# IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TOURISM INDUSTRY: AN APPRAISAL

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## ABSTRACT

*Social media has been playing a great role in our every day's life and in every industry; it plays a crucial role in one or other way. Tourism industry also as it helps in easy decision making for individual/traveller through the information available on different social networking platform. This paper provides a conceptual framework- 'how social media is playing a crucial role in framing individual preference and choice while making travelling decision'. The study states that individual trusts more on expertise, experience and reviews shared by other individual rather than media advertisement or tourism websites as well it has been a great source of information for travellers make a better choice regarding explicit destination. It states that social media has been a great basis for brand building and recognition and social media plays a substantial role in stimulating traveller's decision.*

*The tourism system mainly depends on information and communication technologies for promotional activities, sales and when developing management relationships with customers. When a traveller is making the final decision on destination choice, the most important information comes from online interpersonal influence - online word of mouth (eWOM). Authors dealing with tourism market segmentation recognize the growing number of traveller who uses modern digital media. In accordance with their identified needs, advanced technologies provide a new personalized customized tourist offer. Modern tourists have been more than active since the emergence of the revolutionary Web 2.0 technology which strongly influenced and transformed the travel decision making process. Many surveys results confirm that - approximately 80% of people are likely to download travel applications while searching for destinations before they actually leave for vacation.*

**Keywords -** *Social media, Social networking sites, Travel and Tourism*

## INTRODUCTION

The revolutionized meaning of information communication technologies and Internet technologies refers to mobile communications which enable individuals to move and generate, transmit and receive different kinds of information. As a result of this process, numerous models of communication emerged. With the help of information communication technology in the global environment, individuals may interact; move through space and time and their necessary information accompany and help them to find the desirable product or services.

Social media has left its impact on all the sectors and it is majorly used as a source of communication and to gather information rather than meeting in a person. Social media is one that is used for leisure as well as for the business purpose. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are major websites which has influenced each and every sector. It has bought its effect on tourism sector too in a way where people share their experiences and reviews and the information available on the social media sites helps us to make our prospective choice. Social media helps in making decision easier and make a better choice as to which place to travel.

The social media has given a great contribution to provide some good and not so good feedbacks and contributions. A recent research showed that more than half of the people change their decisions and plans after researching on various social portals. It helps the individually to virtually see the destination online and their reviews helps in making a better decision. The information is available in many forms like blogs, tagging, videos, reviews and many more medium. The tourism industry has also adopted social media as their way of advertising or marketing as it has bought great revenue and outcome as the information available on social media helps in decreasing the uncertainties and providing more relevant and real information.

The research paper will focus on how the social media has helped in influencing the customers buying behaviour and what are the variables that affect the tourism industry by using social media. The study will aim to understand the importance of social media in tourism industry and its impact on the tourism industry.
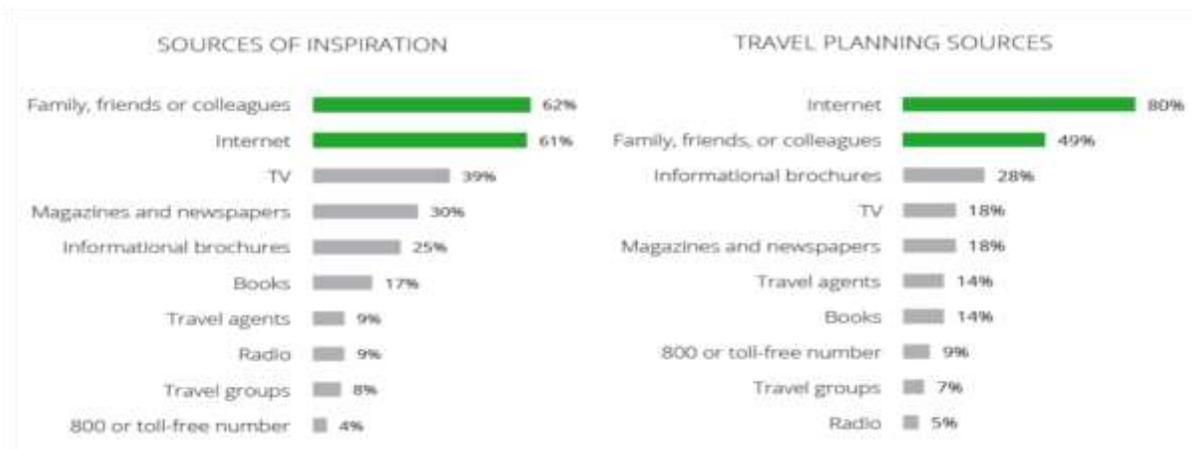


## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:
- Understand the impact and importance of social media on tourism industry.

- Analyze the variables which affect the decision making of consumer due to use of social media.
- Access the effect of using social media and to determine as what factors are the major sources that lead to the changes in the customer's decisions.

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study first analyzed the variable that affected the influence of social media on tourism and then it analyzed the contribution of social media to the tourism industry and how it has affected the decision making of travellers in pre-stage of travelling.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to reach the aim of our study to analyze the variables and the contribution of social media in tourism industry all social media related publications were identified and gathered from hospitality and tourism database and Google scholar. To achieve the objective of our study and to reach the conclusions and discussions of the study keywords of social media, social networking sites, travel and tourism were used to search the social media related articles and other research works done on it. Identified articles are thoroughly studied to understand its conclusions and suggestions as well as the references cited in the articles were also gone through.

The research started with understanding the overview of the term social media and with that understanding the impact of on a traveller. This was followed by the analysis of tourism sector with reference to social media. Furthermore, as per the analyzing and concluding of the previous research a connection was established which has helped in framing our analysis and conclusions.

## TOURISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

**S**ocial media has been defined in various ways. Social media is a wide term and defines as the way of interacting through blogs and forums, photographs, audio records, videos, links, profile pages on social networking sites (Eley& Tilley, 2009). Social media is described as an associate, user created online content (Roberts &Kraynak, 2008). With the advancement of social media, internet has been evolved from being the diffusion medium to a participatory platform through which people become the media themselves for sharing information. Social media is defined as the group of applications which allows the formation and alter the content developed and based on the technological fundamentals of internet (Kaplan &Haenlein, 2010). Different social media applications like wikis, blogs, social network sites i.e., facebook or instagram or the media sharing websites like YouTube have gained the massive recognition in the online tourist communities. As well as it has boosted the use of these social media applications (Gretzel, 2006, Pan et al., 2007). With the growing trend of internet and advancement, tourist are using their gadgets like smart phones laptops and tablets to search the information regarding their visit and to get information about the tourist destinations.(Wrang and Fesenmair, 2013, Santos and Santos, 2014) Social media have been generally take up by tourists to search, arrange, share, and comment on their travel tale and know-how through blogs (Blogger and Twitter), online society (Facebook and Trip Advisor), media sharing sites (YouTube and Flicker and other ways in a collaborative way. The *World Travel Market 2011 Industry Report* announced that more than one-third of all leisure travellers choose their destinations on the basis of reviews and information available on social media sites like Trip Advisor and Facebook (Koumelis, 2011).

Considering the comments available on online communities such as Trip Advisor, helps hotels and other travel-related companies to be aware of what their visitors like and dislike. With the increasing trend of and the benefit of social media provide copious tourism companies has amalgamated social media applications to their websites to increase customers' travel information searching experience (Fuchs, Scholochov,& Höpken, 2009; Sánchez-Franco & Rondan- Cataluña, 2010). Improvements and gains provide advantage over competitors when social networking sites are used for marketing purposes. Large numbers of people are moving towards social media makes it possible to spread the news more rapidly in a short span of time which in a way provides opportunity to expand swiftly (Magnold &Faulds, 2009).



