

# Social Media Sources (SMS) Influence on Tourism Choice Decisions

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**Abstract:** Social media effect in day to day life of most of the mobile and computer users in the internet era is highly influencing their lifestyle, opinions, evaluations, and decision making about purchase and usage pattern of products and services. Tourism industry which is one of the growing service sectors in developing countries like India is not an exception to social media impact. In this article, study about the influence of social media sources on the decisions of tourism consumers is carried out. For the study, 365 respondents are chosen from the various places of Madurai, Tamilnadu. For the analysis, t-test and ranking method are used. The study mainly focuses on analyzing the demographic influence on social media choices in making tourism related decisions.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Tourism, Demographic Variables, and Purchase decisions.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is recognized as a major service industry which contributes to positive economic growth and also one of the largest service industries. According to the World Tourism Organization 2018 information, the remarkable contribution in the tourism sector is rising in GDP and employment opportunities. The importance of tourism, as an instrument of economic development, has been widely accepted. The positive impact generated by tourism industry encouraged various countries to focus their efforts to improve their tourism service (Chang et al., 2010). As per the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), during the year 2013, recorded more than 1.087 billion foreign tourists with a yearly increase of 4.6% and the US \$ 1075 billion tourism receipts with a yearly increase of 11.1%. The Tourism sector generation of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated to rise up to 10.5% by the end of the year 2018 (Padachi, 2009). Travel and Tourism industry is estimated that 255 million jobs with a growth rate of 9.2% were created in the year 2011. By 2022 it will become 328 million jobs worldwide (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2012).

Promotion of tourism services through social media marketing is different than traditional methods of marketing. Thus it requires different methods and strategies to achieve branding and positioning to influence and generate business through social media marketing (Gordhamer, 2009). Social media marketing communication for tourism is with the consumers who seek information about the tourism, tourist places and other related information for decisions on tourism plans through the social communication channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Forums at any time (Gordhamer, 2009). The increasing availability of high-speed internet enhanced social media marketing to reach the customers in information search and evaluation of the products and services through users reviews. Even though the tourism industry is facing challenges due to the improvements in ICT (Wang et al., 2007), this competition changes into healthier for the tourism industry.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anwasha et.al (2016) stated the relationship between the social media and the tourism industry based and found that social media is fundamentally changing the way travelers and tourist search find, read, trust, and justify information related to tourism. Elvis Madondo (2016), have highlighted the role of social media in promoting the tourism industry in South Africa. Research studies indicate that WhatsApp and Facebook as active social media platforms which has the highest numbers of users. SyaharizadBinti et.al (2016) discussed the influence of social media as a marketing tool among the Enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia was conducted. Suzanne Amaro et al (2016) argued in their study that,

the traveler's perception regarding the usage of social media among travelers and the study enumerates the clusters based on demographic and other travel-related characteristics. As said by **Anja Pabel and Bruce Prideaux (2015)**, the least number of research studies were previously conducted on the usage of social media strategies. The researchers have concluded that people are using social media for purchase evaluations and decisions. **Dexter R. Buted et al (2015)** found that customers' opinions, thoughts, and expressions were not well presented through social media. **Gonca Guzel Sahin and Gunce Sengun (2015)** argued in their study the role of the internet, especially through social media as the strongest elements in the competition of the tourism sector. **Isabel et al (2015)** stated in his study by analyzing the positioned images of a tourism destination with the various dimensions of the image are influencing their decisions, how it triggers their purchase decision. **John Bowen (2015)** found the trends that affect social media users, managers and researchers to understand its influence and also discussed the effect of these trends. **Marius et al (2015)** conducted a conceptual study in measuring the heritage tourism entrepreneurship and social media tourism based on their opportunities and challenges. **Minwoo Lee et al (2015)** described that existing consumer or traveler perspective is more relevant for social media related researches in comparison with researchers in hospitality services. The findings from the study indicate that there is a scope for further research it shows the social media use and practices. **Neeraj Gohil (2015)** conducted a case study in measuring the role and impact of social media in the Madhya Pradesh Tourism sector found out that, the participation of online travel bookings stands roughly at 30% in the current market scenario and this figure is expected to rise more in the near future. **Yuanfang Qian et al (2015)** stated that in China very few studies were conducted in this area. The research explored the relevance of social media in search behavior online. Appropriate suggestions were provided on how to utilize personalized search results for the online tourists, and how to use the advantages of social media and how to enhance the tourism enterprises market competitiveness in the future network era. **Androniki et al (2014)** discussed the economic related issues emerging from the implementation of social media, may be useful for companies for the effective use of resources. **Alzbeta and Antonin (2014)** in their study shows the main characteristics of social media with the effects to destination communication strategy and it deals with changes in visitors' behavior affecting the destination marketing.

