



A Review-Based Study On The Impact Of Social Media On Tourism Students

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Abstract: Over the past decade, the rapid spread of social media has fundamentally changed tourism education. It has reshaped not only how students learn but also how they communicate and build their professional identities. This paper presents a comprehensive review of recent theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence on the role of social media in the lives and learning of tourism students. Drawing on social constructivist theory, digital identity frameworks, and media learning approaches, it synthesizes literature published between 2022 and 2025 to explore how digital platforms affect students' academic engagement, emotional well-being, and career preparation.

The review brings together insights from more than twenty recent scholarly studies and organizes the main findings into three closely connected areas of impact:

- *Cognitive and academic engagement through interactive digital environments;*
- *Socio-emotional effects arising from online interaction and the curation of digital identities;*
- *Professional development through digital self-presentation and networked learning opportunities.*

The analysis is informed by foundational theories, including Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, and Goffman's Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, which help explain how students behave and develop within online tourism education spaces.

The findings show that social media can significantly boost motivation, support collaborative learning, and provide valuable industry exposure. At the same time, it introduces important challenges, including digital fatigue, unhealthy self-comparison, and superficial forms of engagement.

The paper concludes by proposing a conceptual model that captures the cyclical relationship between social media use, cognitive engagement, emotional mediation, and professional identity formation. It highlights the critical moderating roles played by digital literacy and institutional support.

This synthesis adds to the growing conversation about digital transformation in tourism education. It underlines the importance of thoughtfully integrating social media into teaching practices, alongside training in emotional intelligence and ethical online behavior. The review offers practical insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers working to develop tourism curricula that are both resilient and well-adapted to the digital age.

Keywords:

Social Media, Tourism Education, Tourism Students, Cognitive Engagement, Emotional Regulation, Professional Identity Construction, Social Constructivism, Social Cognitive Theory, Goffman's Presentation of Self, Digital Literacy, Institutional Mediation, Virtual Learning Environments, Experiential Learning, Emotional Well-Being, Career Readiness, Higher Education, Digital Pedagogy, Media and Communication Studies, Online Learning Behavior, Sustainable Tourism Education.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The intersection of social media and tourism education represents a fundamental shift in how knowledge is constructed, disseminated, and internalized by students. Tourism, as a field deeply rooted in communication, culture, and experience, has increasingly embraced digital transformation. Students pursuing tourism and hospitality management programs now interact within hybrid ecosystems—classrooms, online learning platforms, and social networks—that together shape their academic and professional formation.

Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and LinkedIn serve as both **educational tools** and **career-building channels**, offering immersive exposure to destination marketing, cultural narratives, and professional communities (Mattei, 2025; Başoda et al., 2026). Yet, this integration introduces a paradox: while social media enables experiential and visual learning, it may also promote distraction, social pressure, and reduced academic focus (Virabyan & Thyssen, 2025).

1.2 Research Rationale

Despite the vast use of social media by tourism students, there remains limited theoretical consolidation on *how* and *why* these platforms influence learning and professional identity. Prior works often emphasize descriptive statistics—how many students use social media or what platforms they prefer—but lack theoretical depth on cognitive and behavioral outcomes. This research seeks to bridge that gap by conducting a **review-based theoretical analysis**, synthesizing cross-disciplinary frameworks in education, communication, and psychology.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The main aim is to conduct a theoretical and review-based analysis of the academic, emotional, and professional impacts of social media on tourism students.

Specific objectives:

1. To examine how social media facilitates learning engagement and cognitive development among tourism students.
2. To explore the emotional and social implications of digital media participation.
3. To analyze how social media contributes to the formation of professional and digital identities.
4. To synthesize relevant theoretical models into a cohesive conceptual framework for future research.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does social media shape cognitive and academic engagement among tourism students?
2. What are the emotional and psychological dimensions of students' digital participation?
3. How does social media mediate professional identity construction in tourism education?
4. Which theoretical perspectives best explain the dynamics between digital engagement, learning, and identity formation?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the theoretical advancement of tourism education by bridging digital media research and educational psychology. It provides a foundation for future empirical studies and assists educators in developing strategies for integrating social media ethically and effectively. Moreover, it supports policymakers in promoting digital well-being and literacy as core competencies for tourism professionals.