**Fig.1.Sourced from Statista 2019**

**SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR TOURISM**
Social media is an important tool for the analysis of tourists' attitudes and this is confirmed by the increased purchases and recommendations to other users. Building successful service-based brand in tourism means that each offer should be a unique value proposition based on the customer experience.
Tourists need to know by means of reliable sources how their experience is going to be like in order to reduce uncertainty and create some expectations of what they are going to find at a destination.
Due to the uncertainty of tourist services, a traveler should obtain the necessary information in order to make the right decision concerning the travel. Modern tourists have more trust in other travelers' opinions using social media rather than official marketing advices.
As social media becomes increasingly expressive, con- summers are able to increasingly influence other consumers with their own opinions and experiences. Since social media is low-cost and bias-free, it represents an advantage for marketing communications. According to the *Fo- tis* and in the academic literature there is a disagreement on the classification of the social media types according to their level of social presence/media richness and the level of self-presentation/self-disclosure. Six types of social media have been identified: social networking websites (i.e. Facebook, Linkedin), blogs, content communities (i.e.YouTube, Flickr, Scrib, Slideshare, Delicious), col- laborative projects (i.e. Wikipedia, Wikitravel), virtual social worlds (i.e.Second Life), and virtual game worlds (i.e. World of Warcraft). However, there are other types of social media such as microblogs (i.e. Twitter), consumer review & rating websites (i.e. TripAdvisor, Epinions) and internet fora (i.e. ThornTree, Fodor's Travel Talk.

Evidently, the number of social media is changeable, but their most important role is to encourage users and travelers to post and share their travel experiences, comments and opinions, by having them serve as a source of information for other users.

Social media continues to impact communication either positively or negatively depending on the subjects under study and the type of communication (Steven M. Edwards). Social media requires all marketing activities integration and uses persuasive advertising to provide a competitive product/service experience.

The electronic word of mouth is important for marketers to understand this new platform for communication and support customer relationship in the best way. The electronic Word of Mouth can enhance visitor satisfaction due to product or service improvement. At the same time, eWOM can solve problems and doubts during the travel and it can help discover what tourists think and say about their experience. However, the main benefit can be monitoring of the company's reputation/image or even the analyses of the current competitive strategies.

Digital technologies have contributed to fundamental changes in the tourism industry and determined a better understanding of the decision making process of the travel, tourists' behavior during vacation and post vacation activities.

This interesting study collected the most important in- formation related to the impact of social media on tour- ism. The study revealed that social media has a big influence on travel decisions as 44% of respondents strongly agreed that Internet reviews posted by travel bloggers helped them about the initial decision of vacation destinations. This is followed by 37% online travel forums, 27% Facebook, 24% Youtube/Vimeo, 22% Pinterest.

Nearly half of the respondents would have used social media to plan their vacation if free Wi-Fi had been avail- able.

From those who are "social active", over 50% are likely to download travel apps while planning their vacation before they go. During vacation, the most popular application is (by 15%) Google Maps (Figure 2). After that come city guides, local weather, restaurant finder apps and public transportation apps.

## Apps Used During Vacation

| App | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Google Maps/GPS | 40% |
| City guide | 38% |
| Local weather | 37% |
| Restaurant finder | 25% |
| Public transport | 22% |
| Currency app | 21% |
| Airline app | 18% |
| Translation/language app | 17% |
| World clock | 14% |

