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Social media marketing in the Himalayas: an examination of its influence on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Nestled amidst the awe-inspiring landscapes of Himachal Pradesh, this research delves into the intricate dynamics between social media marketing and the decision-making processes of modern-day tourists. Utilising a mixed-methods approach, the study quantifies the profound impact of platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter on travel choices. The analysis, rooted in the transformative power of social media, underscores the pivotal role of visual content in shaping tourists' perceptions and influencing their destination preferences. The findings not only contribute empirical evidence but also offer actionable insights for sustainable destination marketing practices, aligning with authenticity and addressing concerns related to overtourism. As the tourism landscape continues to evolve, this research aims to inform strategic decision-making in the broader context of responsible tourism development.

Keywords: social media marketing; tourist decision-making; Himalayan tourism; sustainable destination marketing; overtourism; authenticity.

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1 Introduction

The Himalayan region, with its awe-inspiring landscapes, cultural richness, and profound spiritual significance, has long been an irresistible magnet for tourists seeking unparalleled and transformative experiences (Dahal and Inskipp, 2019; Thapa, 2020). The Himalayas, often referred to as the ‘abode of the gods’, offer a captivating blend of natural beauty and cultural diversity, making them a destination of choice for those in pursuit of both adventure and spiritual rejuvenation.

In the contemporary era, the dynamics of tourism have undergone a significant transformation, primarily driven by the pervasive influence of digital platforms (Gyawali and Kim, 2018). The advent of social media, in particular, has revolutionised the way individuals perceive, plan, and choose travel destinations. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter have become powerful tools that not only showcase the scenic beauty of destinations but also play a crucial role in shaping the narratives and influencing the decision-making process of prospective travellers.

This research paper embarks on a journey to unravel the intricate connection between the digital revolution and the tourism landscape, with a specific focus on the Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh. Nestled amidst the towering peaks of the Himalayas, Himachal Pradesh boasts a diverse tapestry of landscapes, ranging from tranquil valleys to challenging mountain treks. However, in the era of social media dominance, the allure of a destination is not solely crafted by its natural beauty but is intricately woven through the digital tapestry painted by social media marketing strategies.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to delve into the heart of the ongoing transformation, meticulously examining how social media marketing practices exert influence on tourist decision-making processes in Himachal Pradesh. The exploration will extend beyond the conventional realms of marketing, delving into the realms of user-generated content, influencer impact, and the comparative analysis of various social media platforms. By shedding light on these aspects, this research endeavours to contribute valuable insights that can inform sustainable tourism practices, strategic destination marketing, and a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics between technology and travel in the Himalayan context.

1.1 Background

Himachal Pradesh, ensconced in the scenic splendours of the western Himalayas of India, stands as a captivating tapestry of natural wonders and cultural richness. Adorned with snow-capped peaks, verdant valleys, and steeped in vibrant traditions with ancient temples dotting its landscape, this northern Indian state offers an immersive blend of breathtaking landscapes and cultural heritage (Kumar and Sharma, 2017). As the tourism industry in Himachal Pradesh continues to burgeon, the role of social media in shaping the narratives and perceptions surrounding destinations has gained paramount importance (Rana et al., 2018).

In an era dominated by digital connectivity and instant information dissemination, social media platforms have emerged as influential storytellers, showcasing destinations to a global audience. The allure of Himachal Pradesh, with its diverse array of picturesque locations and rich cultural experiences, serves as an ideal canvas for examining the intricate dynamics between social media marketing and tourist decision-making. The visual appeal of snow-kissed landscapes, coupled with the immersive cultural tapestry, makes Himachal Pradesh a compelling case study to unravel how social media platforms contribute to shaping the tourist experience and influencing their choices (Kumar and Sharma, 2017; Rana et al., 2018).

As travellers increasingly rely on digital channels for inspiration, planning, and sharing their experiences, understanding the interplay between social media content and tourist decision-making in the context of Himachal Pradesh becomes not only pertinent but also illuminating. Exploring this intersection allows for a nuanced comprehension of how digital narratives on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter contribute to the perception and decision-making processes of tourists, ultimately influencing their choices and preferences in the diverse and enchanting landscape of Himachal Pradesh.

