IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN SELECTING SHAKHRISABZ CITY AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

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Abstract: As technology advances, more organizations, including the tourist industry, are adopting and utilizing social media to share information and engage with consumers more efficiently. Social media is progressively revolutionizing numerous tourism businesses due to its boundless capacities. As a result, social media platforms enable tourist service providers to sell their products and services at a cheaper cost. In an information-dominated age, online communication between individuals, businesses, and groups appears to be a simple, common, everyday answer. The phenomenal growth of social media apps, which characterize today's online communication systems, drives an increasing number of individuals and organizations to utilize them for gathering and disseminating information, promoting or criticizing products and services. Despite the fact that social media applications appear to be incredibly effective, inexpensive, and simple to use for advertising a company's products or services, there is a considerable chance of failure connected with them. The company must consider that the messages sent may be received differently by the intended users. Following that, the study analyzed at the influence of social media marketing, social media marketing content, and social media marketing features on the travel locations chosen by tourist visiting Shakhrisabz, Uzbekistan. A simple random sample methodology was used to choose respondents from the population, and an interview was conducted to collect data, with a qualitative method used for interview analysis.

Key words: tourism, tourist, tourist destination, Shakhrisabz travel, social media marketing, tourist choice, travel options.

Introduction: Uzbekistan's tourist industry has enormous potential for growth. Tourism in the nation has increased fivefold in the previous three years as one of the focal areas for reform and economic progress. While around 1 million visitors visited Uzbekistan in 2016, the number increased to 2.7 million in 2017, and more than 5.3 million in 2018. Foreign tourist numbers are predicted to reach 7 million by 2025, with yearly foreign currency profits from overseas visitors reaching up to $2 billion. Uzbekistan's tourist potential may be increased through increasing ties with other nations and international organizations. Uzbekistan should also investigate its cultural and ecological assets, as well as engage in advertising to enhance awareness of these locations. Uzbekistan must also increase infrastructure building, as well as stimulate entrepreneurship and other private-sector activity, in order to fully fulfill the country's tourist potential (The Caspian Policy Center (CPC), 2019). Perhaps there are ideal regional tourism destinations, such as Shakhrisabz. Shakhrisabz is one of Uzbekistan's most ancient and beautiful cities. Its historic center is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Amir Temur, the famous commander, was born in this city. The city was appropriately named "Green City" because of its green trees and flowers (National PR center, 2023). The development and accessibility of the Internet have altered how passengers obtain information, plan and book trips, and share their travel experiences (Leung, 2018). One notable development in the history of the Internet is the growing popularity of social media platforms that allow Internet users to cooperate, interact, and post original material such as blogs, videos, wikis, reviews, or images (Ellison, 2017). Gretzel (2016) reports that online travelers frequently utilize social media platforms to develop user-generated content. Shakhrisabz has been designated as a rapidly rising tourism attraction in recent years, with visitor arrivals increasing over

time. As a result, this study addresses the study's background in relation to the tourist business in Shakhrisabz and Social Media Marketing-related components.

Literature review: Despite the fact that there is a large volume of information (text, photos, audio, and video sequences) moving quickly throughout the web environment, this information is easily accessible. Social media, which characterizes today's online communication systems, enables users to obtain and disseminate information, as well as to positively or adversely affect other people's perceptions about companies, goods, services, locations, the environment, political, economic, and social events. Because of the high complexity and integrated form for sending information, manipulating people's opinions through particular messages is highly likely to occur in the form of media (Maiorescu, 2020). There are also instances where the required information may not reach its intended goal because the manner in which it is given does not match the user's correct profile for receiving it (Pamfilie, 2021). Tourist businesses have lately implemented social media techniques to increase company performance, according to (Yoong, L.C, 2018), ushering in a new age in the tourist sector. According to M. Haenlein (2010), social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Social media platforms are seen as an efficient communication tool for engaging wider audiences (Law, R, 2012). The interactivity and innovativeness of social media have spurred tourist service providers to adopt social media platforms to connect and communicate with clients. tourist destination decision-making is impacted by the quality of services supplied by tourist service suppliers, according to (Mandasari, V, 2021). Tourism destination advertising and consumer understanding of tourist locations influence tourism destination decision-making (Shih, W, 2016). The deciding variables of tourist destination decision-making have been proven in the literature (Daskalopoulou, G. 2020). Adomaitien, R. (2017), for example, investigated important elements impacting foreign visitors' choice-making and concluded that tourism infrastructure, environmental safety, pricing, and human resources all positively influence tourism destination decision making. According to Yeh (2009), visitor risk perception has a substantial effect on tourism decision-making. Considering the above, this study proposed that:

Hypothesis 1: *Tourist decision making intentions will influence tourism destination selection.*

Hypothesis 2: *Social media will act as a positive moderator in the link between travel decision making intentions and Shakhrisabz as a tourist destination selection.*

Results: According to the demographic interview analysis, the majority of respondents in the age category of 20-30 are cultural heritage tourists, whereas the majority of backpackers are in the age group of 31-40. Only a tiny percentage of respondents are luxury travelers between the ages of 41 and 50, with the rest being elderly people aged 50 and higher. Demographic data reveal that the majority of full-time employees are vacationers, whereas the majority of part-time employees are backpackers. According to the sample responses, female respondents outnumber male respondents. Furthermore, the majority of responders had 5-8 or 8-10 years of experience utilizing social media to arrange their vacation. After conducting the interview and transcribing the results, the researchers went on to structural modeling at this step in the study, with important points highlighted, coded, and themed. According to the interview findings, the given hypotheses (direct hypotheses) had a significant link with the outcome variable (tourist destination choice making), whilst the remaining hypotheses had a significant correlation with the dependent variable.

Discussion: Social media as a technology in the twenty-first century has affected organizations and businesses in a variety of ways. Academics and scholars have put a high emphasis on social media's contributions since its inception. This is explained by the fact that consumers are increasingly reviewing firms' goods and services through social media platforms or applications. According to the aforementioned hypothesis, social media and travel decision making intention have a positive association, showing that the data validated the provided hypothesis developed against the examined literature. Once again, the findings revealed that social media positively mediates the association between behavioral intention and tourist destination decision-making by the visited tourists in

Shakhrisabz. The findings accepted with those of (Maiorescu, 2020) and (Mandasari, V, 2021). Tourist decision-making intentions have a significant effect on tourist destination decisions via social media applications, indicating that the availability of social media helps in-trip information searches provided by tourist service providers has a significant influence on tourists' behavioral intentions, thus affecting their destination decision-making.

Conclusion: The findings of this study on the effect of social media on tourists' choice of vacation locations in Shakhrisabz will serve as inspiration for managers and owners of tourism enterprises in Uzbekistan. Above all, practitioners in Uzbekistan will benefit from the research constructs (social media, tourists' decisions, information provided by other travelers, destination image, tourist behavioral intentions, and tourism destination decision-making among local and international tourists) in their marketing, information sharing, and communication activities. The findings will assist practitioners and industry players in making strategic decisions about how to utilize the findings to achieve desired goals and value social media's presence.

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