**Benxiang Zeng (2013)** conducted a study on social media in the tourism industry said that tourism industry is still in the infancy stage and only very few studies are conducted in this area and more studies are recommended. **Charita Jashi (2013)** concluded that social media marketing can also be helpful in understanding the attitudes of customers and at the same time the value of social media marketing in tourism business is not well recognized yet. **Gergely Rathonyi (2013)** conducted a perception study on the Influence of social media on tourism especially among students of the University of Debrecen. **Ioanna et al (2013)** studied the effects of social media and ICTs among youth. In particular, this study concludes in investigating the profile of young tourists' actively participating in social media as well as the effects of information absorbed through social media and ICTs on their travel decisions and significant results were also found among the data of Greek tourists. **Vera Seabra (2013)** used a social Media value-creation model to find out if any of the functionalities applied to tourism and any of the perceived benefits by using social media. **Bing Pan (2012)** emphasized the role of the traditional theories, such as social exchange theory, social penetration theory, and social network theory, could be used in studying the social media paradigm shifts but more focus on the hospitality and tourism marketing research and the principles of marketing hospitality and tourism businesses through social media. **Drury (2008)** has argued that with social media, in particular, the content of advertising and branding must be provided as relevant value-added content that should be more about the consumer, rather than direct product placement. When companies help their customers through social media outlets, it is more likely to build a long-term relationship, which promotes brand awareness and growth. **Yu-Shan and Huang (2006)** stated that the website significantly influences browsers and indirectly promotes Greek tourism. Then, this article described the key success factors of the popular website. **Pardhasaradhi Madasu(2013)** has described destination branding and how it improves service quality by adopting web2.0 for tourism promotions. **Khan (2012)** said that social media can have both positive and negative impact not only on smaller business but also to franchisee corporations. **Milano et al (2011)**, highlighted the impact of modern ICTs which poses a big challenge to today's tourism arena.

### Objectives

- To study and analyze the perception of consumers on social media aspects with respect to Tourism Services
- To identify the factors influencing tourists' preference for social media for their decision on tourism.

- To offer suggestions to tourism service providers for utilizing social media for their marketing of services.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is descriptive type. A well-structured questionnaire is framed and the responses were collected from the tourist respondents through interview schedule. The responses were chosen using a convenience sampling method. The study was conducted in Madurai region among 400 respondents out of which 365 were found to be complete. Secondary data were collected from various journals, tourism websites, and tourism agencies.

### Hypothesis

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between the demographic and Social Media variables of the respondents with respect to the perception of the Social Media aspects for Tourism Services.

### The Scope of the Study

The research study emphasizes evaluating the influence level of social media on decision making of tourism by tourists in the Madurai region. The study has been made to analyze the preference of social media on tourism customers. The research also attempts to identify the social media factors influencing the buying decision in tourism service choice.

### Limitations of the Study

1. The study is based on the assumed responses given to the sample questions by the consumers of the tourism and industrial units selected for the study.
2. This analysis about the influence of social media on the preference of tourism services is limited to Madurai region only.
3. The survey was limited to existing tourism consumers who are using social media and so generalization of results may not be appropriate or may not give the substantial ground in proving the same points elsewhere.
4. This study was carried out only in the researcher's convenient areas. Thus the findings may vary when the same study in other areas.

Table 1: Distribution of Samples in Madurai Region			
S. No	Geographical Location	No of Respondents	Total Percentage
1	Madurai North	86	24%
2	Madurai South	72	20%
3	Melur	56	15%
4	Peraiyur	48	13%
5	Thirumanagalam	32	9%
6	Usilampatti	36	10%
7	Vadipatti	35	10%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>100%</b>

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Demographic Details			
Variables	Options	Frequencies	(%)
Gender	Male	214	59
	Female	151	41
Marital Status	Married	226	62
	Unmarried	139	38
Age (In years )	Less than 25	129	35
	25- 50	147	40
	Above 50	89	24
Qualification	School/Diploma	182	50
	UG/PG	127	35
	Professional/Ph.D.	56	15
Occupation	Salaried	128	35
	Business/Profession	96	26
	Student	82	22
	Home maker/Retired	59	16

Table 3: Reliability of Factors Influencing Decision Making on Tourism Services through Social Media				
Details	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	The variance of the scale if Item Deleted	Total Correlation Corrected Item	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Increase the level of trust and reduce perceived risk.	82.36	124.125	.583	.878
Ease in collecting information from Social media.	81.26	132.647	.489	.884
Quality of information from Social media about tourism services.	84.28	146.287	.542	.891
The ability to communicate among other tourists through social media	85.23	153.478	.465	.884
Feasibility to refer reviews on experience of other tourists	86.20	1374.279	.539	.892

### Interpretation

From the above table 3, it is clear that the factors used to analyze their influencing level on decision making on tourism services through Social Media are having reliability in the analysis as the Cronbach's alpha in all cases is above 0.8. Thus the scales and factors are having relevancy and reliability in the analysis of the results.

