



Impact Of Social Media Promotional Activities On Tourists' Attitude Towards Destination And Intention To Travel

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate connections within the tourism industry, specifically examining the interplay among social media promotional activities, attitudes towards destinations, and travel intentions. Utilizing 232 valid questionnaires, a robust analysis incorporating exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to scrutinize the proposed hypotheses. The statistical outcomes unequivocally validate the significant impact of social media promotional activities on shaping attitudes towards destinations and influencing travel intentions. Moreover, the findings underscore a consequential association between tourists' attitudes towards destinations and their intentions to travel. The study not only provides valuable insights into these dynamics but also discusses limitations and presents marketing implications for future research and industry practices.

Key Words: social media promotional activities, attitude towards destination, travel intention, SEM.

1. Introduction

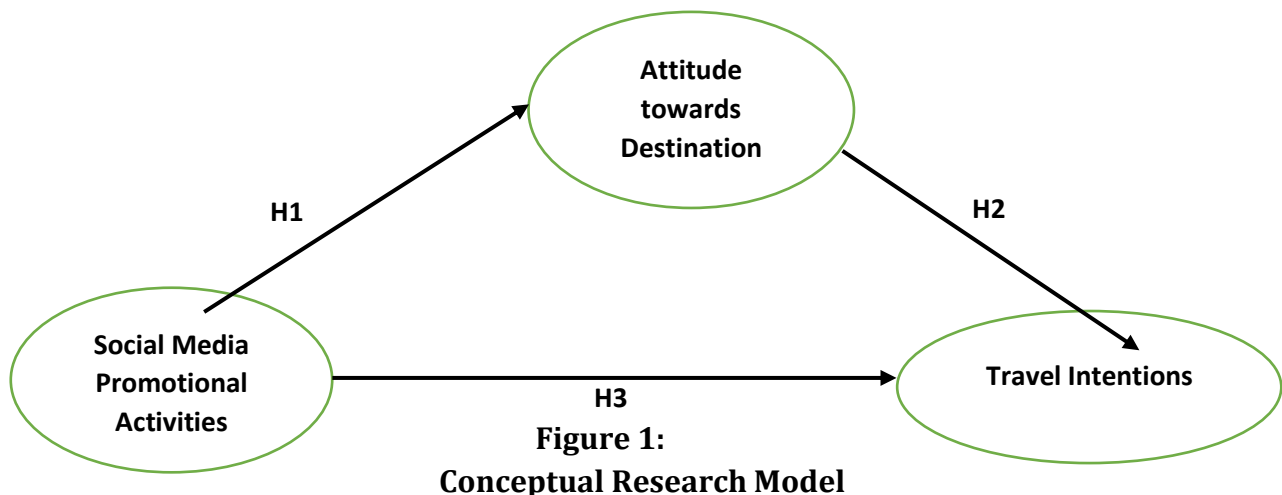
The development of the internet made users to spend more time on the web thus gradually changing the way people communicate. The popularity of Web 2.0 has led to the growth and public popularity of social media networks, a new world of collaboration and communication (Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011) associated with web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the World Wide Web, allowing users to interact with one another or edit or add to website content (Click and Petit, 2010). In recent years, social media platforms have revolutionized the way people communicate and access information. These platforms have become an integral part of people's daily lives, allowing them to connect with friends and family, share personal experiences, and discover new content and ideas (Jacobsen and Munar, 2010; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). In the tourism industry, social media has also had a profound impact. It has emerged as a powerful promotional tool that

allows tourists to gain access to a wealth of information and content. Social media has revolutionized the way people interact and share information, including their travel experiences. Tourists today prefer to read about travel experiences on social media as they seek updated, complete, and customized information for planning their own vacations (Sparks et al., 2013) as these contents influence tourists' attitudes towards destinations and their travel plans. The availability of diverse platforms where tourists can voice their opinions in raw and unedited form has also made social media an important reference for tourists and travel workers alike. Potential tourists are no longer relying solely on traditional media such as television, newspapers, and magazines for travel information. Instead, they turn to social media for authentic and real-time insights from fellow travellers. These social media platforms have disrupted the traditional marketing model for the tourism industry. Tourism industry players have opportunity to utilize social media to build public awareness and enhance tourist behaviour. This shift in consumer behaviour has prompted destination marketers to incorporate social media into their promotional strategies (Hudson and Thal, 2013; Oz, 2013; Tse 2013).

