

Influence of Social Media on Tourists' Destination Selection Decision

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Abstract

Social media are interactive communication platform usually used for community-based inputs, content sharing, interaction and collaboration among people. Prominent social media platforms are, facebook, twitter, google+, wikipedia, LinkedIn etc. These social media channels serve as source of information and influence in decision-making process. Travel experience, photos, videos and other contents shared on social media may influence other prospective tourists in their destination selection decision. This study intended to discover the impact of social media on tourists' decision making. Data have been collected from 167 respondents using judgmental sampling technique. Collected data were analyzed using principle component analysis where 15 variables were reduced to two factors (social media information about destination and social media word-of-mouth). Further, the extent of influence of obtained factors on tourists' destination selection decision was identified using regression analysis and stated that these two factors explains 52.2% of the variance in data.

Keywords: Tourists' destination selection, social media, word-of-mouth, principle component analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the development of technology infrastructure and widespread availability of the internet have vastly changed consumer behavior. In recent days people take help from the internet to make there any kind of decision. As of June 30, 2019, around 58.8 percent of people of the world use the internet [1]. There are 4.39 billion internet users in 2019, an increase of 366 million (9 percent) versus January 2018. According to a study in 2019 around 3.48 billion people use social media and 3.2 6 billion of them use social media on mobile devices [2]. Social media is a set of the online communication channel used for the purpose of community-based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration. Social media is becoming an integral part of life. Social media gained popularity in last few years because of its ability to share photos/ videos, opinions, events etc. in real time. Social media allow its subscriber with the opportunity to meet new people, join groups that share their interests, build up professional networking and so on. The use of social media as an information source has been increasing rapidly. People seek information in social media to identify alternatives, evaluate and make the decision.

Current study tries to explore the impact of social media in tourist destination selection decision.

Social media enabled each user to act as a communication vehicle. As people share their tourism related experiences, photos, videos, and other information on their social media account, these can serve as stimuli to other people on their network. Moreover the overall tourism industry (e.g. tour operators, hotels, resorts, restaurants, parks etc.) can access the benefit from the social media to promote their service. Different tourist destination authorities can confirm their exposure even at international level. The output of this study will enable tour destination business to better understand their prospect in terms of social media influence factor.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent age, the developments in information and communication technology (ICT) increased the social media usages which significantly influence consumer behavior and decision making [3] specifically during planning for travel or purchasing travel related products or services [4]. Gretzel, Kang, and Lee [5]

proposed that the influence of social media on individuals' tourism decision may increased dramatically. They denoted social media as a communication platform or channel that convey user-generated contents and supplies travel related information which may guide prospective tourists. Presently, travelers uses social media to search for, evaluate, and select tourism destinations and spread travel stories and experiences. Social media enabled destination marketers to expand the reach of their communication messages to global audiences at a comparatively low costs. Most of the social media platforms enable their users to share their pictures, videos, comments and reviews which serve as source of information and testimonials [6]. Many travelers rely on other travelers' experiences shared on social media to know about the problems and facilities available in any destination [7, 8].

Tourism products are basically experiential; contain all the characteristics of services (i.e. intangible, variable, inseparable and perishable). Thus, it is difficult to evaluate the tourism products before purchase. As a result, decision making related to tourism is quite risky and require extensive information during information search phase of decision [9-12]. To reduce the risks associated with tourism decision making, travelers usually search for information in various sources of information [13, 14]. Due to the interactivity, customization capability and vastness world wide web became the popular source of information to the tourists for effective decision making [15]. However, all the information found in internet may not be reliable to tourists. Information from other travelers who already have experienced particular tourist destination seemed to be more reliable to the potential tourists [16]. Social media enable tourists to share travel experiences with their contacts. Due to the experiential nature of tourism, prospective tourist often rely on others experience shared on social media in their travel related decision making or destination selection to reduce risks or uncertainties [7] [17]. Social media play a vital role as a source of information in travel planning and tourist destination selection for potential travelers [6]. In selecting an unfamiliar destination to travel, tourism related blogs are found to be more helpful than friends and family [18, 19].

