



# **Influence of Social Media on Tourism Business: Current Trends and Future Implications for Bengaluru**

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## **Abstract**

Social media is a powerful marketing tool for the business of tourism. It provides a forum for tourists to make meaningful connections with service providers through social media platforms, and a greater understanding of products and services thereby encouraging active participation and engagement between tourists and service providers. The main objective of this paper is to study the level of exposure received from social media for tourism and the extent of the influence of social media on tourism to understand the implications of social media in the tourism industry, specifically, Bengaluru.

**Keywords:** Tourism Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Consumer Behaviour

## **1. Introduction**

Social Media is the latest trending marketing tool in tourism and other industries in general. Social media has revolutionised the tourism industry since it has transformed the 'word of mouth publicity' to the 'word of million mouths'. Brand awareness is more functional today through social media. Furthermore, social media websites are popular platforms for information exchange among users. Social media like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Google Plus,

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Pinterest, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, blogs, to mention a few, allow the users to engage in social media. There is a rapid spread of information through social media which gives it immense power to affect an organization constructively or destructively (Khan, 2012). The tourism industry is heavily dependent on the internet as it needs intensive information related to the industry.

Social media is the specific section through which tourism business is engaging with multiple avenues for interacting with potential travellers. The mass appeal, effectiveness and low-cost model make it profitable to experiment with the marketing strategies in social media. Travellers prefer using social media sites for background checks regarding their tours in advance to reduce the risks associated with travel. Therefore, social media platforms provide an avenue and increase the quality of tourism experienced by the tourists and the quality of the service provided to them. 'The quality of tourism' encompasses 'quality of tourist attraction services, quality of travel services, quality of accommodation services' and the likes of it. All of these can be provided on a larger scale at a low cost when it is leveraged through a platform like Social Media.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Marianna Sigala, Evangelos Christou and Ulrike Gretzel in their book *Social Media in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases* (2012) talk about the fundamental changes that social media is bringing about the way travellers and tourists search, find, read and trust, as well as collaboratively produce information about tourism suppliers and tourism destinations. It also examines the ways in which tourism organisations re-engineer and implement their business models and operations, such as new service development, marketing, networking and knowledge management.

On a related note, Evans (2012) has explained how to successfully implement a variety of tools, how to ensure higher levels of customer engagement, and how to build on the lessons learned and information gained from first-generation social media marketing efforts and to carry this across one's organisation. Constantinides

(2014) on the other hand talked about how social media has changed the power structures in the marketplace; the shift is evident in the shifts or transitions of power that is taking place and in the emergence of a new breed of powerful and sophisticated customer who are difficult to influence, persuade and retain. The paper outlined the nature, effects and present status of social media as customer empowerment agents. It explained their aptitude and possible roles of corporate marketing strategies and identified different ways of engaging with the audience via marketing tools. The paper proposes two possible social media marketing strategies:

- a) The passive approach focusing on utilising the Social Media domain as a source of the customer's voice and market intelligence.
- b) The active approach i.e. engaging the Social Media as direct marketing and PR channels, as channels of customer influence, as tools of personalising products and last but not least develop them as platforms of co-operation and customer-generated innovation.

Finally, the paper identified future research directions around the novel challenges of the contemporary marketing landscape.

### **3. Research Gap**

The literature reviews listed above elaborate on theoretical concepts and services of social media in tourism and its scope in the tourism industry. However, there is a dearth of literature on the influence of social media marketing on tourism businesses, especially in Bengaluru. This study aims to fill this void and contribute to the academia and industry which can leverage the potential of social media which has an immense scope of study at the national level.

