media content. Indian studies predominantly measure "intention to visit" without tracking actual bookings or expenditures, limiting practical guidance for regional businesses. The homogeneity assumption of social media users overlooks diverse motivations and trust dynamics, particularly in culturally distinct regions. Future research should address these gaps by examining regional contexts, integrating socio-economic profiles with digital signals, and tracing the conversion of online engagement into tangible tourism outcomes.

IV. KEY FINDINGS

Social media significantly influences tourism behaviour by shaping destination choices through visually engaging user-generated content (UGC), short-form videos, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), with platforms like Instagram and TikTok driving demand, particularly among Generation Z and Millennials (Harb et al., 2025; Quynh & Dang, 2024; Li & Xu, 2024). Electronic word-of-mouth fosters trust and enhances destination appeal through credible peer reviews, especially when validated by online communities (Albarq, 2014; Bigne et al., 2019). Influencers play a pivotal role by leveraging parasocial relationships and authentic storytelling, with their effectiveness tied to destination congruence and cultural resonance (Kusumawati & Hertati, 2024; Nogueira & Silva, 2023). Destination image, amplified by social media, boosts tourist satisfaction and loyalty, though its impact varies by region (Gallarza et al., 2002; Kanwel et al., 2019). Psychological factors like flow experience and trust mediate the relationship between social media content and travel decisions (Li & Xu, 2024; Jamaludin et al., 2017). Regional and cultural contexts highlight the need for tailored strategies, as social media's effectiveness depends on local nuances and accessibility (Narayana & Jawahar Babu, 2021; Hamid et al., 2016). Destination marketing organisations (DMOs) can enhance engagement by adopting data-driven, context-specific social media strategies, though underutilisation of UGC and customer service limits their impact (Molina et al., 2020; Mariani et al., 2017).

V. CONCLUSION

Social media profoundly shapes tourism behaviour through engaging content, credible e-WOM, authentic influencers, and strong destination images, with psychological factors like trust and flow experience mediating these effects. Regional and cultural contexts underscore the need for tailored strategies to maximise impact. For destination marketing organisations (DMOs), adopting data-driven approaches, leveraging user-generated content, and enhancing customer service on social platforms can

improve engagement and convert online interest into actual visits. Future research should focus on regional contexts like the Godavari districts, integrate socio-economic factors such as age and income, and track actual tourism outcomes like bookings and expenditures to provide practical guidance for businesses.

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