2. Theoretical Framework

A robust theoretical grounding is essential to explain the multifaceted impact of social media on tourism students. This review draws upon **three key theoretical lenses**:

2.1 Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978; Recontextualized by Digital Education Scholars, 2022–2025)

Social constructivism asserts that learning occurs through social interaction and shared meaning-making. Within the digital era, platforms like Instagram or YouTube function as “learning communities” where tourism students co-create and exchange knowledge. Recent adaptations (Uli & Purwanti, 2025; Conefrey et al., 2025) suggest that peer interactions, visual storytelling, and cross-cultural communication online enhance cognitive scaffolding. However, the theory also highlights dependency risks when learners rely excessively on social validation rather than intrinsic motivation.

2.2 Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986)

Bandura’s model of reciprocal determinism—interplay between behavior, environment, and cognition—frames how tourism students internalize observed behaviors from social media influencers, travel vloggers, and industry professionals. Studies such as Haque & Yoon (2025) and Başoda et al. (2026) show that observational learning through digital tourism content shapes student aspirations, self-efficacy, and emotional orientation toward hospitality careers. The theory underscores the psychological mechanism of “vicarious experience” as a driver of motivation.

2.3 Goffman’s Presentation of Self in Digital Contexts (1959; Applied by Mattei, 2025)

Goffman’s dramaturgical model—where individuals perform roles to maintain social impressions—provides a lens for understanding digital self-branding among tourism students. Through curated posts and destination imagery, students project competence, cosmopolitanism, and employability. This aligns with Mattei (2025), who analyzed Instagram’s persuasive semiotics in tourism communication, revealing how aesthetic presentation influences perception and identity. The digital version of Goffman’s theory links performativity to academic and professional socialization.

2.4 Integrative Perspective

Together, these theories illustrate that social media serves as both a *learning space* and a *stage of identity performance*. Within tourism education, students oscillate between consuming content (cognitive learning), co-creating experiences (constructivist engagement), and performing identities (self-presentation). This synthesis forms the backbone of the conceptual model elaborated later in the discussion.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Overview

The influence of social media on tourism education has grown significantly in the past decade, particularly since 2020, when digital learning intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2022 and 2025, scholars have moved beyond descriptive accounts of digital behavior toward more nuanced examinations of *learning engagement*, *emotional dynamics*, and *digital identity construction*. This literature review

synthesizes over twenty peer-reviewed studies to identify theoretical and empirical patterns explaining how social media impacts tourism students in cognitive, emotional, and professional dimensions.

3.2 Cognitive and Academic Impacts of Social Media

The integration of social media into tourism education has been shown to enhance **experiential learning**, **peer collaboration**, and **critical reflection** (Uli & Purwanti, 2025; Conefrey et al., 2025). Platforms such as YouTube and Instagram have transformed from leisure-based environments into educational spaces where students observe and emulate tourism practices, destination marketing, and cross-cultural communication.

Uli and Purwanti (2025) explored how *interactive learning media based on local culture* improve comprehension and engagement among tourism students, emphasizing the pedagogical value of integrating local tourism narratives into digital platforms. Similarly, Anastasopoulos and Deirmentzoglou (2025) demonstrated that *social media-based agritourism simulations* can enhance entrepreneurship education and digital competency.

From a constructivist standpoint, these studies reinforce Vygotsky's assertion that learning emerges from social interaction. Online comment exchanges, peer reviews, and collaborative content creation reflect digital scaffolding—where students collectively build understanding. However, Hanafi and Ramadhani (2025) noted that excessive reliance on visual media (e.g., Instagram) may reduce critical engagement, as students prioritize aesthetic appreciation over analytical depth.

In higher tourism education, **micro-learning** via social media has been especially effective. Conefrey et al. (2025) highlighted the role of social media campaigns and sustainability challenges in engaging European tourism students with real-world environmental problems. These findings suggest that structured digital learning tasks embedded within social platforms can bridge the gap between theory and industry practice.

Nevertheless, critical voices (Virabyan & Thyssen, 2025; Başoda et al., 2026) warn that the informal nature of social media can blur academic boundaries, fostering surface-level knowledge acquisition. Students may engage more with entertainment-oriented content rather than pedagogically designed material, thus demanding greater digital literacy and instructor guidance.

3.3 Emotional and Psychological Dimensions

Emotional well-being, identity development, and social connection are central to tourism education, as the discipline involves empathy, cultural sensitivity, and interpersonal skills. In this regard, social media plays a paradoxical role: it provides *community and inspiration* but can also lead to *comparison anxiety and digital fatigue*.