### **4. Significance of the Study**

Bangalore was addressed as the "Silicon Valley of India" (or "IT capital of India") has the highest usage of digital resources in India. A demographically diverse city, Bangalore is the second fastest-growing major metropolis in India. Bangalore has one of the most

highly-educated workforces in the world. It is home to many educational and research institutions in India, such as Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Indian Institute of Management (Bangalore) (IIMB), International Institute of Information Technology, Bangalore (IIITB), National Institute of Fashion Technology, Bangalore, National Law School of India University (NLSIU) and National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) and so on. Thus, the footfall of elite tourist is high in Bengaluru, leading to the maximum usage of Social Media too. Therefore, social media in tourism is important today since it is an important phenomenon of the digital era and impacts all the stakeholders in diverse ways. The tourism industry must embrace social media marketing in its fullest potential and enhance the experience of tourists through social media. The use of social media at this juncture is significant as it has a tremendous potential to create awareness and influence the potential of tourism businesses worldwide.

## **5. The Objective of the Study**

The objectives of this paper are

- i. To study the level of exposure received from social media for tourism
- ii. To study the extent of the influence of social media on tourism to indicate the likelihood of using social media in tourism business and the possible implications for the future

## **6. Research Methodology**

Using descriptive statistical methods, such as SPSS to analyse the primary data sought from tourism practitioners and using content analysis of Facebook, Twitter and similar social media networks and unpacking readings from secondary sources, the paper has aimed to address the abovementioned objectives. Convenience sampling has been used for the selection of 50 tourism service providers such as tour operators, hotels, airlines, tourist attraction sites, GDS companies and Cruise liners in Bengaluru who are

active users of social media. The period of the study for the primary data was from September 2018.

## 7. Analysis of the Study

The efforts of fulfilling the objectives of the study have brought out the following analysis.

### 7.1. Preferred Social Media among Respondents

Social Media with its multiple platforms has created hype among the technocrats, yet the actual picture among the tourism service provider remains hazy. To address the gap in previous research regarding the area of the study reported here, the paper used quantitative and qualitative methods to ascertain the state of affairs. The results tabulated in Table 7.1 shows the table of Preferred Social Media among Respondents as perceived by service providers.

Table 7.1: Preferred Social Media among Respondents

Types of Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	33	66.0
Twitter	4	8.0
YouTube	2	4.0
Instagram	3	6.0
Pinterest	3	6.0
Blogs	5	10.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Primary Data

It is found through Table 7.1 that Facebook tops the list with 66 percent (33) respondents, followed by Blogs with 10 percent (5) respondents and then Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest in the list of social media platforms preferred by service providers. The least preferred social media platform by the tourism service provider happens to be YouTube with 4 percent (2) respondents.

### 7.2. Activeness on Social Media among Respondents

Social Media provides instant information through the service providers' own accounts as the events unfold in any part of the world. This is referred to as the activeness of social media. In the

case of tourism service provision, it is important for the service providers to upload the latest details to keep their social media accounts active. A study on this among the respondents has been tabulated as Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Activeness on Social Media among Respondents

<b>Activeness on Social Media Accounts</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Slightly inactive	8	16.0
Static	9	18.0
Slightly active	19	38.0
Very active	14	28.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Primary Data

It is clear from Table 7.2 that, 66 percent of the respondents agree that they are keeping themselves active in all social media accounts in some way or other but another 16 percent agree that they are slightly inactive. Strangely 18 percent of the respondents are unaware of the importance of being active on the social media accounts and thus they are static.

### 7.3 Preferred Marketing Medium for Promotions

Marketing in several platforms is a strategy to bring in potential customers for the product or service offered by the organisation. There are several mediums to identify them. This section tabulates the position of social media towards the identification of the tourism service providers in Bengaluru.

Table 7.3: Preferred Marketing Medium for Promotions among the Respondents

<b>Preferred Marketing Medium for Promotions</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Social Media	32	64.0
TV Channels	2	4.0
Newspaper Advertisements	5	10.0
Mobile Applications (Mobile Apps)	5	10.0
Others	6	12.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Primary Data

Table 7.3 shows that the present day tourism service providers prefer mostly social media as a marketing medium for promotions

with 64 percent (32) respondents and the least preferred medium is TV channels with just 4 percent (2) respondents. It is interesting to note that both newspaper advertisements and mobile applications occupy 10 percent (5) of respondents each in their position as a medium for promotion. It is noted that there are also other mediums for promotions as 12 percent (6) respondents have preferred those.