1.2 Rationale

The central premise of this research is rooted in the recognition of social media as a powerful force in influencing the choices and perceptions of modern-day tourists (Govers et al., 2007; Leung et al., 2013). Understanding the nuances of this influence is crucial for destination marketers, policymakers, and stakeholders aiming to harness the potential of digital platforms to promote tourism responsibly and sustainably (Litvin et al., 2008; Neuhofer et al., 2019). By integrating empirical evidence and theoretical insights, this research seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge that informs strategic decision-making in the realm of destination marketing in the Himalayan context.

1.3 Objectives

This study is guided by two primary objectives. First, to quantitatively assess the impact of social media marketing on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh. Second, to conduct a comparative analysis of various social media platforms, discerning their respective roles in shaping tourists' perceptions of Himachal Pradesh as a destination.

- 1 Quantifying the impact of social media marketing on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh:
 - The first objective aims to measure and analyse the extent to which social media marketing activities influence tourists' decision-making processes when choosing Himachal Pradesh as their travel destination. This involves assessing the role of various social media platforms, the type of content that resonates most with tourists, and understanding the quantitative impact of these digital marketing efforts on actual travel decisions.
- 2 Comparative assessment of social media platforms in shaping tourists' perception of Himachal Pradesh as a destination:
 - The second objective involves conducting a comparative analysis of different social media platforms (such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) to understand their individual roles in shaping tourists' perceptions of Himachal Pradesh. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of content dissemination, engagement strategies, and user interactions on each platform, providing insights into which platforms are more influential in the context of destination marketing for Himachal Pradesh.

1.4 Significance

By unravelling the dynamics between social media marketing and tourist decision-making, this research aspires to provide actionable insights for destination marketers, tourism authorities, and the broader academic community. The findings aim to contribute not only to the specific context of Himachal Pradesh but also to the broader discourse on leveraging social media for sustainable tourism development in culturally and ecologically sensitive regions.

2 Review of related literature

The fusion of social media and tourism has become an integral aspect of contemporary travel decision-making, with a plethora of research highlighting the transformative impact of digital platforms on destination choices. In the context of Himachal Pradesh, the Himalayan region's unique charm and diverse offerings have positioned it as a compelling case study for exploring the nexus between social media marketing and tourist decision-making.

- 1 Social media and destination marketing: numerous studies have underscored the pivotal role of social media in destination marketing. Gretzel and Yoo (2013) emphasise the democratisation of travel information through user-generated content on platforms like TripAdvisor and Yelp. In the context of Himachal Pradesh, where the landscapes range from serene valleys to challenging treks, understanding how user-generated content shapes perceptions becomes imperative. In addition to Gretzel and Yoo's (2013) emphasis on democratising travel information, Wang and Xiang (2019) explore the role of user engagement metrics in evaluating the effectiveness of destination marketing campaigns on platforms like Instagram and Facebook. Their research provides insights into how destination marketers in Himachal Pradesh can leverage user interactions to enhance the impact of promotional content.
- 2 Influence of social media on tourist decision-making: research by Xiang et al. (2017) delves into the psychological aspects of social media influence on travel decisions. Their study identifies the significance of social media in shaping destination images, impacting travellers' attitudes and behaviours. Applying these insights to the context of Himachal Pradesh allows for a nuanced understanding of how digital platforms mould perceptions of this Himalayan state. Building on Xiang et al.'s (2017) work, Li and Wang (2020) delve into the role of social media in the decision-making process by examining the influence of user-generated content on perceived destination risk and trust. Understanding the psychological factors affecting tourist decisions in the context of Himachal Pradesh becomes crucial. Li and Wang's research sheds light on how perceptions of safety and reliability on social media platforms contribute to tourists' attitudes and behaviours.
- 3 Role of influencers in tourism: in the era of influencer marketing, scholars like Brouder et al. (2020) have explored the impact of influencers on tourist decision-making. Understanding the effectiveness of influencers in portraying Himachal Pradesh's cultural richness and natural beauty becomes crucial for destination marketers seeking authentic and relatable promotional strategies. Complementing Brouder et al. (2020) exploration of influencer impact, Smith and Johnson (2021) investigate the authenticity of influencer content and its resonance with diverse tourist segments. Their study assesses the alignment between the cultural representation of Himachal Pradesh by influencers and the preferences of target audiences. This nuanced perspective aids destination marketers in crafting influencer collaborations that authentically showcase the cultural richness and natural beauty of Himachal Pradesh. Social media influencers continue to wield significant influence in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours in the tourism industry. Recent research by Han et al. (2022) explores the effectiveness of

influencer marketing in promoting sustainable tourism practices, emphasising the role of authenticity and credibility in influencer-consumer relationships. Furthermore, studies by Choi et al. (2023) investigate the impact of influencer endorsement on destination image and tourist intentions, highlighting the potential for influencers to positively influence traveller decision-making processes. The rise of micro-influencers also offers destination marketers opportunities to target niche audiences and drive engagement (Nguyen et al., 2022).

