

Social Media and Tourism

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Social media are platforms that enable users to develop online communities and networks by collaborating, publishing, distributing and commenting on web-based content and customizing Internet applications worldwide. Some of the most popular platforms are wikis, blogs and microblogs, social networks, media sharing sites, review sites, and voting sites.

The progression of social media has led to the emergence of new tourism cultures and practices. Tourists communicate and form virtual communities on a whole array of social media platforms (Munar, Gyimóthy and Cai 2013). Tourism social media is a heterogeneous and fast-changing virtual space consisting of platforms that have tourism as their core value, including TripAdvisor, as well as tourism-related content uploaded by tourists and organizations on generic sites, such as Instagram and TikTok. With millions of tourists using social media, the participatory Web has enabled new kinds of tourism interactions. Tourists' perception, evaluation, and relation to their social and material worlds are thus transformed.

Evolution of the Field

Tourism social media research appeared first as a subset of the field of Information Technology and Tourism. Since the turn of the millennium, research production on social media has fast increased. The first stages were driven by a business research agenda. This applied-focus approach dedicated to the "business of social media" still is the most frequent type of research enquiry. However, its research is increasingly envisioned as a subset of the field of digital tourism studies. This evolution results from studies that apply critical or interpretivist approaches and a rich mixture of novel academic perspectives from various disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and cultural studies.

The managerial study of social media can be divided between customer- and supply-focused research, the former being the most common type in this field. Multiple studies aim to classify tourism social media according to types of tools, platforms and content, types of tourists contributing to these sites. Another popular stream of research examines the impact of social media on decision-making and tourism experiences. Consumer-centered research approaches are also often adopted in other studies of electronic word-of-mouth, location-based services, and digital cultures that analyze tourists' communication, emotions, behavior,

and motivation on social media platforms and the phenomenon of the influencer (Gretzel 2018). With the increasing online activities, social media has been adopted as an effective tool for tourism fieldwork (Ma and Cai 2023).

Supply-oriented research discusses how social media is leveraged by tourism organizations. Studies examine the strategies used to interact with the virtual world of social media and their impact on value chains, intermediation, and the touristic marketplace. Other contributions discuss patterns of technology adoption in the industry and describe the managerial challenges and opportunities that tourism organizations face when using social media for destination marketing or product development.

Additionally, scholars examine the social use of technology in tourism, the affordances of social media, as well as the way in which people and institutions actualize those affordances (Gössling 2021). Other studies in the political dimension explore the phenomenon of cyberactivism and social movements (Mkono 2018). These critical approaches comprehend social media as deeply embedded in political and sociocultural structures, and aim to reveal how social media influences, augments, and transforms tourism interactions and relationships.

Recent research has been moving away from the advocating stage, and engaging in more critical voices of the negative impact of social media in tourism. On the tourist's level, research examines the negative impacts of the glamorization of social media, competitive social status and ubiquitous social connectedness on tourists' mental wellbeing. On the destination level, studies investigate the role of social media in creating overtourism and the negative impacts of social media-induced tourism on destinations (Siegel, Tussyadiah and Scarles 2023).

The Way Forward

Social media has allowed for novel economies and forms of value creation to emerge. The commercialization of tourist-generated content has transformed social media platforms into global virtual marketplaces and contested political spaces. The management and exploitation of this digital capital change power relations, alter value chains, and transform tourism encounters and relationships. In addition to the managerial aspect, future studies should broaden the scope of knowledge production in this field by engaging with different disciplines and including more critical voices, including ethics, wellbeing, and the digital divide (Cai, McKenna, Wassler and Williams 2020). New investigations may explore the development of artificial intelligence and social media and its implications on diversity and inclusion, power relations and justice; the impacts of technological change on human cognition and wellbeing; digital mediation of affect and emotion; the complex interrelationships of technology with nature and sustainability; and how all these different phenomena are embedded in and transformed through tourism.

See Also

- eTourism
- Information Technology
- Online Review
- Social Network Analysis
- Technology

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