#### 7.4. The objective of Social Media Efforts among Respondents

The purpose of social media in serving a personalised plan for facilitating targeted marketing is gaining ground in every field and tourism is not far behind. The tabulation in this section substantiates the same.

Table 7.4: Objective of Social Media Efforts among Respondents

<b>The objective of Social Media Efforts</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Brand Awareness	28	56.0
Target Markets Access	3	6.0
Engage With Customers	12	24.0
Create Revenue	3	6.0
Posting Offers	30	60.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>152</b>

Source: Primary Data

The major objective of using social media by the tourism service providers has been found out to be for promoting offers with 60 percent (30) respondents followed by efforts on building brand awareness with 56 percent (28) respondents. The efforts of target market access and that of creating revenue have 6 percent (3) respondents each. It is important to note that social media also has the objective of engaging with the customers as shown by the choices by the 24 percent (12) respondents. Few respondents chose two options and will have overlaps across categories in their selected preferences. Hence, the percentage analysis might not provide the total number.

#### 7.5. Developing Positive Brand Image through Social Media

Developing a Positive Brand Image is a trump card for enhancing the customer base. Table 7.5 details the opinion among the

respondents towards the usage of Social Media to gain a positive brand image.

Table 7.5: Opinion on Developing Positive Brand Image through Social Media

<b>Opinion on Developing Positive Brand Image</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	27	54.0
Disagree	6	12.0
Neutral	14	28.0
Strongly Agree	3	6.0
Totals	50	100.0

Source: Primary Data

The opinion on the influence of Social Media towards developing a positive brand image is highly fractured as majority 66 percent (33) respondents who are tourism service providers feel that they do not agree and only 6 percent (3) respondents agree for this stage. It must be noted that 28 percent (14) respondents are neutral on this opinion

### **7.6. Opinion on the Influence of Social Media on Purchase Decisions**

A major objective of any marketing efforts is to facilitate purchase decisions. The opinions on this aspect among the respondents are tabulated in Table 7.6.

Table 7.6: Opinion on Influence of Social Media on Purchase Decision among Respondents

<b>Social Media Influence on Users for Purchase Decisions</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	1	2.0
Disagree	1	2.0
Neutral	6	12.0
Agree	24	48.0
Strongly Agree	18	36.0
Totals	50	100.0

Source: Primary Data

It is clear from the Table 7.6 that the opinion on the influence of Social Media on Purchase Decision is very high with those respondents who have selected the options, Agree and Strongly Agree (84 percent (42) respondents). Only 4 percent (2) respondents do not agree with this. It is important to note that 12 percent (6) respondents are Neutral towards this opinion.

### 7.7. Testing of Hypotheses

In continuation of the analysis of primary data, a test of hypotheses is done by formulating null hypotheses for the study.

#### 7.7.1. Hypothesis ( $H_0$ )

*The distribution of influence of marketing through social media is the same across the tourism service providers' categories.*

Tourism encompasses tourism attraction services, tour operators and accommodation services. Each of them needs to market their products and services effectively and each of the industry has taken an active interest in using social media marketing. This study has attempted to assess the distribution of influence of marketing through social media for these specific sectors and the results are provided in Table 7.7.

Table 7.7: Influence of Marketing through Social Media across The Different Categories Of Tourism Service Providers

Tourism Service Providers Categories	N	Mean Rank	$\chi^2$ -value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Tour Operators	22	22.41	2.009	0.366
Accommodation Services	13	26.50		
Tourism Attraction Services	15	29.17		

Source: Computed from Primary Data

The tabulated result (Table 7.7) of the test of hypothesis done on an Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test indicates that there was no statistically significant difference in the influence of marketing through social media across the different categories of tourism service providers as the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) value is 2.009 and the p-

value is just 0.366, with a mean rank of 22 for tour operator, 27 for hotels and 29 for tourism attraction services.