The use of social media data can also offer new opportunities for decision-support in tourism planning. With the ease of sharing of information and possibility of examining many comments in virtual environment in the globalizing world potential tourists could visit relevant social media sites before deciding on the travel due to the fact that they believe the virtual assessment to be useful for their purchasing decision (Sariisik and Ozbay, 2012). According to Chung and Buhalis (2008) social media supports the pre-travel phase, where all the search and bookings can take place online; the in-travel phase, through interactive forums and/or blogging while on the road; and the post-travel phase where people can share experiences, review hotels and destinations, and post photographs and videos from their trips. However, trip planning is a very complex process requiring travellers to identify, filter, evaluate, and select a massive amount of information," (Sigala, 2010). Jeng and Fesenmaier (2002) noted that travellers collect and review various forms of travel information early in the travel decision making process in order to minimize the risk of making a poor destination decision. So for the hospitality and tourism organizations there is a need to understand how consumers search and review information at the various stages of their travel decision making process (Choi et al., 2007). Research to date has demonstrated that consumers use different types of online information sources to make instant decisions at any travel planning phase (Choi et al., 2007; Seabra et al., 2007).

In the light of the growth social media promotional activities in terms of reach and influence, it is very interesting to examine what makes certain opinions more influential than others. In addition, marketers are becoming increasingly interested in making use of social media activities as a new communication and promotional tool that can influence attitude towards destination and intention to visit (Song and Yoo, 2016). Furthermore, travel intention has been assumed to be a key factor which strongly correlates with observed behaviour. Social media promotional activities affect tourists' attitudes and travel intentions towards certain destinations (Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017). In

addition, there is a significant relationship between individual tourists' attitudes and travel intentions. Figure-1 shows the conceptual framework drawn for this study. In the current study, the objective of this research is to find out the impact of social media promotional activities in influencing the tourist's attitude towards destination and their travel intentions. The findings of this study will be beneficial to tourism marketers. It will assist the industry's decision-makers, media buyers or agencies, and other participants in the travel and advertising sectors in organising their social media promotional campaigns.



2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Social media promotional activities in tourism industry

The utilization of social media as a promotional tool has become increasingly prevalent in the tourism sector. According to estimates from the Travel Industry Association of America, nearly two-thirds of online travel bookings involve the use of search engines and social media for trip planning. This underscores the critical importance for travel-related businesses to actively engage with social media platforms to promote their products and services. Numerous studies, including those by Dellarocas (2003) and Litvin et al. (2008), have demonstrated the significant impact of social media on travellers' opinions and intentions to travel.

Research on the effects of social media marketing initiatives reveals their substantial influence on travellers' perceptions of destinations and their inclination to visit. The evidence strongly supports social media's evolution into a vital instrument for the travel industry, shaping travel plans and promoting locations. The impact of social media marketing on travellers' attitudes towards their intended destinations and travel plans cannot be overstated. To attract and retain potential tourists, it is imperative for businesses in the tourism sector to comprehend and leverage social media effectively. Social media promotional activities have emerged as a powerful and indispensable tool for the travel and tourism sector, revolutionizing the marketing of related goods and

significantly shaping travellers' perceptions and intentions. Studies by Ye et al. (2011) and Yun & Good (2007) underscore the substantial role of social media in promoting travel destinations, influencing travellers' attitudes, and shaping travel plans.

A case study by Hanna et al. (2011) on a music recording company effectively demonstrates the strategic use of social media. The study emphasizes the value of social media and its integration into marketing plans to connect with customers. The importance of viewing social media initiatives as components of an integrated system prioritizing the customer experience, rather than as independent elements, is underscored.

Kietzman et al.'s (2011) honeycomb framework defines social media through seven functional building blocks: identity, conversation, sharing, presence, relationship, reputation, and groups. Companies utilizing these building blocks can monitor and understand the dynamics and impacts of social media activities, enabling the creation of an integrated strategy that upholds the integrity of these building blocks for their community.

In the travel industry, social media promotional activities serve as crucial references for travel decision-making, impacting choices regarding travel products such as destinations, hotels, and restaurants. Casalo et al.'s (2010) examination of online customers in travel communities revealed that information obtained through these communities influences consumer perceptions and trip planning. Prospective travellers rely on these promotional activities to facilitate their decision-making process, as highlighted by Goldberg et al. (2001). Overall, the role of social media in the tourism sector is undeniable, reshaping the landscape of travel promotion and decision-making.

