



HOTEL

EDITORS

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DIGITAL DISRUPTION IN HOSPITALITY

SUSTAINABLE HOSPITALITY

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON PEOPLE, PLANET, AND PROFIT

Digital Disruption in Hospitality, Sustainable Hospitality

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Digital Disruption in Hospitality, Sustainable Hospitality: A Global Perspective on People, Planet, and Profit

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Preface

The hospitality industry, a cornerstone of human connection and cultural exchange, is undergoing significant transformation. *Digital Disruption in Hospitality, Sustainable Hospitality: A Global Perspective on People, Planet, and Profit* addresses this dynamic shift by exploring how emerging technologies and sustainability imperatives are reshaping the sector. In today's digital era, the industry faces the dual imperative of embracing technological disruption and addressing pressing global sustainability challenges. From data-driven personalization to blockchain-facilitated transparency, the scope of digital innovation is reshaping customer experiences and operational efficiencies. Simultaneously, the sector must align with global sustainability goals, recognizing the environmental and socio-economic impacts of its practices.

Against this backdrop, this book examines the interplay between digital disruption and sustainability in hospitality, presenting a multidimensional narrative that integrates forward-thinking technologies with responsible business strategies. It highlights how the industry can adapt to evolving demands while remaining committed to creating positive social and environmental outcomes.

Purpose and Scope

This book aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on how the hospitality industry can embrace digital disruption while advancing sustainability. It examines how technology-driven innovation intersects with the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit, creating pathways for responsible and profitable growth. By offering both theoretical and practical insights, the book serves as a resource for academics, practitioners, and policymakers. It focuses on integrating technological advancements into hospitality operations, enhancing customer satisfaction, and ensuring environmental stewardship, all while addressing the economic and social dimensions of sustainability.

Structure of the Book

Digital Innovation and Customer Experience in Hospitality represents a transformative approach to understanding the intersection of technology and hospitality services. The themes within this domain explore critical areas such as social media's impact on tourist decision-making, the potential of metaverse technologies in luxury

hospitality, and the revolutionary role of digital disruptions like blockchain and fintech in personalizing customer experiences. These research directions highlight a profound shift toward data-driven customization, where technologies like big data and digital platforms are being leveraged to enhance guest experiences, create more personalized interactions, and ultimately drive customer loyalty in an increasingly digital landscape.

Sustainable Development and Responsible Tourism and Economic Growth and Regional Perspectives in Hospitality emerge as complementary themes that underscore the hospitality industry's broader social and economic responsibilities. The research topics reveal a nuanced approach to responsible tourism, focusing on innovative digital advancements that support sustainable practices, entrepreneurship in rural areas, and collaborative partnerships that address social challenges. The themes span from exploring eco-resort management using big data to examining the intersections of social health, domestic workers, and telemedicine and from analyzing culinary tourism development to understanding regional hospitality dynamics. These research directions demonstrate a holistic view of hospitality that goes beyond traditional service models, emphasizing economic development, social responsibility, and technological innovation as interconnected pathways to creating more meaningful and sustainable tourism experiences.

The chapters employ diverse methodologies, including quantitative analyses, case studies, and theoretical models, ensuring a well-rounded exploration of the themes. Advanced techniques such as sentiment analysis, econometric modeling, and digital twin frameworks are applied to deliver robust insights. The book's contribution lies in its ability to bridge academic theory and practical application, offering actionable strategies that stakeholders can implement in real-world scenarios.

Vision for the Future

As the hospitality industry embraces digital disruption, it faces the dual responsibility of leveraging technology for growth while prioritizing sustainability. This book envisions a future where innovation and responsibility go hand in hand, enabling the sector to thrive economically while supporting environmental and social well-being. By addressing the intersection of people, planet, and profit, the book aims to inspire meaningful conversations and actions that shape a resilient and sustainable hospitality landscape.

We extend our gratitude to the contributors for their expertise and commitment to this project. It is our hope that this book serves as a guide and inspiration for navigating the evolving challenges and opportunities in the hospitality industry.

