

## Social Media and Tourism Industry in Kashmir

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### Abstract:

Social media applications have facilitated unprecedented growth in human interaction in modern times. Social media and its growing role in tourism is a topic of utmost significance. From information search to decision making behaviors, social media plays a significant role in many aspects of tourism. Social media also plays a significant role in tourism promotion and helps the tourism service providers in focusing on best practices through the feedback they get from tourists and public via social media. Social Media has become a very powerful tool for advertisements for having a huge user base. A profile of a tourist destination can be created or a blog for the information of the people with all the required photos and vedios for the attraction of the tourists all round the globe.

There is a high need to promote tourism on social media for tourism marketing and destination promotions. The representatives also sought the participation of the department in all the travel trade fairs held across the country. As a part of this campaign on social media the tourism department has raised the attractive slogans like “Kashmir Calling” and “When Are You Visiting?”, etc to attract the more and more tourists from different parts of the world. The campaign on social media is more appealing than any other media.

**Kay Words:** Social media; Tourism; Kashmir;

**Introduction:** Social media are interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. Social media are interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications. User-generated content, such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos, and data generated through all online interactions, is the main function of social media. Users create service-specific profiles for the website or app that are designed and maintained by the social

media organization. Social media facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups. As users engage with these electronic services, they create highly interactive platforms through which individuals, communities, and organizations can share, co-create, discuss, participate and modify user-generated content or pre-made content posted online. Some of the most popular social media websites, with over 100 million registered users, include Facebook, YouTube, WeChat, Instagram, QQ, QZone, Weibo, Twitter, Tumblr, Telegram, Reddit, Baidu Tieba, LinkedIn, LINE, Snapchat, Pinterest, Viber, MeWe, and VK. All these wevsites are now a days playing pivotal role to make information available to the visiting tourists about tourist destination across Kashmir.

**Theoretical Aspect:** Before the internet, destination marketing organizations reached a targeted market of tourists by brand advertising for a destination resulting in one-way communication with the consumer. The internet has allowed for two-way communication between destination marketing organizations and the consumer with the use of social media. destination marketing organizations post their activities on social sites such as blogs, YouTube and Facebook resulting in consumer responses and feedback. Lim cites Blackshaw to define social media as an internet-based application that conveys consumer-generated content. This allows for the consumer to participate in the development of a destination identity/image. Tourists create consumer-generated content of their travels that can influence an audience of prospective tourists. Consumer-generated content is considered, according to Blackshaw and Nazzaro is “a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiment, founded and unfounded tidbits, experiences, and even rumor”. It consists of content such as videos, photos, essays or blog posts aimed at educating other consumers about products, brands, services, and issues.

Now that consumers have an outlet for their personal experiences in the same place as tourist consumers in the midst of their purchase decision process have a lot more information on which to base their decision. Social media influences the decision making process of prospective tourists, but because it is produced among consumers themselves, it can challenge destination marketing organizations. Consumer generated videos attracted more people than marketing generated videos. "According to Qualman, traditional advertisements have less trustfulness than opinions by peers to consumers. Also, individuals are more likely to look up peer posts than postings by an online news site".

A tourist-consumer decision process has four stages: consider, evaluate, buy, and advocate. Tourists go through these stages when making travel purchases, but social media has made the evaluate and advocate stages increasingly relevant. Tourism marketers need to consider the significance of those stages and use it to their advantage. During the evaluation stage consumers research markets and other outlets for information about the product they are considering. Tourist agencies are no longer the unrivaled experts on the attributes or quality of brand and products. In fact, fellow consumer opinion is often more influential than marketers efforts to persuade tourist. Customer reviews that allow for consumer-to-consumer interaction can be found directly on tourism company websites, company blogs, sites such as TripAdvisor.com, or personal blogs, etc. Social media and e-commerce is being implemented into the buying stage as well. With destination research conducted online, it is no wonder that the travel sector accounts for a third of all global e-commerce activity. Once the purchase is made the advocate stage commences. During this phase more interaction and a deeper brand connection is created online with touch points not completely utilized in traditional purchaser funnel models of communication. These touch points can include social media campaigns such as Vail's EpicMix for skiers and geolocation social platforms such as FourSquare, Gowalla and Loopt. In the final stage, social media is being as a means of self-improvement. When choosing a destination tourists are now more informed with the addition of fellow consumer opinion to destination brand information

rather than solely relying on ads provided by marketing organizations. A more informed search allows for tourists to have a more satisfying trip.

