Study on Impact of Social Media in Destination Planning

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ABSTRACT: Undoubtedly, one of the most vibrant economic sectors in the world is tourism. Businesses have been profoundly impacted by the advances of social media, mostly because they have made new marketing methods possibly easy and more accessible. The tie-in of tourism and social media in today's world is highly synchronised. The way people decide now is very different owing to social media. People rely on other people's reviews to choose whether or notto trust a travel service. From researching destinations to finding accommodations and activities, social media has become an integral part of the travel experience. Hence, social media and its increased dominion in the field of tourism have brought forward various conscious and inadvertent mechanisms of tourist judgment through an affluence of information and analysis. The research conducted here determines the influence of social media in selection of their travel destinations amongst the tourists in Gujarat. Along the lines it also helps in understanding the elements of social media marketing impacting their decision regarding finalizing the destination to travel. Both international and national tourism shall be essential determinants of this study.

Keywords: Social Media, Destination Marketing, Destination Planning, Social media, Tourism, Customer behaviour, Destination branding, Technology

Introduction to Study: Social media's addition has caused a paradigm shift in communication methods globally by enabling users to connect, observe, and share information. User-generated content (UGC) has dramatically increased in recent years as the knowledge society has developed along with the Internet and social media. Social media is the tool used by destination marketing organisations (DMOs) to promote their locations and build relationships with potential tourists. They disseminate breath-taking images and videos of the nearby sights, activities, and events, inspiring tourists to go there. DMOs interact with passengers on social media by responding totheir queries, offering advice, and promoting exclusive offers.

Tourism destination marketing is heavily reliant on social media. Tourists can use it as a platform to share their trip tales, along with images, videos, and opinions about various locations, lodging options, and activities. Because prospective travellers are more likely to believe the reviews and advice of their peers than traditional advertising, user-generated content has a significant impact on the travel industry. In addition, social media influencers with a sizable fan base on websites like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have developed into significant figures in the destination marketing industry. In order to reach their following, who are frequently young and daring travellers, DMOs collaborate with these influencers.

In general, destination marketing has changed thanks to social media, becoming more involved and interesting for tourists. It enables both passengers to interact with destinations and share their experiences as well as DMOs to promote their locations and establish more direct and intimate connections with potential visitors. Social media data can be analysed using GIS to identify popular tourist attractions, trending topics, and customer reviews, which can be used to create tailored tourism experiences that cater to the specific needs and interests of different tourist groups. For example, by analysing social media data, tourism planners can identify the most popular tourist activities in a destination and develop tourism packages that combine these activities to create unique and memorable experiences for tourists.

Hence, the tourist sector has long been seen as an engine for local growth since it

generates employment opportunities, boosts consumer spending, and boosts export earnings. Tourism encompasses a range of cultural, social, and economic activities that entail individuals moving from their residential areas to other locations, both domestically and internationally, for purposes such as relaxation, indulging in local cuisine, entertainment, shopping, leisure activities, education, business, spiritual experiences, health and wellness, and visiting friends and family. This involves transportation to the chosen destination and arrangements for accommodation. There are various forms of tourism, including but not limited to, sports tourism, religious tourism, medical tourism, cultural tourism, rural tourism, spiritual tourism, tea tourism, and wine tourism.

The objective of this research was to examine the impact of social network communication on destination selection and its significance for potential tourists. To achieve this aim, an empirical study was conducted using a self-administered online questionnaire that was structured based on previous literature and adapted to suit the study's requirements. The study aimed to determine whether respondents perceived social networks to be effective tools for communication and simplifying the information gathering process when selecting a destination, as well as whether they found the information collected to be helpful and relevant.

The survey was distributed online through Google Forms and shared widely to capture as broad a range of participants as possible. A convenience sampling method was employed, selecting participants who used social networks in Rajkot. A sample size of 150 was taken for questionnaires and were fully completed and deemed adequate for factor analysis. It was crucial to recruit a homogeneous sample of social media users to ensure consistency in the results.

Despite the growing importance of social media in promoting travel and tourism in various locations throughout the world, limited study has been done on the relationship between socialmedia use and travel destination choice. This study tries to evaluate the influence of social media on individuals' choice of travel destinations based on this scant empirical information.

This study will advance our understanding of social media's role in the growth of the tourism industry.