Theme 1

Digital Innovation and Customer Experience in Hospitality

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Chapter 1

Social Media and Tourist Decision-making: A Sociodemographical Exploration of India Using PLS-MGA

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Abstract

Social media has changed the tourism landscape. Tourists are often hooked to social media like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TripAdvisor, etc. for searching where to travel, how to travel, etc. Social media is considered to be revolutionizing tourist decision-making with its versatile and engaging content and thus a favorite among both tourists and tourism marketers. India's digital revolution has made it, which is the land of second largest travellers and social media users, and so this study particularly explores India. There are also various sociodemographical factors that have an interplay on the impact that social media can have on tourist behavior, particularly decision-making. Despite these sociodemographic variables being considered extremely important for the travel sector, they have often been ignored in literature. This study reveals how social media influences the tourist decision-making process of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase behavior, which is empirically tested on 530 Indian tourists. It further explores the sociodemographic impacts of gender, marital status, and education to understand the Indian geographical market using PLS-MGA, which is an advanced moderation technique. Further, it offers real-time implications and suggestions for tourism and hospitality marketing using social media.

Keywords: Social media; tourist; decision-making; gender; education; marital status

1. Introduction

Tourism is considered a unique industry due to its multifaceted presence in the lives of people. While some travel for leisure, some do it for meeting friends and family and some for meeting specific travel goals such as winning over acrophobia. Like a typical service, tourism is intangible and nonperishable, which highlights its nature of being experience-based. Tourism essentially involves tourism expenditure which in most cases comes from savings and planning, leaving customers with lifelong memorable and enjoyable experiences (UNWTO, 2020).

Due to its unique characteristics, tourism is often considered an experience product which makes its evaluation cumbersome before it is actually consumed (Zeithaml et al., 2012). This attracts a complex consumer behavior process with tourists trying to mitigate risks associated with travel decision-making. With technological advancements, tourists often rely on social media for assistance on travel planning and informed decision-making. The open, inexpensive, and user-friendly nature of social media has gained a lot of popularity among the tourist community. They also use it for content creation as a form of social sharing and feedback. Social media like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter not only allow the tourists to interact and engage with fellow tourists but also with brands and communities which help them in acquiring information, minimizing the risks associated and gain social support for travel purchases (Zhan et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2019). The engaging and exciting nature of travel content on social media act as a travel guide to tourists for visiting new places (Rahjasa et al., 2023, 2024). User-generated content and advertisements on social media often act as a trust-worthy source of social proof and helps shaping tourist decisions (Wibisono & Lale, 2024). Such dependence on social media among tourists often leaves researchers intrigued about how social media is impacting tourists' behavior and choices (Dewayani et al., 2023; Rahjasa et al., 2023).

Studies reveal that specific aspects of social media influences like tourists' desire to share or the propensity to share on social media may vary across genders, stage of life, etc. (Huang et al., 2010; Pritchard et al., 2007). These processes of sharing travel experiences and storytelling can be significantly different for different types of tourists, like male or female (Huang et al., 2010). Some also hint at a probable influence of personal factors, such as gender, marital status, and education, on social media usage and the perception of impacts it has on tourists (Aye et al., 2013; Minazzi, 2014).

Various factors personal to a tourist can be categorized as their sociodemographical factors, like age, gender, education, and marital status. Tourist behavior varies across these different categories of demographics and so does the social media usage patterns. Travel preferences are often shaped with sociodemographics such as where to travel, how to travel, etc., having a strong role in tourist decision-making (Mihai et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Pallas et al., 2024). Such factors are extremely important for marketers in designing both the tourism product and marketing (Brochado et al., 2022). This suggests the relevance of sociodemographics in noting social media influence among tourists (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011).

But despite the importance of such variables, past research studies on the socio-demographical analysis of tourism industry are said to be “virtually unexplored” (Rodríguez-Pallas et al., 2024).

Despite demographics being a popular theme within the tourism domain, their potential impact on social media-based decision-making has been often ignored. Among the handful studies, they have often attempted to note the impact of age or generations in studying social media and tourist behavior (Cox et al., 2009; Dôebksi et al., 2019; Gulati, 2023; Werenowska & Rzepka 2020; Xiang et al., 2015). Past studies have overlooked the probable differences arising due to other individual tourists’ characteristics, like gender (Assaker et al., 2020), assuming that both genders behave similar with regard to using social media for online travel behavior (Chiu et al., 2006). Marital status, which is an important reflection of tourist behavior, has also been ignored in major research studies. This has led to the erroneous assumption of reality which does not reflect the changes in individual behavior (Escobar-Rodríguez et al., 2017). Hence, researchers suggest a need to “further theorizing it” (Agustí, 2021; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015; Javed et al., 2020; Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018). Also, the handful research conducted with sociodemographical lens are a decade old and have only attempted to explore individual decision-making stages, like information searches or post-purchase story telling (like Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Also, a major concern is the contradictory nature of findings due to different social media platforms assessed lack the generalization of results (Minazzi, 2014).