2.2 Attitude towards Destination and Travel Intention

Attitude, characterized as a relatively enduring and stable evaluative summary of an item, holds considerable significance within psychological constructs, as it serves to influence and predict various behaviors (Kraus, 1995). Specifically, attitude toward a behavior is defined as "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question" (Ajzen, 1991). The more favorable one's attitude toward a behavior, the stronger their intention to engage in that behavior (Ajzen, 2001). In the context of the tourism industry, social media activities exert a significant impact on travelers' attitudes, introducing novel avenues for capturing, analyzing, interpreting, and managing influences on consumer behavior.

Positive social media activities play a pivotal role in shaping travelers' intentions by creating positive perceptions and reducing promotional expenses (Javilvand & Samiei, 2012). A comparative study by Milwood et al. (2013) involving 2000 US and 483 Swiss destination marketing organizations highlighted the influence of user-generated content on destination image. User-generated content shared on social media platforms was identified as an efficient gauge of public beliefs, values, and attitudes toward tourism destinations. The study emphasized the need for organizations to analyze and evaluate messages on social media to gain insights into people's attitudes, values, and beliefs related to destinations (Volo, 2010).

The significance of fostering positive attitudes toward destinations and tourism products is underscored in the marketing literature, with the ultimate goal being to influence tourists' purchasing and consumption behaviors. Social media has emerged as a powerful communication tool in achieving this goal, becoming one of the most effective ways to connect with customers in the tourism industry (Neascu, 2014).

In the tourism sector, interpersonal communication has always been crucial, and social media activities on the internet have been identified as significant influencers of consumer attitudes and behaviors (Castaneda et al., 2009; Vermuelen & Seegers, 2009; Dennis et al., 2009). The perception of a destination plays a pivotal role in travelers' choices, and Souiden et al. (2017) demonstrated how views and intentions to visit are influenced by a destination's image. According to Sanchez et al. (2018), tourists' preferences and dislikes about destinations are shaped significantly by the information gleaned from social media, with favorability having a positive impact and vice versa. Ultimately, travelers' attitudes toward specific locations strongly influence their willingness to visit those destinations. Hence, against these findings we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant relationship between social media promotional activities and attitude towards destination.

H2: There is a significant relationship between attitude towards destination and travel intentions.

H3: There is a significant relationship between social media promotional activities and travel intentions.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in Kashmir, an alluring tourist destination in India, focusing on the tourist community visiting Jammu & Kashmir with awareness of social media network tools and their functioning. Due to the unavailability of accurate data on this population, probabilistic sampling techniques were impractical. A convenience sampling method was employed, selecting the sample from tourist destinations in Kashmir known for their popularity and frequent tourist arrivals, including Srinagar city, Pahalgam, Gulmarg, and Sonmarg.

3.1 Data Collection

A total of 286 questionnaires were distributed among tourists, both foreign and domestic, with 232 responses received—84 from foreign tourists and 148 from domestic tourists, yielding a final response rate of 81.12% for analysis. The study's instruments were adapted from previous research and modified to suit the present context, focusing on three categories of variables: social media promotional activities, attitude towards destination, and travel intentions.

3.2 Validity and Reliability

To assess construct validity, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were employed. EFA, performed using SPSS with the principal component method of extraction and varimax rotation, aimed to reduce data and explore underlying theoretical and statistical concepts. The factors were extracted using an Eigenvalue ≥ 1 criterion. Reliability analysis, including Cronbach's alpha, was crucial for evaluating the consistency of measurement variables.

All Cronbach's alpha values for the studied variables exceeded 0.70, indicating robust internal consistency. The social media promotional activities dimension achieved a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.84, attesting to its reliability. The variable "attitude towards destination" demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.79, while the "travel intention" variable exhibited a value of 0.82, both meeting the acceptable thresholds set by Hsu, Liu, and Lee (2010).

In summary, the study employed a convenience sampling method to gather responses from tourists in popular destinations in Kashmir, yielding a high response rate. The instruments used demonstrated construct validity through EFA and CFA, and reliability was ensured by achieving Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the acceptable thresholds. These rigorous methodological approaches enhance the credibility of the study's findings and contribute to the robustness of the research design.