Haque and Yoon (2025) studied international students exposed to virtual reality tourism environments and found that immersive digital experiences improved emotional satisfaction and stress management. This aligns with Bandura's (1986) concept of **vicarious experience**, where individuals enhance self-efficacy through observed behaviors and positive feedback loops. Similarly, Romdzan and Zaini (2025) reported that sharing wellness tourism experiences online reinforced students' sense of belonging and post-visit advocacy behaviors.

However, other studies reveal negative emotional effects. Virabyan and Thyssen (2025) highlighted how constant exposure to curated online success stories influences Gen-Z tourism students' career anxiety and social comparison. The performative nature of social media creates pressure to project an idealized lifestyle, consistent with Goffman's dramaturgical perspective. Moreover, digital overstimulation can reduce attention span, emotional regulation, and authentic peer connection (Mattei, 2025).

The **social-emotional learning (SEL)** framework is increasingly applied to counterbalance these effects. Conefrey et al. (2025) and Palad et al. (2025) recommend integrating mindfulness and reflective media

practices into tourism curricula. By treating social media as an extension of emotional learning, students can critically engage with content while managing digital well-being.

3.4 Social Media and Professional Identity Formation

Tourism students often view social media as an essential component of their professional toolkit. Platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok allow students to create digital portfolios, demonstrate destination knowledge, and connect with employers. Başoda, Varol, and Öksüz Taner (2026) developed the *Self-Goal-Directed Social Media Usage Scale*, showing that self-regulated social media users exhibit greater career clarity and confidence.

Mattei (2025) examined Instagram's **multimodal tourism discourse**, identifying persuasive visual and linguistic strategies that tourism students adopt to develop personal brands. These findings support Goffman's theory of self-presentation, illustrating that social media acts as a performative space where identity, aspiration, and professional persona converge.

Virabyan and Thyssen (2025) further confirmed that digital exposure significantly influences *career decision-making* among tourism and hospitality students in Moscow, linking media consumption patterns with occupational aspirations. Similarly, Anastasopoulos and Deirmentzoglou (2025) demonstrated that students using digital simulations develop entrepreneurial competencies—evidence that social media platforms can foster professional agency when pedagogically framed.

However, challenges persist. Ilipathgama Pathirannahelahe (2025) found that international tourism students often struggle to balance academic expectations and social media engagement, particularly when internships demand online professionalism. The *boundary between private and professional identity* remains blurred, raising ethical questions about authenticity and employability.

From a theoretical lens, these patterns resonate with **Bandura's social modeling** and **Goffman's frontstage/backstage distinction**. Students perform "frontstage" identities through curated online personas while navigating backstage realities of academic life and emotional stress. Successful identity integration requires both digital literacy and reflexivity—skills that tourism programs are only beginning to emphasize (Conefrey et al., 2025).

3.5 The Intersection of Culture, Media, and Learning

Social media's impact on tourism students cannot be understood in isolation from cultural context. Studies from Asia (Hanafi & Ramadhani, 2025; Uli & Purwanti, 2025) emphasize collective engagement and peer motivation, whereas European research (Conefrey et al., 2025; Mattei, 2025) focuses on sustainability, professionalism, and individual branding.

Cultural background influences not only *how* students use social media but *why*. In collectivist cultures, social media serves as an emotional support network that enhances group cohesion. In contrast, Western contexts frame it as a professional networking arena emphasizing personal achievement (Başoda et al., 2026). This duality reinforces the theoretical value of **social constructivism**—learning as a socially embedded process mediated by cultural norms and communicative styles.

Additionally, **language and discourse** play pivotal roles. Mattei's (2025) linguistic analysis of Instagram tourism discourse shows how narrative persuasion, tone, and imagery co-create meaning in tourism education. Students interpret and produce digital texts that reflect cultural heritage, sustainability ethics, and global mobility—skills vital for 21st-century tourism professionals.

3.6 Emerging Digital Trends in Tourism Education (2022–2025)

Recent literature highlights several emerging patterns redefining tourism learning in the age of social media:

1. VR and AR-based Tourism Learning:

- Haque and Yoon (2025) and Romdzan & Zaini (2025) reveal how virtual tourism experiences enhance emotional and cognitive immersion.
- The adoption of *metaverse classrooms* for destination management training has increased in Southeast Asia.