Literature Review of the Study: Blackshaw (2006) identifies "Social Media" as internet-based programmes that provide user- generated content, which includes media impressions made by users, often informed by relevant experience, and preserved or shared online for quick access by other consumers with impressionable tastes. In a technical sense, social media refers to a multiplicity of applicationsthat let users "Post," "Tag," "Digg," or "Blog" on the internet. With the aim of educating one another about goods, services, brands, and concerns, customers create, initiate, disseminate, and use a variety of new and evolving sources of online knowledge, which are included in the material produced by these applications (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2006).

Social media has evolved into a vital platform for businesses as it enables marketers to maintain effective client relationships. Users write their own reviews on blogs, visual communities, and social networking platforms, creating a platform for sharing any music, video, photo, or other media files on YouTube, Flickr, and the internet (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010; Pan et al., 2007). A destination will be satisfactorily visible, according to Kiráová (2014) and Pergolino et al. (2012), through a well-designed communications plan that focuses on social media. Using this communication plan will enhance brand awareness, brand engagement, online word of mouth (WOM), friends like trust, and social validation.

User-generated content (UGC) has significantly increased in the travel, tourism, and hospitality industries, especially with the explosive growth of online travel reviews (OTRs). For instance, TripAdvisor-branded websites claimed to have the largest travel community in the world with more than 320 million reviews and opinions covering more than 6.2 million attractions, lodgings, and restaurants. Booking.com, Reviews, claimed to have more than 75 million verified hotel reviews from actual guests (TripAdvisor.com, About Us).

There have been many studies on the influence of UGC, and especially OTRs, as types of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) marketing of travel-related decisions as well as on the destination image formation. Moreover, to a certain extent, travel-related writings, as travelogues, travel blogs, and OTRs, can and do function as sources of information for visitors of a destination and can be used in ways similar to conventional travel guidebooks (Marine-Roig, E. 2017).

There have been numerous studies on the impact of UGC, and particularly OTRs, as eWOM marketing strategies on both the construction of destination images and travel-related decisions. Moreover, writings about travel, such as travelogues, travel blogs, and OTRs, can and do serve as sources of information for travellers to a destination and can be used in ways that are akin to traditional travel guidebooks (Marine-Roig, E. 2017).

In a study by Xiang and Gretzel, the significance of social media was examined (2010). The authors looked at how frequently social media websites appeared in search engine results while people were looking for travel-related information. Their investigation revealed that social media accounts for a sizeable portion of the search results, suggesting that search engines connected users to social media websites directly.

According to Buhalis (1998), travellers products are bought before being used and far from the point of consumption. As a result, timely and reliable information that is related to tourist needs is essential to ensuring both customer satisfaction and the competitiveness of the destination. It is also important to remember that the tourist sector is leading the way in terms of internet usage and online transactions. Inversini (2019) noted the significance of reputation and the trend towards online reputation in a recent literature review. The research study discovered that real-time reputation assessment has become possible thanks to the aggregation of social media and increasing processing capability of consumers. Also, it has enabled individuals to instantlygrasp and comprehend reputational breakdowns.

Yadav and Arora (2012) believe that social media is a crucial instrument for tourist marketing that can improve the reputation of the place. Given the foregoing, travel companies should consider social networking sites an essential component of their marketing plans. When compared to traditional media techniques, Kaplan and

Haenlein (2010) discovered that using social media platforms, tourist destinations can reach out to potential visitors more effectively and at a lesser cost. The research makes it clear that social media serves as a means of engagement with significant cost advantages for all the stakeholders.

According to (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020), 21.5 million individuals working in the tourism sector have lost their jobs as a result of the three COVID-19 waves that first impacted the nation in early 2020. According to Reddy, the number of visitors to the nation decreased by 93% during the first wave of the COVID-19 outbreak, 79% during the second wave, and 64% during the third. "We have done research on how the pandemic has affected tourism. According to the report, the first wave saw 14.5 million job losses, the second wave had 5.2 million job losses, and the third wave saw 1.8 million job losses "During the Lok Sabha's Question Period, he remarked. Before the epidemic, according to Reddy, 38 million people worked in the country's tourism sector.

Many nations had shut their borders, postponed events and flights, and placed travel restrictions in an effort to stop the virus' spread. As a result, international flights have decreased by more than half, and the travel and tourism sector has temporarily laid off half of its staff. (Gössling et al., 2020). Up to 2.1 trillion dollars in losses and up to 75 million jobs are expected to be associated with tourism in 2020. The biggest hit industries are airlines, hotels, and restaurants, with airlines forecast to lose a record \$84 billion in 2020 and hotels and restaurants closing as a result of fewer tourists. The tourism sector would fall by 50% in 2020, leading to major job losses, making it difficult for it to continue operating during this crisis(Sanjita Jaipuria, et al. 2020).