Table 1: Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis

Variables	No. of items	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha
Social media promotional activities	8	0.77-0.936	0.84
Attitude towards destination	4	0.80-0.93	0.79
Travel intention	3	0.73-0.86	0.82

To ensure the robustness of a construct and establish both convergent and discriminant validity, several key criteria must be met, including Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Maximum Shared Variance (MSV). These criteria are commonly acknowledged in the literature, with recommended thresholds for CR being greater than 0.7, AVE greater than 0.5, and MSV less than AVE (20).

In Table 2, the calculated Composite Reliability values are presented, ranging from 0.95 to 0.98. These values surpass the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating strong reliability for each construct under examination. This suggests that the measurement items within each construct consistently and reliably capture the underlying theoretical concept, reinforcing the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Furthermore, both AVE and MSV are vital indicators of convergent and discriminant validity, respectively. The Average Variance Extracted values meet the criterion, exceeding 0.5 in Table 2. This implies that a substantial portion of the variance in each construct is accounted for by its respective measurement items, supporting the convergent validity of the constructs.

In terms of discriminant validity, Maximum Shared Variance is compared to Average Variance Extracted. The criterion is met as MSV is less than AVE. This indicates that the shared variance between constructs is lower than the individual variance captured by each construct's measurement items, confirming that the constructs are distinct and not unduly influenced by shared variance.

In conclusion, the reported values in Table 2 for Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted, and Maximum Shared Variance adhere to the recommended criteria for construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. This meticulous assessment ensures the reliability and validity of the constructs under consideration, fortifying the overall quality of the study's measurement model and enhancing the credibility of its conclusions.

Table 2: Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR) AND MSV

	AVE	CR	MSV
Social media promotional activities	0.741	0.95	0.27
Attitude towards destination	0.932	0.982	0.286
Travel intentions	0.890	0.970	0.286

In the subsequent phase of the study, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to estimate the conceptual model, unraveling the causal relationships among the constructs under investigation. The analysis was executed using the AMOS software, which facilitated a thorough exploration of the interconnected relationships within the model.

The results of the Maximum Likelihood Estimation, as presented in Table 3, signify a well-fitted model. Key indicators such as the ratio CMIN/df (2038.11/767) at 2.65, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) at 0.910, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) at 0.851, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) at 0.821, Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) at 0.040, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) at 0.041 are all deemed significant and align with the measurement model.

The CMIN/df ratio, a measure of goodness of fit, indicates that the model fits well with a value of 2.65. Additionally, the CFI, GFI, AGFI, RMR, and RMSEA values further corroborate the appropriateness of the model fit. These indices collectively provide a robust foundation for testing the hypothesized paths within the conceptual model.

In summary, the utilization of SEM, supported by AMOS software, has yielded a well-fitted model with indicators demonstrating coherence with the measurement model. The established goodness-of-fit ratios and indices provide a solid basis for scrutinizing and validating the proposed relationships among the constructs, enhancing the overall reliability and validity of the study's findings.

Table 3: Model fit criteria and final SEM model's results

	Criteria	SEM results
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CMIN/df	<3	2.65
CFI	>0.9	0.910
RMSEA	<0.8	0.041
GFI	>0.9	0.85
AGFI	>0.8	0.82

The findings, presented in Table 4, unequivocally validate the hypothesized associations between social media promotional activities, attitude towards destination, and travel intentions. Consequently, Hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are confirmed. Specifically, social media promotional activities emerge as a significant predictor of tourists' attitude towards destination (H1: $\beta = 0.570$, $p < 0.01$), establishing a robust and positive correlation. Moreover, these promotional activities exhibit a statistically significant association with tourists' travel intentions (H2: $\beta = 0.229$, $p < 0.05$), underscoring their influential role in shaping travelers' future plans.

The empirical findings from the structural model underscore that social media promotional activities exert a favorable impact on both tourists' attitudes and intentions. This attests to the pivotal role played by social media in influencing and molding the perceptions and future travel decisions of tourists.

Furthermore, a notable positive correlation is identified between tourists' attitude towards destination and travel intentions (H3: $\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that a favorable attitude towards a destination significantly contributes to and influences travelers' intentions to visit. The interplay between these constructs emphasizes the interconnected nature of attitude formation and subsequent behavioral intentions within the context of tourism.

In summary, the study's empirical evidence solidly supports the hypothesized relationships, shedding light on the influential role of social media promotional activities in shaping tourists' attitudes towards destinations and their subsequent travel intentions. These findings contribute valuable insights to the understanding of the intricate dynamics between social media, tourist attitudes, and travel behavior.