Indians love to travel and explore and often have traditions of the great Indian family vacation. They enjoy all sorts of travel with newer trends emerging such as bag-packers, solo travel, etc. (Visa, 2015). India is also the second largest nation of social media users with a base of over 755 million users (Demand Sage, 2023). Hence, India can be said as a market with huge potential for travel and tourism sector understanding technological impacts (Gulati & Kumar, 2024). Further, understanding a particular site and case shall help in a deeper understanding of the nexus of social media and tourist behavior and help in revealing the significance of social media as “influential source” for tourists (Dewayani et al., 2023). There is a pertinent need to address how tourism geographies can potentially be impacted social media communication through newer methodologies; thus, there is still a need to explore gaps with newer methodologies (Cheng, 2024). Hence, this study aims at gathering empirical evidence on how social media influences tourist decision-making in India, which is an apt study area, and attempts to rather explore the nuances with respect to different sociodemographical groups to gain a more in-depth understanding of such an impact.

A study aimed at exploring the sociodemographical differences is useful for both by tourism marketing agencies and governments for tourism development planning (Rivera & Gutierrez, 2018). Understanding the trends in technology and social media allows marketers to strategize toward more customer-centric view and better customer satisfaction. It also allows industry experts and stake holders like destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and tourism marketers to better target their audience by coupling advertisements with demographic data (Smith, 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Ignoring the diversity that exists in tourism domain specifically with

respect to individualistic characteristics may lead to faulty interpretation of tourism taken as a whole (Agustí, 2021), thus documenting a need for the present study where social media influences have been looked at through a sociodemographic lens. Further, in this social media-oriented setup, businesses are investing heavily in internet-based marketing through thorough planning (Akin & Şener, 2023).

This study is directed at not just filling the existing theoretical gaps in social media and tourism research but also provide an insight into individualistic nature of tourism consumers to better shape the marketing strategies of tourism players. Especially as a major chunk of decision-making has now gone online, revealing the group-based differences on the basis of sociodemographic variables can help leading social media travel portals operating in India like MakeMyTrip, Bookings, Agoda, Goibibo, ClearTrip, EaseMyTrip, etc. to rethink their marketing strategies and incorporate the suggestions made through empirical analyses of Indian tourists. It also suggests how social media like Facebook, Instagram, and TripAdvisor can be used for a seamless tourist decision-making experience.

Accordingly, the study is divided into three parts. The first part discusses how social media influences tourists' decision-making process. The second part explores if tourists' sociodemographics such as gender, marital status, and education have any role in the social media influences on Indian tourists. The last segment offers real-time implications and suggestions for tourism marketers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Social Media for Tourist Decision-making*

Social media as a concept is on a continuous evolution and expansion with the rising technological expansion. Branching from the traditional web 2.0 concept and moving toward a new social world altogether, social media categorizations can be plentiful. The most appropriate classification with respect to tourism industry includes those web-based applications that allow creation, modification and sharing of content that includes photographs, videos, comments, etc. with a two-way interaction on the internet (Gretzel, 2018; Javed et al., 2020). Even though newer forms of social media are steadily increasing, the commonly used platforms include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), Pinterest etc.

Tourist decision-making originates from classical consumer decision-making that essentially involves sequential steps that are commonly referred as decision-making process (Engel et al., 1990; Um & Crompton, 1990). Researchers often refer to it by different names such as Mathieson and Wall's Linear Model of Travel Decision-making (1982) or Consumer Decision-making Process (Kotler & Keller, 2012) and is as a five-stage linear process involving need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase behavior (Refer to Fig. 1.1).