Several scholars have looked at social media in the context of tourism, focusing on a variety of issues such the perceived advantages and risks of social media use (Parra-Lopez et al., 2011; Kang, 2011). Importantly, 78% of travellers use social media for travel-related objectives, demonstrating the importance of social media in purchase decisions (Murphy & Chen, 2016). Social media's significance in the communication process has also been studied (Pennington- Gray et al., 2011; Habeeb et al., 2021).

It is stated that prior study does not adequately reflect the current social media environment when it comes to travel planning and decision making because of substantial technology improvements and an increase in communication in recent years via social media. This study focuses on how the use of social networks for information search and communication affects the choice of trip location. The goal is to determine how simple it is to get information on social media and to look at how useful it can be for travellers looking to organise their travels. The goal of the study is to understand how social network users view their use of these platforms, as well as how they communicate with one another and obtain information, all of which have an impact on how they decide where to go on vacation.

Research Methodology for the Study: In this study, the SPSS software was used to analyse the data. The primary goal was to investigate the relationship between the various variables-related hypothesis. The researchers used a number of statistical tools, including ANOVA tables and the Inter-Item Correlation Matrix, to accomplish this goal. These methods are frequently used to assess the validity and reliability of the data in social science research.

A statistical technique called the inter-item correlation matrix looks at how each item on a scale relates to all the other items. This aids in determining whether the scale contains any redundancy and whether any items may be eliminated without compromising the accuracy of the scale. This method is crucial for ensuring that the measuring scale is accurate.

Additionally, the ANOVA tables are used to test the hypothesis by contrasting the means of various groups. To see if there was a statistically significant difference between the variables in this study, the researchers examined the means of the various variables. In order to test the hypothesis at a 95% significance level, the researchers used reliability analysis, which had a 5% margin of error.

Overall, the statistical methods used in this investigation were exacting and were intended to guarantee the reliability and validity of the findings. The researchers were able to analyse the data thoroughly using SPSS software, which gave them important

new information about the connections between the variables they were studying. The bifurcation of the statements analysed are mentioned in the annexure below.

Hypothesis:

H1: The decision-making process of selecting a travel destination is not positively associated with the use of social networks.

H2: The decision-making process of choosing a travel destination is not positively influenced by communication within social networks.

H3: Information obtained through social networks does not have a positive impact on the decision-making process of choosing a travel destination.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 1: Sample Demographic Data

F	eatures	Frequency	Percentage
	Female	77	51.3%
Gender	Male	71	47.3%
	Prefer not to say	2	1.3%
	Under 18	3	2.0%
	18-24	133	88.7%
Age	25-34	9	6.0%
	Above 34	5	3.3%
	Undergraduates	126	84.0%
Education	Postgraduates	22	14.7%
	Others	2	1.3%
Frequencyof	Several times a week	34	22.7%
social network	Once a week or less	7	4.7%

usage	Several times a day	105	70.0%
	Never	4	2.7%

The table presents the frequency and percentage of respondents' characteristics and social media usage. In terms of gender, 51.3% of the respondents were female, 47.3% were male, and only 1.3% preferred not to say. Regarding age, the majority of respondents (88.7%) fell within the 18-24 age group, with only a small percentage (2.0%) being under 18 years old. In terms of education, 84.0% of respondents were undergraduates, 14.7% were postgraduates, and only 1.3% fell into the "other" category. When it comes to the frequency of social network usage, a significant portion of respondents (70.0%) reported using social networks several times a day, while only 4.7% used them once a week or less. A small percentage (2.7%) reported never using social networks.

Table 2: Social Network Usage – Decision Making Correlation Matrix

SNU1		SNU2	SNU3	DM1	DM2	DM3	DM4	DM5
SNU1	1.000	.607	.653	.313	.352	178	023	.068
SNU2	.607	1.000	.641	.188	.343	049	076	.201
SNU3	.653	.641	1.000	.262	.470	088	.081	.122
DM1	.313	.188	.262	1.000	.352	142	.136	022
DM2	.352	.343	.470	.352	1.000	083	.001	.033
DM3	178	049	088	142	083	1.000	.182	015
DM4	023	076	.081	.136	.001	.182	1.000	.200
DM5	.068	.201	.122	022	.033	015	.200	1.000

The above table inter item correlation matrix of Social Network Usage – Decision Making. Thetable shows the extent to which scores on one item are related to score on all other items in a scale. The values between .15 to 0.50 depicts a good result, values lower than 0.15 shows that items are not correlated well. The values higher than the 0.50 shows strong correlations between the items.