Table 4: Standardised Path Coefficients and Statistical Significance

Hypothesis	Standardised coefficient	Significance	Result
H1: There is a significant relationship between social media promotional activities and attitude towards destination	0.570	***	Supported
H2: There is a significant relationship between social media promotional activities and travel intentions	.229	**	Supported
H3: There is a significant relationship between attitude and travel intentions	0.34	***	Supported

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to thoroughly investigate the influence of social media promotional activities on tourists' attitudes towards destinations and their subsequent travel intentions. The outcomes of the research robustly confirm the hypothesis that the perceptions of sampled tourists regarding destinations and travel intentions are significantly and positively shaped by social media promotional activities, establishing these activities as influential tools in the realm of destination marketing. The methodological approach, based on structural equation modeling, allowed for a comprehensive examination of the proposed relationships, and the findings strongly align with existing literature.

The study reveals a compelling positive impact of social media promotional activities on tourists' attitudes towards destinations. This suggests that as promotional initiatives on social media platforms increasingly mold tourists' perceptions, their attitudes towards travel destinations correspondingly experience a positive elevation. This result is consistent with Vermeulen & Seegers (2009), who demonstrated that exposure to online reviews, comments, photos, and videos enhances awareness and positively influences travelers' attitudes. Similarly, the findings support the research evidence presented by Petrevska (2012), highlighting that consumers' attitudes are significantly influenced by information and experiences shared by users on social media networks.

Moreover, the study establishes a positive correlation between social media promotional activities and tourists' travel intentions. This finding resonates with the work of Hay et al. (2013), which revealed that promotional activities on social media networks, encompassing information, reviews, and trip offers, play a pivotal role in influencing the travel plans of tourists. The alignment with the findings of Syed-Ahmed et al. (2013) further emphasizes that promotions on social media networks not only impact destination awareness but also significantly influence travel intentions.

Tourists, as active participants on social media networks, expose themselves to a myriad of promotional activities, contributing to the formation of favorable perceptions about destinations and subsequently influencing their travel intentions. This aligns with the contemporary trend wherein diverse information, offers, and the sharing of photos/videos on social media platforms empower users to collaboratively shape images, communicate effectively, and ultimately influence the behavior and travel intentions of tourists.

In conclusion, this study significantly underscores the paramount importance of social media in promoting tourism. It breaks communication barriers, enhances efficiency for tourism organizations, and positions social media as one of the most effective promotional tools in the industry. The observed shift in tourists' decision-making processes, incorporating social media at all stages of their trips, emphasizes the transformative impact of these platforms. This study not only contributes to the ongoing discourse on social media's role in tourism promotion but also provides practical implications for tourism organizations to remain competitive and efficient in a dynamic digital landscape.

5. Limitations and future research recommendations:

While the study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the generalizability of the results. Primarily, the participants predominantly consisted of tourists visiting Kashmir, raising concerns about the broader applicability of the findings. The study's focus on a specific tourist population may limit the ability to extrapolate the results to diverse geographical locations or tourist demographics.

Furthermore, a noteworthy limitation lies in the subjective measurement of all variables through a questionnaire. This approach introduces the potential for response bias, as participants' answers are dependent on their perceptions and interpretations. Subjective measures may be influenced by individual perspectives, experiences, or expectations, introducing a degree of variability in the collected data.

Despite these limitations, the study yields practical implications for destination marketers. The findings underscore the importance of vigilantly monitoring travel information disseminated on social media networks, emphasizing its influential role in shaping tourists' travel intentions. Destination marketers are encouraged to integrate social media promotional activities seamlessly with traditional promotional methods to enhance the overall effectiveness of their destination promotion strategies.

A practical recommendation emerges for tourism businesses to invest in staff education, ensuring proficiency in leveraging social media networks for effective communication with travelers. This aligns with the evolving landscape of information consumption, where social media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping tourist perceptions and decisions.

In conclusion, while the study has limitations related to participant demographics and subjective measurement, its practical suggestions for destination marketers offer actionable insights. The study can serve as a valuable reference for tourism organizations and marketers seeking to optimize their promotional strategies through social media networks. By acknowledging the study's limitations, future research can further explore these dynamics across diverse tourist populations and destinations, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media in the tourism industry.

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