Cheng (2024) suggest that theories allow to tap the multi-dimensional nature of social media. Literature suggests social media influences all the five stages of decision-making through the various roles that it adopts. Liu et al. (2020) have categorized them as four roles: First "need generator role" that initiates an

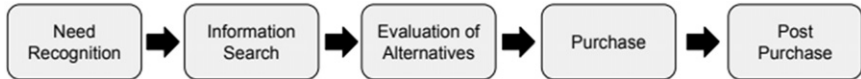


Fig. 1.1. Tourist Decision-making. *Source:* Adapted from Kotler and Keller (2012).

interest or lure people to visit a place or attraction that they saw on social media. Second, “supporter” role where information gained from social media supports the travel decisions. Third, “guide” role has a direct impact on tourists as social media essentially guides tourists toward appropriate choices while evaluating or searching for travel information and fourth, “approver” role that help double checking decisions and confirm the preliminary choices. Various studies have found that social media imparts a very strong and positive influence on all the five stages of decision-making. They discover their travel needs through social media, look for information online, evaluate them for the best choice and also eventually make online bookings for a final purchase. Further, they also indulge in feedbacks or complaints and social sharing as a part of their post-purchase behavior (de Souza & Machado, 2017; Fotis et al., 2011; Gulati, 2023; Minazzi, 2014; Osei & Abenyin, 2016; Pop et al., 2021).

2.2 The Role of Sociodemographics

Tourist behavior and decision-making can be molded by several factors of “individual travel context” such as gender, education, etc. These could be internal to a tourist and can play specific important roles in shaping tourist behaviors and needs (Gavalas et al., 2014; Lamsfus et al., 2015). Some of these can be identified a priori and can facilitate better understanding of the change in tourist behavior and decision-making (Volchek et al., 2020).

A study of demographic impact is considered to be profound for the implications it can have. Schewe and Meredith (2006, p. 51) quote that “finding groups of consumers with strong, homogenous bonds is the ‘Holy Grail’ of marketing.” Specifically, demographic variables such as age, gender, and education play a pivotal role in the segmentation for marketers (Hudson, 2008; Make, 2014).

2.3 Social Media and Gender

Gender has been the most prominent form of group comparison and segmenting for marketing communicators, and studying it forms an important basis of segmentation (Darley & Smith, 1995; Holbrook, 1986; Meyers-Levy, 1988; Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991; Putrevu, 2001). This is because gender acts as a differentiating factor of socialization process among men and women (Dhandra & Park, 2018). Research reveals that the decision-making behavior of men and women vary with men being more challenge taking, lenient, and

dominant while women being emotional, helpful, and risk averse (Gilligan, 1982; Stern & Dietz, 2005).

Further, it is noted that males and females behave differently with regard to the influence of social media on tourist decision-making (Buluk & Esitti, 2015; Jacobsen & Munar, 2012; Javed et al., 2020; Seyidov & Adomaitiene, 2016; Simms & Gretzel, 2013; Öz, 2015). But there are contrasting observations with respect to the gender disparity in tourist behavior. While some suggest that women rely more on online travel websites (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012) and social networking sites to make travel decisions (Joseph & Anandkumar, 2016), others found males to be more dependent with social media consumption (Verna, 2009; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008) and using it for travel planning (Simms & Gretzel, 2013). Further, Cahyanto et al. (2016) note that gender can influence the travel behaviors on social media such as social content sharing, which can attribute to variability among the two genders.

H1. Gender moderates the influence of social media on tourist decision-making and is different among male and female groups.

2.4 Social Media and Marital Status

Marital status has a potential to impact tourist behavior, but it has not been given enough importance as a demographic characteristic and needs further exploration. A handful of studies that have been conducted suggested that marital status can play a vital role in determining impact of social media on travel planning and decision-making (Buluk & Esitti, 2015; Öz, 2015; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Further, Yoo and Gretzel (2011) highlight that marital status acts as a driver for the use and creation of social media among tourists.

H2. Marital status moderates the influence of social media on tourist decision-making and is different among “unmarried” and “married” groups.

2.5 Social Media and Education

Education levels allow the users to process the use of technology with much ease. They also help in determining engagement with social media such as the type of social media used and when. For example, LinkedIn is the favorite social media among the educated professionals (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). This trend of varying behavior as per educational levels has also been seen among tourists (Yuan et al., 2022). Past studies suggest that education does influence the social media-based tourist behavior (Fotis et al., 2011; Javed et al., 2020; Rathonyi, 2013), but there have been contrasting findings. While Öz (2015) noted that with increasing educational levels, there was also an increase in the internet usage and also of social media for various travel purposes. On the contrary, Jacobsen and Munar (2012) found that highly educated tourists relied lesser on online information searches made through social media like Facebook, online travel websites like