**Fig.2.The most popular applications during vacation**

### IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Social Media has its impact on each aspects of our lives with its great reach it has affected the tourism industry too. Comments or reviews on social media sites are considered important when the traveler makes some travel plans. Travelers who are planning for a holiday accommodate themselves first with the information. Through the use of internet travelers easily get the information about the place and helps in making easy reservations. This helps in building positive effect and creating a satisfaction level of the tourist. The comments and feedbacks on social media also influence the tourist decision at the time of reservation stage, as well as helps in building brand recognition and reliability. The online feedbacks have both the positive as well as negative feedbacks, the negative feedbacks include the negative or the bad experiences thus the negative comments too have to be analyzed efficiently. The consumers look for negative evaluation in particular (Sachse &Magnold, 2011).There are enormous monthly visitors on social media who are keenly searching the travel information from different sources such as Trip Advisor, Cox & Kings, Make My Trip and the likes. Social networking sites helps travelers in making decisions and helps in sharing their experiences about the place hotel or any particular destination. Social networking sites are becoming a vital way of promoting products and a way of communication (Indian Express, 2014). According to Zeng (2013) a fine plan to endorse selling is by making use of social media to sell tourism goods apart from it social media can be also used to announce the most recent promotions.
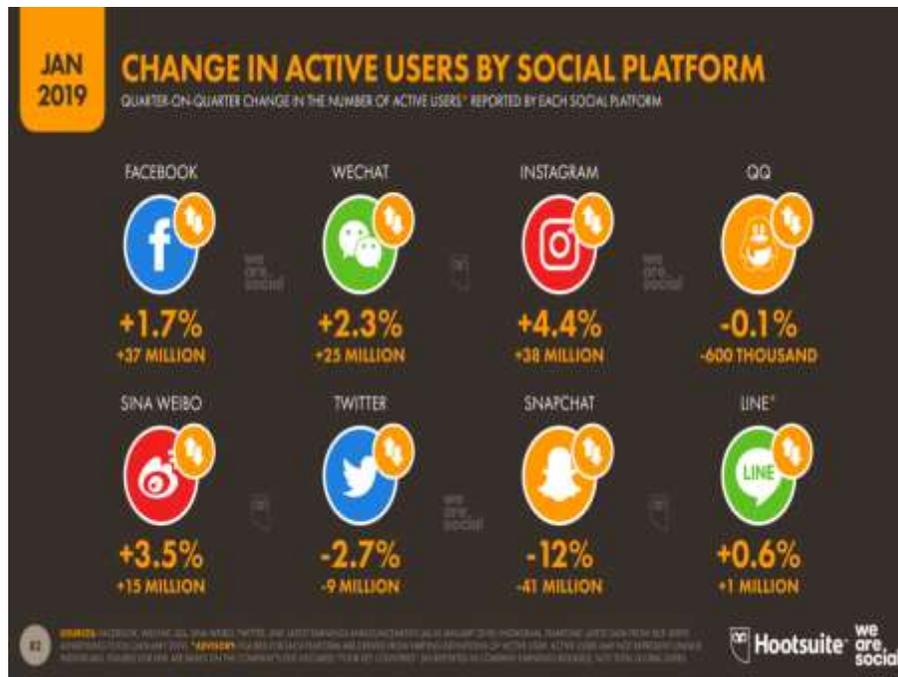
**Fig.3. Sourced From Statista Jan 2019**

## SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON CONSUMERS

Social media plays a great role while the traveller is making the travelling decision. The pre Phase of the traveller's trip is affected by the information and comments available online and further leads to change in the decision. A research by Google stated that 84% of the leisure tourist uses the internet for making their travelling plans (Torres, 2010). The growing popularity of websites which has the user generated contents by travellers, there are number of research scholars who have laid the dominant significance of social media in the research stage of the travellers planning process (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, &Buultjens, 2009; Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011; Tussyadiah, Park, &Fesenmaier, 2011; Yoo&Gretzel, 2010). Huang, Basu, and Hsu (2010). Through the information available online the visitors on the websites are able to have a look at the feedbacks of the travellers who have uploaded their pictures or videos of the place of their visit either on their personal page or on the tourism websites. Apart from this the Word of Mouth is also a major factor to influence the tourist decision. People take social media as the trusted source of information as the information available there is through their friends or relatives so it's being a trusted source for them. Travellers often make their decision on the basis of the previous travellers experience as it helps in avoiding risk and to build up their satisfaction level (Fotis, Buhalis&Rossides, 2012). Travellers usually evaluate various online website while making the travelling decision in order to lessen the risk of making wrong choice (Jeng&Fesenmaier, 2002). Trip Advisor is recently the biggest travel website, which has 74 million of active users who are continuously checking the website to check the reviews and make decision while planning a trip (R'athonyi, 2013).