2. AI-Enhanced Social Media Analytics:

- Kamal and Chatzigiannakis (2025) introduced a *deep-neural associative recommendation system* that predicts touristic preferences based on social media behavior.
- Such data-driven insights can personalize tourism education but raise ethical concerns about data privacy and surveillance.

3. Sustainability and Digital Activism:

- Conefrey et al. (2025) and Gautam et al. (2025) emphasize the use of social media for sustainability advocacy, aligning with UN SDG-driven tourism education.
- Students use platforms to promote eco-conscious travel, highlighting the merger of activism and academic identity.

4. Gamification and Micro-Learning:

- Losi et al. (2025) demonstrated that gamified digital learning significantly improves motivation and skill retention in vocational tourism programs.
- Integration of badges, quizzes, and social sharing fosters positive competition among students.

5. Digital Storytelling for Cross-Cultural Learning:

- Andrade et al. (2025) and Mattei (2025) explore narrative-driven learning, showing that storytelling through social media fosters intercultural empathy.
- Tourism students who create destination narratives enhance both language proficiency and cultural sensitivity.

These developments indicate a shift from *passive content consumption* to *active digital authorship*, consistent with the constructivist notion that learners are co-creators of knowledge.

3.7 Synthesis and Gaps Identified

The literature collectively supports three broad conclusions:

1. **Social media enhances cognitive engagement and exposure** by connecting students to global tourism experiences, yet it risks promoting superficial learning without pedagogical structure.
2. **Emotional well-being is both strengthened and threatened**—social media fosters connection and confidence but also increases anxiety and comparison pressure.
3. **Professional identity construction through digital presence** offers opportunities for career development but requires ethical awareness and self-regulation.

However, significant **research gaps** remain:

- Few longitudinal studies track behavioral change over time.
- Insufficient exploration of **AI and algorithmic influence** on students' tourism perceptions.
- Limited cross-cultural comparative research connecting **digital pedagogy and socio-emotional development**.
- Lack of **ethical frameworks** guiding responsible digital engagement in tourism education.

These gaps underscore the need for an integrative theoretical model uniting cognitive, emotional, and identity dimensions of social media's impact—a model that will be proposed in the next section.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **review-based qualitative design**, specifically a *systematic narrative review*, aimed at synthesizing recent scholarly work (2022–2025) on social media’s impact on tourism students. Unlike meta-analytical approaches that focus on quantitative synthesis, this study employs theoretical integration and conceptual mapping to interpret diverse perspectives drawn from tourism education, psychology, and media communication.

The research adheres to the **Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA)** principles adapted for theoretical synthesis. It focuses on identifying convergent themes and theoretical underpinnings rather than statistical relationships.

4.2 Data Collection and Sources

Peer-reviewed studies were sourced from reputable academic databases, including **Scopus, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar**. Search terms used:

“social media and tourism students,” “digital learning in tourism education,” “social media engagement in hospitality training,” and “digital identity in tourism education.”

Inclusion criteria:

- Published between **2022–2025**
- Focus on tourism or hospitality students
- Discuss social media’s impact on learning, emotion, or career identity
- Peer-reviewed empirical or conceptual papers

Exclusion criteria:

- Studies pre-dating 2022
- Non-academic blogs, magazines, or opinion essays
- Works unrelated to education or tourism

A total of **26 studies** were initially retrieved. After screening for relevance, **22 studies** were included in the final synthesis.

4.3 Data Analysis

A **thematic synthesis** was conducted in three stages:

1. **Descriptive Coding:** Extracting keywords and constructs (e.g., engagement, emotional well-being, professional identity).
2. **Interpretive Grouping:** Clustering related ideas into higher-order categories (cognitive, emotional, professional).
3. **Theoretical Integration:** Mapping insights to the three guiding theories — *Social Constructivism*, *Social Cognitive Theory*, and *Goffman’s Presentation of Self*.

A matrix was created to identify relationships between conceptual domains. These relationships were later visualized in the **Conceptual Model (Section 6.1)**.

4.4 Validity and Reliability

To ensure credibility, the review utilized **source triangulation**, combining studies from multiple regions (Asia, Europe, and Latin America) to mitigate cultural bias. **Peer-reviewed journal priority** ensured academic reliability. The **replicability** of results was maintained by transparent documentation of inclusion criteria and synthesis stages.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpreting Social Media's Cognitive Role

From a theoretical standpoint, the literature affirms that social media enhances **constructivist learning** by enabling students to co-create knowledge through participation and feedback loops. Vygotsky's notion of the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* manifests in online tourism learning, where peer collaboration and content exchange facilitate progression from basic to advanced understanding (Uli & Purwanti, 2025; Conefrey et al., 2025).