To address the elusiveness of social media terminology, a number of theories and concepts have been related to its understanding. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) created a classification scheme based on the theories of media richness, social presence, and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure) – what they argue to be the foundation of social media. The theory of social presence suggests that the higher the degree of social presence, the greater social influence communicators have on one another's behaviour. Social presence, in the online environment, is gained by media richness. Media richness theory assumes that the goal of any communication is the "resolution of ambiguity and the reduction of uncertainty". Media differ in the degree of richness they possess, resulting in some media being more effective than others. The theory of self-presentation and self-disclosure is also relevant here – virtual worlds allowing for high levels of social presence and selfpresentation (for example, with an avatar one can present oneself physically in almost any way one wishes). In the context of a virtual world the user can mimic the face-to-face world, and beyond. In terms of self-presentation, in the real world one will try to reveal information which is consistent with the image one gives. In the virtual world the user can project a certain image by how they communicate, and, by whatever physical image they wish. How images in a virtual world influence propensity to travel is complex, and requires much further research to comprehend. In the Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classification, applications such as collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia) and blogs score lowest, as they are typically text-based simple exchanges. Content communities (e.g. YouTube) and social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) score in the middle of the scheme, reflecting their facility to share pictures, videos, and other forms of media. On the highest level are virtual games and social worlds (e.g. Second Life), which mimic dimensions of face-to-face interactions. In terms of self-presentation and self-disclosure, blogs score higher than collaborative projects given their expansive content in contrast to specific projects. Social networking sites are again in

the middle, given their facility for self-disclosure, and virtual social worlds are ranked highest (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Studies that reference these theories, and others, as fundamental to our understanding of

the social media phenomenon, are listed in Table below.

**Table**  
**Theories and concepts underlying social media**

Theories and concepts	Reference
Media richness theory Social presence theory Self-presentation theory	Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010
Information processing Consumer-decision making Schema theory Consumer decision-making model	Choi, Lehto & O'leary, 2007 Cox, Burgess, Sellitto & Bultjens, 2009
Perspectives on the online tourism domain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry perspective</li> <li>• Symbolic representation perspective</li> <li>• Travel behaviour perspective</li> <li>• Travel information search perspective</li> </ul>	Xiang & Gretzel, 2010
Information search behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal search</li> <li>• External search</li> <li>• Structured approach</li> <li>• Unstructured approach</li> </ul>	Lee, Soutar & Daly, 2007
Mental model Persuasion Process	Xiang & Pan, 2011
Netnography Balance theory	Woodside, Cruikshank and Dehuang, 2007
Brain-computer interface research (BCI) Immersive systems Presence	Guttentag, 2010
Environmental psychology and service marketing research Servicescape Information Systems Theory	Kim & Hardin, 2010
Information theory	O'Connor, 2010
Flow theory	Huang, Backman & Backman, 2010

**Tourism Industry in Kashmir:** So far as the history of the growth and development of tourism industry in India is concerned, it was started very late during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Britishers did not promote tourism during their entire reign in India except that they set up a committee under the leadership of Sir John Sergeant (in 1945) which submitted its report in 1946. Under the independent Government of India a small tourist section was set up under the Ministry of Transport in 1948 to encourage and develop the

tourist industry. The Department of Tourism as a separate department was set up in 1958 only.

In India, tourism is one of the most important economic sectors that has potential to grow at a high rate and can ensure consequential development of the infrastructure of the tourist destinations thereby developing the backward economies. Jammu and Kashmir State is a hilly and economically backward but occupies an apex seat in the beautiful tourist resorts in the country.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is rightly called as paradise on earth. The state of Jammu and Kashmir is situated on top of the country and if Mother India is a 'Queen' then Jammu and Kashmir surely looks like the 'Crown' on her head. From sun-kissed mountains, lush green valleys, beautiful gardens, to blue lakes, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has it all. Jammu and Kashmir is regarded as one of Asia's top tourism destination known for quite, peaceful and ritualistic lifestyle of these people.