The value of SNU3 - DM2 is 0.470 which depicts a good correlation between them whereas the value of SNU1 - DM3 is -0.178 which is very less than 0.15 which shows a negative or weak correlation between them.

Table 2.1: ANOVA

Sum of Square	es		df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between People		206.104	149	1.383		
Within People	Between Items	251.126	7	35.875	55.495	.000
	Residual	674.249	1043	.646		
	Total	925.375	1050	.881		
Total		1131.479	1199	.944		

The above table shows the Anova test result performed to test the hypothesis. Based on the above table 1.1, it is determined that null hypothesis is rejected as the p value is less than 0.05 significance level. Hence it can be said that the decision making process of selecting a travel destination is positively associated with the use of social network

Table 3: Communication on Social Networks – Decision Making Correlation

Matrix

CN1		CN2	CN3	CN4	CN5	DM1	DM2	DM3	DM4	DM5
CN1	1.000	.388	.414	.228	.289	.216	.266	158	.173	.150
CN2	.388	1.000	.455	.268	.310	.149	.271	102	.135	.072
CN3	.414	.455	1.000	.384	.473	.202	.380	172	.021	025
CN4	.228	.268	.384	1.000	.326	.199	.341	207	.154	.235
CN5	.289	.310	.473	.326	1.000	.135	.385	210	009	.101
DM1	.216	.149	.202	.199	.135	1.000	.352	142	.136	022
DM2	.266	.271	.380	.341	.385	.352	1.000	083	.001	.033
DM3	158	102	172	207	210	142	083	1.000	.182	015
DM4	.173	.135	.021	.154	009	.136	.001	.182	1.000	.200
DM5	.150	.072	025	.235	.101	022	.033	015	.200	1.000

The above table inter item correlation matrix of Communication on Social Networks – DecisionMaking. The table shows the extent to which scores on one item are related to

score on all other items in a scale. The values between .15 to 0.50 depicts a good result, values lower than 0.15 shows that items are not correlated well. The values higher than the 0.50 shows strong correlations between the items.

The value of CN5 - DM2 is 0.385 which depicts a good correlation between them whereas the value of CN5 - DM3 is -0.210 which is very less than 0.15 which shows a negative or weak correlation between them.

Table 3.1: ANOVA

Sum of Squares			df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between People		225.219	149	1.512		
Within People	Between Items	287.313	9	31.924	50.247	.000
	Residual	851.987	1341	.635		
	Total	1139.300	1350	.844		
Total		1364.519	1499	.910		

The above table shows the Anova test result performed to test the hypothesis. Based on the above table 1.1, it is determined that null hypothesis is rejected as the p value is less than 0.05 significance level. Hence it can be said that the decision making process of choosing a travel destination is influenced by communication within social networks.

Table 4: Information on Social Networks Correlation Matrix

	IF1	IF2	IF3	DM1	DM2	DM3	DM4	DM5
IF1	1.000	.298	.489	.249	.511	.012	060	.053
IF2	.298	1.000	.408	.366	.209	181	.144	.119
IF3	.489	.408	1.000	.388	.367	063	.068	.040
DM1	.249	.366	.388	1.000	.352	142	.136	022

DM2	.511	.209	.367	.352	1.000	083	.001	.033
DM3	.012	181	063	142	083	1.000	.182	015
DM4	060	.144	.068	.136	.001	.182	1.000	.200
DM5	.053	.119	.040	022	.033	015	.200	1.000

The above table inter item correlation matrix of Information on Social Networks – Decision Making. The table shows the extent to which scores on one item are related to score on all other items in a scale. The values between .15 to 0.50 depicts a good result, values lower than 0.15 shows that items are not correlated well. The values higher than the 0.50 shows strong correlations between the items.

The value of IF1 - DM2 is 0.511 which depicts a strong correlation between them whereas the value of IF2 - DM3 is -0.181 which is very less than 0.15 which shows a negative or weak correlation between them.