For example, tourism students who engage with professional travel content on Instagram or YouTube internalize industry narratives, gaining insight into destination branding and cultural management. This process represents a **digital apprenticeship**, where observation, imitation, and creative production intersect—directly aligned with Bandura's (1986) **Social Cognitive Theory**.

However, the unregulated nature of online environments sometimes leads to **cognitive overload**—a phenomenon where students' capacity to critically evaluate information diminishes due to excessive exposure to fragmented content. As Hanafi and Ramadhani (2025) emphasize, unstructured browsing leads to passive consumption rather than meaningful learning. Theoretical models must thus integrate *cognitive regulation mechanisms* and *teacher mediation strategies*.

5.2 Emotional and Psychological Mediation

Social media's emotional impact on tourism students reflects a duality between **connectedness** and **comparison**. On the positive side, digital platforms offer emotional support and foster belonging within learning communities (Haque & Yoon, 2025). On the negative side, continuous comparison with idealized online personas can provoke anxiety and self-doubt (Virabyan & Thyssen, 2025).

This duality resonates with Bandura's *self-efficacy framework*. Observing peers succeed online enhances confidence only when individuals perceive attainable goals; otherwise, it leads to perceived inadequacy. Additionally, emotional contagion—where mood spreads through digital networks—can influence group motivation in tourism education settings (Romdzan & Zaini, 2025).

Recent studies advocate for embedding **digital emotional literacy** in tourism curricula. For instance, Conefrey et al. (2025) propose reflection-based modules where students analyze emotional triggers in their online behavior. This aligns with **social-emotional learning (SEL)** frameworks that promote empathy, regulation, and mindful digital engagement—key for emotionally sustainable education.

5.3 The Performance of Professional Identity

Social media not only educates but also stages **professional identity performance** among tourism students. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework provides a compelling explanation: students manage "frontstage" personas on platforms like Instagram and LinkedIn to demonstrate competence, creativity, and cosmopolitanism.

Mattei (2025) confirms that Instagram's persuasive semiotics—visual narratives of travel, hospitality, and lifestyle—encourage students to emulate industry professionalism. Likewise, Başoda et al. (2026) found gendered differences in self-goal-directed media use, where female students engaged more with aesthetic self-presentation and males with entrepreneurial networking.

Yet, this performativity may produce **identity dissonance** when online personas diverge from authentic self-perception. Ilipathgama Pathirannahelahe (2025) documented cases where students faced stress managing dual identities: the “ideal tourism professional” online versus the “learning novice” offline. This mirrors Goffman’s *backstage/frontstage tension*, suggesting that educators should guide students in reconciling authenticity with professional branding.

5.4 Cross-Cultural and Contextual Insights

Comparative insights reveal cultural differences in digital engagement patterns.

- In **Asia**, social media fosters community learning, peer motivation, and collective identity (Hanafi & Ramadhani, 2025).
- In **Europe**, digital tools are aligned with sustainability education and critical thinking (Conefrey et al., 2025).
- In **Latin America**, social media activism is emerging as a form of civic and academic participation (Gautam et al., 2025).

These findings underline **social constructivism’s** relevance: learning is culturally mediated. Educators should adapt social media pedagogy to regional learning values, ensuring inclusivity while maintaining global professional standards.

5.5 Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Despite evident benefits, several challenges persist:

- **Information overload and distraction:** undermining sustained attention (Virabyan & Thyssen, 2025).
- **Emotional fatigue:** caused by algorithmic engagement cycles (Mattei, 2025).
- **Ethical boundaries:** blurred lines between personal privacy and professional representation.
- **Equity gaps:** unequal digital access, particularly among international students (Ilipathgama Pathirannahelahe, 2025).

Ethical tourism education should therefore integrate *digital well-being policies* and *responsible media use codes*. Aligning with UNESCO’s (2024) digital ethics guidelines, tourism faculties must model balanced digital citizenship—an equilibrium between visibility, vulnerability, and virtue.