Along with the advancement in information technologies and social media platforms, major changes have also been observed in consumer behaviors in tourism industry. Changes in values and life styles, extended work schedule and shortened leisure period have made tourists more informed, more independent and more individualistic [20]. In cooperation with social media platforms, new technological advancements (i.e. Global positioning systems, high definition photo and video making devices, artificial intelligence etc.) have increased the volume and coverage of content sharing among travelers via social media applications. Thus

social media and mobile technologies have significantly changed the tourist behavior [21].

Souza and Machado [22] examined the use of social media on different stages of trip planning. Their findings revealed that travelers use social media in all stages of trip planning as a reliable source of information. Sahin and Sengun [23] studied the importance of social media on tourism marketing. Their findings revealed that social media can affect tourism industry both positively and negatively and young generation is highly affected by contents shared by others on social media. Carnoy [24] stated that social media have significantly changed the way the travel companies communicate with their potential customers. The identified that social media have transformed the tourism marketing in five ways; i.e. travel research, social sharing, enhanced customer service, interactive travel agencies and changed tourist behavior. Olenski [25] mentioned that 20% of leisure tourists take help from social media sites in making their travel plan and destination selection. Kazak [26] also found a huge impact of social media in our daily decision making including the decisions related to travel and tourism. Dwityas and Briandana [27] also found that social media play an important role as an information source in travelers decision making and these information help travelers in every stages of decision making.

In another study, Li [28] stated that there is more chance of using social media in tour planning by tourists who expect to travel foreign countries. He also observed that tourists use social media not only as a source of information but also for recommendations and testimonials about tourism destinations. Similarly, Pike [29] mentioned that most of the modern travelers are technology savvy and 85 percent of prospective tourists rely on social media and internet. In the same vision, Minazzi [30] suggests that travel preparation stems from an internal need to gain new experience by traveling to a specific destination. Importantly, because of either internal or external stimuli, or both, this internal need can arise. Minazzi [30] therefore reiterates that visitors focus on meeting such a need by concentrating on finding the destination with a high potential to better meet such a need. In line with this, social media does indeed have a vital role to play in helping travelers find tourist goods and/or services that can meet these needs.

Various factors of social media, like trustworthiness, reliability and dependability were found to be important in tourists' decision making. Munar and Jacobsen [31] have found that tourists have high level of trust towards travel related review website. In addition to trustworthiness, other facets of the impact of social media on tourism that researchers and scholars have analyzed in the past include credibility or reliability. In this regard, one of the researchers' concerns is whether travel consumers view social media as a credible and reliable tool for travel research and

planning [32]. Uysal, Perdue and Sirgy [32] noted that most travelers view social media as a reliable resource in providing a variety of information that might help them search and plan their travel. This is particularly the case in addition to the fact that in most cases the materials accessed via social media actually represents the current status of the destination(s) travelers are interested in. Moreover, through social media platforms, social media users can easily find critical information about their desired destination.

The number of users of social media continues to rise considerably. Most importantly, use of social media platform in tourism related decision making has also been increasing tremendously. This is because most of these people assume that social media offers a precise description of these destinations in terms of factors such as the products services and experiences they give their customers. Social media plays a key role in helping future visitors make informed choices about their destinations. Despite increasing work on the role of social media in the tourism industry, there are still areas to be adequately covered by researchers and scholars.

Objective(s) of the Study

In current era social media play a enormous role as a source of information for all kind of users for any kind of decision. The objective of the present study is to identify the factors of social media that influence tourists' destination selection decision. Moreover, this

study will also gauge the extent of influence created by these factors.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study is mainly based on primary data collected through structured questionnaire. The survey was conducted through personal interview and online survey (via Google form). Judgmental sampling technique was applied and respondents were selected from several tourism spots (for personal interview) and travel related blogs and social media groups/pages (for online survey). Data have been collected from 167 respondents who used to travel regularly. Data collection period was from July 15, 2019 to August 10, 2019. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic profile of the respondents. Principle Component analysis has been applied to identify the factors of social media that influence tourists' destination selection decision and regression analysis was used to predict the influence of identified factors in tourist decision making. For analyzing data, SPSS-24 was used.

Data Analysis and Findings

Social media are tremendous source of information nowadays. Thus, tourists can use social media in their destination selection decision. The collected data to measure the impact of social media in tourists' decision have been analyzed in this section.