Apart from agriculture the economy of the state depends mainly on tourism. Its main component is cultural tourism which is one of the largest and most flourishing industries. The cultural tourism has the potential of generating about half of the total employment generated by tourism in the state. The cultural tourism not only generate economic benefits but also uplift the social life of the host population. And as such all sections of the population and all the areas of the state are getting benefits from this industry.

Among the long list of places of tourist interest in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the most popular destinations are: Gulmarg, Sonamarg, Srinagar, Vaishno Devi, Kargil, Leh, Zangla, Zanskar, Ladakh and Pahalgam. Different tourist centres has different attraction like heritage, pilgrimage, infrastructure, natural beauty, etc. Kashmir has combination of all the attraction from natural beauty, pilgrimage, heritage, cultural and handicraft from the very ancient times; but political instability, and war like situation in Jammu and Kashmir, poor infrastructure, feeling of insecurity, lack of advertisement, etc, are the constraints for the growth of tourism in Jammu and Kashmir.

**Role of Social Media in Promoting Tourism:**

Social media marketing has increased due to the growing active user rates on social media sites. One of the main uses is to interact with audiences to create awareness of various tourist destinations and services available over there, with the main idea of creating a two-way communication system where the people and/or customers can interact with each other. The use of new media put tourists on the position of spreading opinions, sharing experience with utmost transparency.

Social media has made a huge impact on the tourism industry. Consumers engage with social networking sites to research trips, make informed decisions about their travels and share their personal experiences of a particular hotel, restaurant or airline. Facebook, WhatsApp, TripAdvisor and Instagram, besides others, in particular has had a wide-reaching effect on the industry. It has millions of visitors who are actively seeking out and circulating travel information and advisory among the people all over the globe.

The following list of the leading social networks shows the number of active users as of July 2018. According to Statistics, in 2019, it is estimated that there will be around 2.77 billion social media users around the globe.

S.No	Social Media Platform	Number of Users (in millions)
1	Facebook	2,270
2	YouTube	1,900
3	WhatsApp	1,500
4	Facebook Messenger	1,300
5	WeChat	1,040
6	Instagram	1,000
7	QQ	806
8	QZone	563
9	Tik Tok	500
10	Sina Weibo	411
11	Twitter	330
12	Reddit	330
13	Baidu Tieba	300
14	Skype	300
15	LinkedIn	303
16	Viber	260
17	Snapchat	255
18	Line	203
19	Discord	200
20	Pinterest	291
21	Telegram	200
22	Tinder	100

This style of user-generated content is seen by the online community as more credible and authentic and

for many hotels, restaurants and visitor attractions, if they are not listed in the top five spots, they are losing out majorly to their competitors. With more than 200 million reviews and opinions posted on TripAdvisor to date, and more than 800 million active users on Facebook posting updates and sharing images, social media is dominating the industry.

Changing the dynamics of promoting Kashmir valley as an international tourist destination, the State Tourism department is concentrating on social media, besides numerous festivals, to woo travelers both at national and international levels. Besides local people the Tourism Department is also campaigning to its best to promote tourism in J&K on social media by way of uploading videos, pertaining to various tourist destinations in the valley. In addition to that, latest technology, including drones have been used to create videos for circulation on various social media platforms.

**Conclusion:** Tourism is the life line of Jammu and Kashmir and all possible efforts need to be taken for retaining, maintaining and sustaining it. Tourism opens up new window for resources, both investment generation and revenue generation leading to employment generation as well as socio-economic development of the local populace. The tourism infrastructure like wider and smooth roads, transport including provision for Airlines and Rail services, up gradation of hotels, development of tourist places in Jammu and Kashmir should be strengthened. Steps should be taken to restore the ancient splendor of the monuments. The religious sites in all the three regions of Jammu and Kashmir need a very special focus for the development of basic infrastructure to attract pilgrims in huge numbers.

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