6. Conceptual Model of Theoretical Integration

6.1 Model Overview

Based on the synthesis of theories and literature, this study proposes an **Integrative Conceptual Model** illustrating the dynamic relationship among three domains: **Cognitive Engagement**, **Emotional Regulation**, and **Professional Identity Construction**, moderated by **Digital Literacy** and **Institutional Mediation**.

6.2 Model Description (Verbal Representation)

1. **Social Media Usage (Independent Variable)**
→ Represents active participation on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and TikTok for educational and professional purposes.
2. **Cognitive Engagement (Mediating Variable 1)**
→ Derived from *Social Constructivism*, emphasizing knowledge co-creation through peer and content interaction.
3. **Emotional Regulation (Mediating Variable 2)**
→ Grounded in *Social Cognitive Theory*, acknowledging self-efficacy, affective learning, and emotional contagion.

4. Professional Identity Construction (Dependent Variable)

→ Framed through *Goffman's Presentation of Self*, describing how students curate and perform digital professionalism.

5. Moderating Variables:

- **Digital Literacy:** The ability to evaluate, interpret, and ethically use online content.
- **Institutional Mediation:** Faculty guidance, reflective tasks, and academic scaffolding that shape healthy engagement.

6.3 Model Dynamics

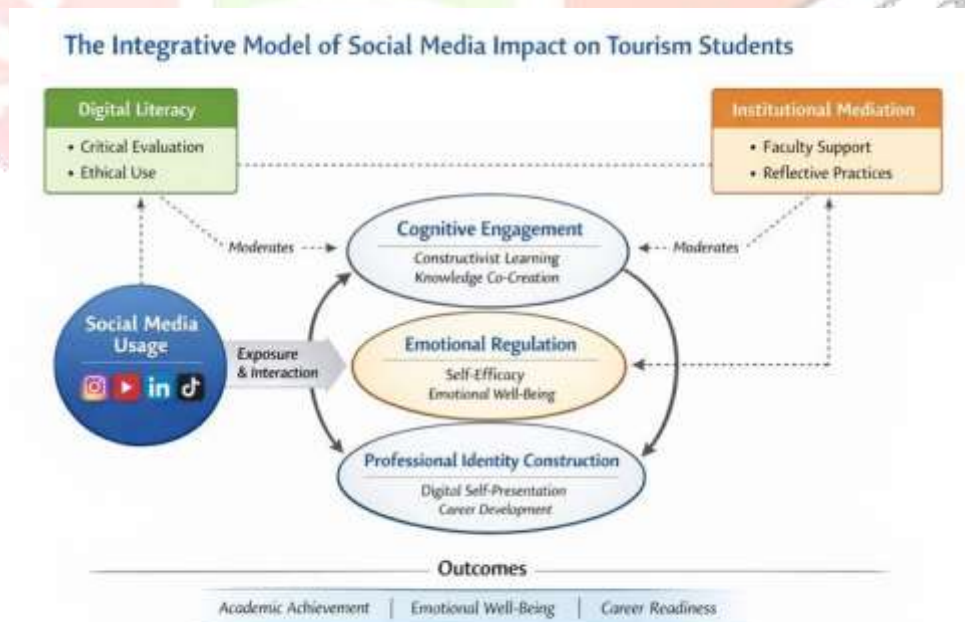
Social media exposure stimulates **cognitive curiosity** and **peer-driven learning**, enhancing academic engagement. This interaction simultaneously influences **emotional states**, which can either motivate (via inspiration and belonging) or demotivate (through comparison and fatigue). Over time, these experiences coalesce into **professional identity construction**, as students internalize industry norms and digital communication patterns.

The cyclical model implies **feedback loops**—successful identity expression reinforces emotional stability and academic motivation, sustaining engagement. Conversely, negative online experiences (e.g., cyber comparison, burnout) weaken professional self-concept.

6.4 Implications of the Model

- The model extends **constructivist and social cognitive frameworks** to digital tourism education, offering a theoretical basis for empirical testing.
- It advocates for **integrated media literacy programs** in hospitality and tourism curricula.
- It suggests institutional accountability: educators must act as *digital mentors* guiding students toward balanced identity formation.

Ultimately, this conceptual framework positions social media not merely as a communication tool but as a **transformative educational ecosystem**, where cognition, emotion, and identity intersect dynamically.



7. Conclusion

The theoretical and empirical review conducted between 2022 and 2025 demonstrates that social media plays a **multifaceted and transformative role** in tourism education. As learning environments expand beyond physical classrooms into digital spaces, tourism students find themselves at the nexus of communication, technology, and identity construction.