Table 4.1: ANOVA

	Sum of Squares		df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between People 210.137			149	1.410		
Within People Between Items		237.880	7	33.983	49.825	.000
	Residual	711.370	1043	.682		
	Total	949.250	1050	.904		
Total 1		1159.387	1199	.967		

The above table shows the Anova test result performed to test the hypothesis. Based on the above table 1.1, it is determined that null hypothesis is rejected as the p value is less than 0.05 significance level. Hence it can be said that information obtained through social networks has a positive impact on the decision making process of choosing a travel destination.

Limitation of the Study:

This preliminary study aimed to understand the relationships between social network

use, communication, and information that influence the decision-making process of potential tourists when selecting a destination. However, the study has some limitations that must be considered. Firstly, the sample size was limited since the study focused solely on social network users, excluding non-users' opinions. While social network users utilize these platforms for gathering information to plan trips, a certain number of respondents do not use social networks for this purpose, and the reasons for this need to be further explored. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, future research should supplement online surveys with offline surveys to include non-users' perspectives. Additionally, for greater reliability, the studyshould be conducted over an extended period. Lastly, future research should also explore contemporary issues related to social network services, including user protection, privacy, and content protection that could impact decision-making processes.

Conclusion: Social media networks are the go-to medium for marketing communication because they enable users to exchange ideas and experiences, discover new things, and gather knowledge. The enormous volume of unsolicited messages and spam adverts, which consumers can ignore, presents a considerable difficulty, though. Destinations should successfully manage their socialmedia presence and engage with potential visitors to increase business performance and draw more tourists. This study provides tourist marketers with useful recommendations for improving their comprehension of and interaction with social media. As more people utilise social media for travel planning and destination research, destinations must have a presence there. Tourism relies on the conveyance of information, thus destinations should use social media to expand their virtual presence and audience.

The study analysed the correlation between social network usage, communication on social networks, and decision-making in travel destination selection. Table 1 shows that 51.3% of respondents were female, 88.7% were aged 18-24, and 84.0% were undergraduates. Table 2 displays the inter-item correlation matrix, with values between 0.15 to 0.50 indicating good correlation, and values over 0.50 indicating strong correlation. Table 2.1 shows the ANOVA result, which confirms a positive association between decision-making in travel destination selection and the use of

social networks. Table 3 shows the correlation between communication on social networks and decision-making in travel destination selection. A significant correlation was found between communication on social networks and decision-making, with values ranging from 0.072 to 0.473.

In conclusion, this study has found that social networks have a significant positive impact on the decision-making process of selecting a travel destination. The study also highlights the importance of effective communication on social networks, as it positively correlates with the decision-making process. These findings have important implications for tourism marketers and service providers who should consider leveraging the power of social networks to attract and engage potential customers. Moreover, they should focus on improving the quality of communication on social networks to enhance customers' satisfaction and loyalty. Future research should investigate the impact of other factors on travel decision-making, such as personal values, preferences, and socio-cultural factors, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the travel decision-making process.

Annexure I

Indicators	Items	Code
	I use social networks to get ideas about which	SNU1
	destination to choose	
Social Network	I use social networks when I am looking for ideas	SNU2
Usage	and information about accommodation	
	opportunities	
	I use social networks when I am looking for ideas	
	and information about excursions and other	SNU3
	activities available in the destination	
	Communication via social media helps you make a	CN1
	decision concerning destination for travelling	
	Communication through social media via	CN2

Communicationon	influencersattracts you to visit the destination						
social networks	Your understanding of places has it improved as a	CN3					
	result of social media communication						
	I take comments and reviews about destination on						
	social media platform seriously						
	I use social media to communicate with friends and	CN5					
	other travelers about my experiences and pictures.						
	Using social networks makes me more efficient in	IF1					
	gathering information about destination to visit.						
Information on	On social networks I can get information about	IF2					
social networks	destination that can't be found elsewhere						
	It is easier to find information on social networks	IF3					
	than from other sources						
	The information you gathered via social media will	DM1					
	influence your final choice of destination selection						
	Social Media helps in looking for ideas and						
	information about excursions and other activities	DM2					
	available at the destination.						
DecisionMaking	Social Media platforms help in making people						
	awareabout unknown and less discovered travel	DM3					
	destinations.						
	How likely are you to change your travel plans	DM4					
	basedon something you saw on social media?						
	Have you ever changed your travel plans based on						
	negative reviews or comments about a destination	DM5					
	onsocial media						

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