Table 4: Ranking of Preferences for Tourist Places			
S. No.	Preferences For Places Of Visit	No. Of Respondents	Rank
1.	Tourists attraction areas	265	1
2.	Pilgrimage Places	97	2
3.	Recreation Sites	33	5
4.	Entertainment Places	43	4
5.	Educational Tour/Industrial Visit	46	3

**Note: 1 to 5 (1 'Most' Preference and 5 'Least' Preference)**

### Interpretation

From the above table 4, the order of ranking by the tourism consumers about their preferred places of the visit is listed. Among the various places, the tourist's attraction areas like historical places, hill stations, waterfalls etc ranked at first preference followed by places where pilgrimage related temples, churches, mosques, festival places etc as the second one. Tourists listed educational and industry-related places occupied the fourth rank and lastly, recreation places like walking places, beaches, sea view restaurants ranked fifth place among the other places.

### Hypotheses on Demographic Variables Vs Tourists' Perception

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference between the Male and Female respondents with respect to the Preference on Social Media aspects for Tourism Services with respect to the Preference on Social Media Sources for Tourism Service Decisions.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference between the Married and Unmarried respondents with respect to the Preference on Social Media Sources for Tourism Service Decisions.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference among the Qualification of the respondents with respect to the Preference on Social Media Sources for Tourism Service Decisions.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference among the Occupation of the respondents with respect to the Preference on Social Media Sources for Tourism Service Decisions.

Table 5: Consolidated table of a t-test of demographic variables				
Statement	Gender	Marital Status	Qualification	Occupation
	Independent sample -t test P Value (5% Significance Level)			
Increase the level of trust and reduce perceived risk.	0.031 *	0.023*	0.068	0.028*
Ease in collecting information from Social media.	0.019*	0.037*	0.031*	0.032*
Quality of information from Social media about the tourism.	0.028*	0.035*	0.057	0.041*
The ability to communicate among other tourists through social media	0.051	0.017*	0.039*	0.031*
Feasibility to refer reviews on experience of other tourists	0.033*	0.018*	0.029*	0.014*
<b>Results -Null Hypothesis</b>	<b>H<sub>01</sub> is Partially Accepted</b>	<b>H<sub>02</sub> is Rejected</b>	<b>H<sub>03</sub> is Partially Accepted</b>	<b>H<sub>04</sub> is Rejected</b>
* Variables are Significant				
Source: Consolidated from the SPSS table				

## FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

As the  $P$  values are lesser than Sig. Value (0.05) in case of 17 out of 20 cases and also in consumer preference of Social Media for decision making towards Tourism Services the Null Hypotheses are rejected. The Null Hypotheses are accepted in the remaining 3 cases since the  $P$ -Value is greater than Sig. Value (0.05).

From the consolidated table of independent 't' test, it is found that except the ability to communicate to other social media users, other parameters are showing statistically significant among male and female in their preference of social media in making tourism related decisions. With respect to marital status and occupation, trust level, ease in information collection, quality of information, ability to communicate to other users and feasibility to see other reviews in social media are showing statistically significant difference among tourism consumers. In considering the qualification of the respondents, factors like increase in trust level and quality of information on social media are showing no significant difference in the preference of tourism consumers while the factors ease in collecting information, ability to communication and review other tourism users' opinion are having significant difference exist with respect to their qualification level.

Hence, it is concluded that there exists a statistically significant difference between the demographic characteristics of Social Media users with respect to their decision making towards Tourism Services

## SUGGESTIONS

- The tourism service providers have to identify the ways to use social networking sites other than facebook and twitter for virtual advertising, which should be a trustful one. They can use social media to reach potential customers by enhancing the image clarity in their advertisements.
- They should also learn how to react with negative comments which may spoil the trust of the new visitors. Another major thing is updating of relevant information using different social media sites with a frequent interval.
- Social media is an innovative way to attract new customers. Some people are unaware about the social media sites while searching for information regarding tourism services. So the tourism service providers have to take some initiatives to create awareness about their sites as the usage of Smartphones among the people has increased even in the rural areas.
- Now people are sharing their content in a telegram and Instagram instead of facebook. They think telegram as committed and protected sites. Respondents have mentioned that WhatsApp collects too much data about them and it disturbs their privacy. They have highlighted telegram as their convenient site for collecting information regarding tourism services. So service providers should not misuse the data. Service providers should be able to identify fake accounts and the advertisement should reach the potential customers thereby increasing the trust in the tourism services.

## CONCLUSION

The tourism services supported by social media services in the current scenario are becoming a very essential channel in promoting the services to prospective tourist customers in a faster and effective way. With the unexpected boom in internet services and smartphone usage population in India has facilitated the information seeking and decision making efforts of tourism consumers easier. The tourism industry which is recording the consistent growth with the increasing tourism attraction initiatives by the government and technological drive through social media should be properly channelized and regulated by the service providers and the government for secured and user-friendly access by the tourism consumers.

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