## PROMOTING TOURISM INDUSTRY THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media plays an important role in promoting and marketing the tourism industry. It has helped in promoting the world's diversity and has given positive contribution towards preserving our

natural and cultural heritage. The ministry of tourism has formulated various policies and programmes for the development and promotion of tourism. The World Travel and Tourism Council (2015) stated that $120 billion USD (8.31 Lakh Crore) was generated by the Indian government from tourism activities in 2015.Besides from these, tourism supported 37.315 million jobs. Different campaign was launched to promote India as a popular tourist destination by the India's ministry of tourism. The phrase "Incredible India" was approved as a slogan by the ministry (TNN, 2005).To persist the rich cultural heritage and diversity of India the Government of India coined the concept of Incredible India. It was an International Marketing Campaign to promote tourism yet an extremely interactive campaign to establish message retention as and when the tourists are making the decisions to visit their favourite international holiday destinations.

**"Atithi Devo Bhavah"** was another social awareness campaign that aimed at giving a great sense of being welcomed to our country. The campaign targets the general public and mainly focusing stakeholders of the tourism industry.

Another initiative was from the Kerala Government to promote tourism on social media. (2013) Apart from just opening the Facebook Page it took an initiative to organize two workshops in association with Facebook. The workshop was themed as Travel goes social.



## The Top Seven Online Travel Planning Activities

| | Leisure Travelers | | Business Travelers |
|---|---|---|---|
| Researched an upcoming trip | 60% | | 69% |
| Researched travel as a result of seeing an online ad | 45% | | 57% |
| Brainstormed or started thinking about a trip | 43% | | 52% |
| Read reviews from other travelers | 40% | | 54% |
| Requested more information related to an upcoming trip | 32% | | 45% |
| Watched a travel video | 7 points since 2009  28% | | 46%  9 points since 2009 |
| Looked at travel content or reviews by my friends or family | 23% | | 40% |

**Fig.4 Sourced From** *The Traveller's Road to Decision*, **Google and Ipsos MediaCT**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The advancement through the internet and the development of Social Media has assisted the interconnectivity of travellers through the various means of social media. Interactions through various means of social Media like through forums, ratings, reviews and feedbacks. The development of various means of social media helps the travellers to make better choice and discussion. Travellers rely on personal approach rather than on various advertisements as the social media information that is through their personal acquaintance. The information shared through the social media plays a great role in the pre-stage of travelling.

**Fig.4 Sourced From *The Traveller's Road to Decision*, Google and Ipsos MediaCT**

**CONCLUSION**

The study helped in understanding that the social media helps the traveller in making decision and reducing the risk of dissatisfaction as the traveller is pre-assured about the destination through the research done by them at the pre-stage of travelling. As well as there is much scope if more campaigns and marketing is done through the social media.

This paper is based on a review of studies conducted on the usage of Social Media by tourism organizations and the effect of Social Media on the traveller's decision. For future research, a qualitative tool can be used to analyze Social Media effects as well as ways to promote tourism. It can be backed up with a quantitative study in the form of questionnaire survey to understand how tourist decision can be effected through various social media platforms.

Digital mobility and social media activities enable tourism industry to have appropriate insight in the world of tourists. Marketing communications will be mostly concentrated on the improvement of relationships in social media and adapting to tourists' needs. Social media has been recognized as one of important competitive tools in terms of tourism marketing. Tourism need to engage their tourists with multichannel integrate communications and encourage them to talk about and recommend good experiences. Engaging with travellers on real-time social media has huge implications for the travel industry. Today tourists encounter with the new digital technology that can help them improve services and make their online experiences more personalized and more relevant

- the Web 3.0. Beside many advantages of the next generation technology, probably, the big challenge for advanced ICT in the future will be facing with privacy and information reliability.

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