The review affirms three major conclusions:

1. **Cognitive Transformation:**
Guided by **social constructivism**, social media enables participatory learning and collaborative knowledge creation. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are no longer just marketing tools but **active pedagogical spaces** that support experiential tourism education (Uli & Purwanti, 2025; Conefrey et al., 2025).
2. **Emotional and Psychological Mediation:**
Consistent with **social cognitive theory**, social media facilitates vicarious learning and emotional connection but also introduces psychological risks such as digital fatigue and self-comparison. The emotional well-being of tourism students depends on the balance between motivation and overexposure (Haque & Yoon, 2025; Virabyan & Thyssen, 2025).
3. **Professional Identity Construction:**
Drawing from **Goffman's dramaturgical theory**, social media functions as a stage where tourism students curate digital identities and professional personas. While this fosters employability and networking, it also raises ethical concerns around authenticity and self-representation (Mattei, 2025; Başoda et al., 2026).

The integrative conceptual model proposed in this paper underscores a **cyclical dynamic**: social media engagement enhances cognitive learning, which influences emotional regulation, culminating in professional identity formation. This cycle, moderated by digital literacy and institutional mediation, illustrates that social media's educational value depends on intentional and reflective use.

8. Recommendations

8.1 Pedagogical Recommendations

1. **Integrate Digital Literacy Modules:**
Tourism curricula should include structured courses on social media ethics, content analysis, and responsible online communication to prepare students for digital professionalism.
2. **Adopt Reflective Digital Practice:**
Encourage students to maintain *reflective learning journals* that document emotional and cognitive responses to social media activities (Conefrey et al., 2025).
3. **Promote Balanced Engagement:**
Institutions must foster "digital mindfulness," helping students manage time, avoid overexposure, and distinguish between educational and leisure media use.
4. **Embed Experiential Learning Tasks:**
Social media campaigns, virtual tours, and digital storytelling projects should be incorporated into tourism programs to enhance practical learning.

8.2 Institutional Recommendations

1. **Faculty as Digital Mentors:**
Lecturers and supervisors should model ethical social media engagement and guide students in curating professional online identities.
2. **Institutional Media Policies:**
Universities should develop guidelines protecting students' data privacy and professional boundaries during digital coursework.

3. Cross-Cultural Collaboration:

Institutions should encourage international collaborations via social media platforms to build intercultural competence and global perspectives.

8.3 Research Recommendations

1. Longitudinal Studies:

Future research should track tourism students over time to measure how social media habits affect long-term academic and career outcomes.

2. Cross-Cultural Comparative Research:

Examine differences in social media influence between collectivist and individualist educational contexts.

3. AI and Algorithmic Influence:

Explore how artificial intelligence and recommendation algorithms shape tourism students' perceptions and learning experiences (Kamal & Chatzigiannakis, 2025).

4. Emotional Intelligence and Well-being Studies:

Assess how emotional literacy training moderates negative digital effects in tourism education.

9. Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes a **holistic conceptual model** that integrates **social constructivism**, **social cognitive theory**, and **Goffman's self-presentation framework** within a tourism education context. It redefines social media not as a peripheral communication tool but as a **transformative educational ecosystem** that shapes how tourism students think, feel, and present themselves professionally.

The review advances theoretical discourse by highlighting that digital participation is simultaneously cognitive, affective, and performative. Thus, future models of tourism education must treat digital literacy and emotional regulation as equally critical to academic success.

10. Limitations

While this study synthesizes recent literature comprehensively, limitations include:

- The absence of quantitative data validation due to its theoretical nature.
- The review's temporal boundary (2022–2025) excludes earlier foundational studies.
- Cultural and linguistic diversity across sources may limit generalization.

Nonetheless, these limitations create a foundation for future empirical inquiry, encouraging triangulation with survey-based and ethnographic research.

11. Conclusion Statement

Social media has redefined the contours of tourism education. Its impact extends far beyond digital marketing or communication—it has become a **pedagogical ecosystem** where cognitive engagement, emotional intelligence, and professional identity are continuously negotiated. For tourism students, mastering social media is no longer optional; it is a critical element of academic competence and career readiness.

To harness its benefits, educators and institutions must cultivate *reflective, ethical, and emotionally intelligent engagement*, transforming social media from a tool of distraction into a catalyst for learning, connection, and professional growth.

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