Table-1: Demographic profile of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	106	63.5
	Female	61	36.5
Age Group	Under 18	6	3.6
	18-30 years	149	89.2
	30-45 years	11	6.6
	Above 45	1	0.6
Marital Status	Single	146	87.4
	Married	21	12.6
Level of education	Secondary	5	3.0
	Higher secondary	20	12.0
	Honors	116	69.5
	Masters	26	15.6
Occupation	Student	133	79.6
	Service	21	12.6
	Business	6	3.6
	Others	7	4.2
Monthly family income	Up to BDT. 10,000	14	8.4
	BDT. 10,000-20,000	31	18.6
	BDT. 20,000-30,000	32	19.2
	BDT. 30,000-40,000	22	13.2
	BDT. 40,000+	62	37.1
	Total	161	96.4
	Missing-System	6	3.6
	Total	167	100.0

Table-1 represents the demographic information of the respondents. Basically, demographic data is statistically collected data about the characteristics of population. The sample size of the study is 167 and majority of them were male. Besides, most of the respondents are from the age group of 18-30 years and about 80% of them are students.

Principle Component Analysis

To perform Principle Component Analysis (PCA), Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test of sampling adequacy is necessary. The KMO test is a measure of how the collected data is suited for carrying out factor analysis. The following Table-2, represents the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Table-2: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.931
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1467.002
	df	105
	Sig./ p-value	0.000

This table shows two tests that designate the suitability of collected data for structure detection. The KMO values range from 0 to 1 and a rule of thumb states that KMO values between 0.8 and 1 indicate the sample is adequate. Thus, from Table-2 we may conclude that the collected data is adequate for conducting PCA. Bartlett's test of sphericity is another

indicator to measure the strength of relationship among variables. This tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. The Table-2 shows the p-value for Bartlett's test of sphericity is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. So, we may reject the null hypothesis and say that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix.

Table-3: Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
Social media provides information about 'new tourism destinations'	1	0.63
'Tour reviews' of others in social media help me to select destination	1	0.73
'Comment' and 'Reply' in social media provides important information.	1	0.52
'Videos' shared on social media influence me to select any destination.	1	0.70
'Images' of tourism spots shared on social media attract me to visit that place.	1	0.74
Information found on social media regarding tourism seems reliable to me.	1	0.50
Social media help me to gather tourism cost related information.	1	0.59
Social media help me to get travel route information.	1	0.49
Safety and security issues tourism destination can be identified from social media.	1	0.58
Problems or risks in tour destination can be pointed from social media.	1	0.56
Social media can be helpful to know about the restaurant or food facilities.	1	0.54
Idea about accommodation facilities can be obtained through social media.	1	0.66
Social media provides information about transportation infrastructure.	1	0.73
To select the best time to visit, social media helps me.	1	0.64
Social media provides understanding about the culture and heritage.	1	0.58

Table-3 shows the communalities before and after extraction. Principle Component Analysis (PCA) follows the primary assumption that all the variance is common, thus, before extraction all the communalities are 1. The extraction column reflects the common variance in data structure. Extraction communalities are

estimates of the variance in each variable accounted for by the factors in the factor solution. The communality values which are more than 0.5 should be considered further analysis. Hence, from Table-3 the researchers considered all the variables for further analysis.

Table-4: Rotated component matrix

	Social media information about destination	Social media word-of-mouth
Social media provides information about transportation .	0.808	
Idea about accommodation facilities can be obtained through social media.	0.758	
Safety and security issues tourism destination can be identified from social media.	0.738	
To select the best time to visit , social media helps me.	0.719	
Problems or risks in any destination can be pointed from social media.	0.718	
Social media provides understanding about the culture and heritage .	0.710	
Social media help me to gather tourism cost related information.	0.642	
Social media can be helpful to know the restaurant or food .	0.588	
Social media help me to get travel route information.	0.520	
Images' of tourism spots shared on social media attract me to visit that place.		0.804
Videos' shared on social media influence me to select any destination.		0.797
Tour reviews' of others in social media help me to select destination		0.776
Comment' and 'Reply' in social media provides important information.		0.705
Social media provides information about ' new tourism destinations'		0.646
Information found on social media regarding tourism seems reliable to me.		0.635
<i>Initial Eigenvalues</i>	<i>8.026</i>	<i>1.233</i>
<i>% of Variance</i>	<i>53.504</i>	<i>8.220</i>
<i>Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)</i>	<i>0.912</i>	<i>0.884</i>