Hence the null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that the distribution of influence of marketing through social media across the different categories of tourism service providers is the same.

**7.7.2. Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>)**

*The distribution of influence of marketing through social media is the same across categories on the age establishments.*

In consideration to the Product Life Cycle (PLC), Age of Establishments is a crucial factor as the Establishment providing Tourism Services vie for attention and opportunity to sustain and increase their customer base. The following Table 7.8 shows the result of the test of hypothesis cited above.

Table 7.8: Influence of Marketing through Social Media across Categories on the Age Establishments of Tourism Service Providers.

Age of Establishments	N	Mean Rank	$\chi^2$ -value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Less than 5 years	13	26.88	0.937	.626
Between 6 to 10 years	8	21.00		
Above 10 years	29	26.12		

Source: Computed from Primary Data

It is clear from the table that an Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test indicates there was no statistically significant difference in the influence of marketing through social media across categories on the Age Establishments of Tourism Service Providers as chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) value is 0.937, and the p-value is only 0.626, with a mean rank of 27 for establishments having less than 5 years as their age and 21 for establishments whose age is between 6 and 10 years and finally 26 for those having age above 10 years.

Hence the null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that the distribution of Influence of marketing through social media across the categories on the age of establishments providing tourism services is the same.

## 8. Findings of the Study

The study has brought out the following findings on the influence of social media on the tourism business. Facebook is the most preferred by the Tourism Service Provider to influence potential customers. On an average, only 66 percent of the tourism service providers are active on the social network which shows that the rest 34 percent are non-interactive. Social media tops as the preferred medium for promotion by tourism service providers. The majority of the service providers use social media to post offers and to create brand awareness on their tourism products and services. The majority of the service providers use social media to promote positive brand image for their organisation. The majority of service providers use social media to influence purchase decisions. However, the influence of marketing through social media across the categories of tourism service providers is the same and the influence of marketing through social media across the categories on the age of establishments providing tourism services is the same. There is an absence of specific sections to deal with social media among the tourism service providers and there is indeed a dearth of infrastructure among the tourism service providers.

## 9. Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are placed which will, for sure, usher in the likelihood of influence of social media on tourism business starting from Bengaluru.

1. Tourism service providers could introduce separate sections in their establishments towards maintenance and updating of social media content related to their business and organisation.
2. Tourism service providers could be called to conduct regular training programmes for their staffs to keep themselves abreast of the rest in the industry on social media aspects too.
3. Tourism service providers should provide areas for customer interaction on their preferred social media sites and make it truly interactive by all means.

4. Tourism service providers can enhance the opportunity of influence of social media on marketing by making their offers targeted through customer classification.
5. Tourism service providers could introduce inter-linking of social media sites related to various sectors of the tourism industry so to provide effective services to their customers.
6. A new social media namely *Tour Book* in the likes of Facebook could be initiated by the tourism service providers to make the business of tourism more purposeful.
7. Tourism service providers could incorporate the age of their establishments to showcase their performances and difficulties in their social media sites.
8. It is suggested that both the State and Central Government can list out approved and/or licensed sites to weed away fraudsters.
9. It is suggested that tourism-related social media sites may be added as a standard site in every android driven handsets on their purchase itself.
10. It is suggested that the governments concerned improves the infrastructure that is needed for the growing digital world.

## **10. Conclusion**

Effective marketing has become an increasingly vital ingredient for business successes and it affects the day-to-day life of consumers profoundly. Today, the role of business houses has changed from merely selling products and services to transforming lives and nurturing lifestyles. Social networks play a great role in this as they allow multi-dimensional conversations. It is no longer about brands pushing their message onto a passive crowd through offline and online channels. There are various layers in the extent of influence of social media on service providers in Bengaluru. Social networks now allow tourism businesses to interact with fellow travellers, surpassing traditional travel and tourism actors, including destinations. It is sincerely hoped that the suggestions of this study

be considered for the policies on quality improvement of the tourism business scenario.

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