Table-4 represents the rotated component matrix of factor analysis. 15 variables related to social media influence on destination selection have been précised into 2 factors; Social media information about destination and Social media word-of-mouth. Usually, tourists seek information about transportation, accommodation, safety and security, problems and risk, when to visit, culture and heritage, costing, food facilities and travel route related information on social media. These variables are termed under the factor 'Social media information about destination'. Since this factor has Eigenvalue 8.026, it explains more variance than a single variable. In fact, this factor explains 8.026 times than a single variable. Moreover, this factor explains 53.504% of total variance. The reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) of this factor is 0.912, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency. The second factor extracted is 'Social media word-of-mouth' with Eigenvalue of 1.233 and 8.220% of total variance. The alpha coefficient for 6 items in this factor is 0.884 which also signifies the high level of internal consistency among the items in the factor.

DISCUSSION

In present era, social media are communication platform for heterogeneous population. Tourists' decision selection decision vastly depends on social media. From the above finding it can be articulated that social media can manipulate tourists' destination selection decision through 2 different approaches. Tourists collect information about transportation, routes, accommodation, food, costs, safety-security, risk and problems regarding a tourist destination to decide rationally. However, digital word-of-mouth spread over social media (i.e. in the form of 'images', 'videos', 'comments and reply' etc.) may insist tourists to decide cognitively.

Regression Analysis

A simple linear regression has been conducted to predict the role of social media in tourists' destination selection decision. The output of regression analysis has been presented in following tables.

Table-5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.723	0.522	0.516	0.715
Predictors: (Constant), Social media word-of-mouth, Social media information about destination				

Table-5 represents the model summary of regression analysis. Here, the term R denotes correlation between regressor variable (role of social media in tourist destination selection) and regressand variable (Social media information about destination

and Social media word-of-mouth). Here the value of R is 0.723, which means there is high correlation exists between regressor and regressand. In this model, calculated R square value is 0.522 this mean the linear regression explains 52.2% of the variance in data.

Table-6: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	88.260	2	44.130	86.364	.000(a)
	Residual	80.734	158	.511		
	Total	168.994	160			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social media word-of-mouth, Social media information about destination
b. Dependent Variable: Role of social media in tourist destination selection decision

The Table-6 represents the F-test. The linear regressions' F-test has the null hypothesis that the model explains 'zero' variance (i.e. $R^2=0$). Here the F-test is highly significant, thus it can be assumed that the model explains significant amount of variance in 'role

of social media in tourist destination selection decision'. In other words, it can be concluded that the current regression equation meaningfully describe the relationship between dependent and independent variables.

Table-7: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	3.994	.056		70.892	.000
	Social media information about destination	0.332	.057	.323	5.881	.000
	Social media word-of-mouth	0.664	.057	.646	11.753	.000

Dependent Variable: Role of social media in tourist destination selection decision

The coefficient table provides the necessary information to predict the role of social media in tourist destination selection from 'Social media information about destination' and 'Social media word-of-mouth' as well as these independent variables contributes statistically significantly to the model. From the Table-7, the estimated regression coefficients are: $\beta_0= 3.994$, $\beta_1=0.332$ and $\beta_2= 0.664$. Therefore, following regression equation can be proposed:

Role of social media in tourist destination selection decision= $3.994+0.332$ (Social media information about destination) + 0.664 (Social media word-of-mouth) + error term

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to identify the various issues of social media that can influence tourists' decision making. As social media are widely used source of information, tourists use these media in their decision making process. Social media provide information about transportation facilities, travel routes, accommodation and restaurant facilities, problems and risks, safety issues, culture and heritage of tourist destinations. Moreover, social media also perform as a word-of-mouth communication tool in tourist decision making. In present business world, the power of social media can be utilized by the tourism industry to attract, retain and grow the number of visitors in their destinations. The outcome of this study can be applied by the decision makers of many businesses which are related with tourism industry (i.e. transportation companies, travel agencies, hotels, restaurants etc.). However, this study analyzed the impact of overall social media on tourists' decision making. Further study

can be conducted focusing on specific social media vehicle (e.g. facebook, twitter, youtube).

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