- 4 Social media and over tourism: a plethora of recent studies have examined the multifaceted relationship between social media usage and tourist behaviour. For instance, Chen et al. (2023) explore the role of social media in destination image formation, emphasising the importance of user-generated content and peer interactions. Additionally, research by Li and Wu (2024) investigates the impact of social media marketing on tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, highlighting the significance of personalised and engaging content. These studies underscore the evolving landscape of social media in tourism and provide valuable insights for destination marketers seeking to leverage digital platforms effectively. Gretzel (2019) explained that the social media influencers can contribute substantially for diverting the tourists' traffic from the mass tourism destination to the nearby destinations, thus addressing the issue of overtourism I the popular destinations.
- 5 Significance of social media in tourism marketing: social media has become increasingly vital in tourism marketing strategies, offering unparalleled opportunities for engagement and content dissemination. Recent research by Kim et al. (2021) emphasises social media's role in influencing destination choice and travel behaviour. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok enable travellers to explore destinations virtually and engage with user-generated content, enhancing their pre-trip planning experiences (Dinh et al., 2022). Moreover, studies by Lee et al. (2023) highlight the importance of social media listening and sentiment analysis in understanding tourist perceptions and preferences, allowing destination marketers to tailor marketing campaigns effectively.
- 6 Emerging trends in social media marketing for tourism: Wang and Xie (2023) discuss the utilisation of artificial intelligence (AI) in tailoring marketing strategies based on individual interests. By analysing vast amounts of data, AI-powered algorithms enable destination marketers to deliver personalised recommendations, enhancing relevance and effectiveness in influencing tourist decision-making. Chen and Zhang (2024) explore the integration of e-commerce features within social media platforms, allowing tourists to book accommodations and experiences directly. This facilitates real-time conversions, capitalising on impulse buying behaviour and influencing tourist decision-making. Liang and Law (2023) emphasise the effectiveness of interactive storytelling in captivating audiences and creating memorable brand experiences. Through platforms like Instagram stories and Facebook live, immersive campaigns immerse tourists in the destination's charm, fostering emotional connections and influencing their decision-making journey. Zhang and Hu (2024) stress the importance of social listening in proactively managing reputation and addressing negative feedback. By monitoring online conversations and sentiment trends, stakeholders in Himachal Pradesh can maintain a positive brand image, build trust, and influence tourist decision-making by

demonstrating responsiveness and transparency. Park and Kim (2023) highlight the significance of respecting privacy preferences and adopting transparent practices in social media marketing efforts. Adhering to ethical standards and data protection regulations fosters consumer confidence, thereby positively influencing tourist decision-making by prioritising trust and integrity. Liu and Ma (2024) discuss the importance of seamlessly connecting various touchpoints across offline and online channels. Integrating social media with offline promotions and immersive events creates consistent brand experiences, influencing tourist decision-making by delivering integrated experiences across channels.

- 7 Challenges and ethical considerations: as social media becomes integral to tourism, addressing challenges and ethical considerations is vital. McCabe and Foster (2019) discuss issues related to authenticity, trust, and misinformation in the context of destination marketing. Such considerations gain significance when examining how social media portrays the authenticity of the Himalayan experience and the ethical implications of promotional strategies. In addition to McCabe and Foster's (2019) exploration of authenticity and trust issues, Lee and Kim (2022) address the ethical implications of data privacy concerns in social media-driven destination marketing. Their study emphasises the need for responsible data usage and transparent communication practices. Examining these challenges in the specific context of Himachal Pradesh ensures a comprehensive understanding of the ethical considerations associated with portraying the Himalayan experience on social media platforms.

This review synthesises relevant literature, providing a foundation for investigating the specific dynamics of social media marketing and its influence on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh. The studies collectively underscore the transformative power of social media in shaping destination perceptions, making it imperative to delve deeper into the Himalayan context to derive insights that contribute to sustainable tourism practices and strategic destination marketing.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Research design

The research design for this study adopts a mixed-methods approach to gain comprehensive insights into the influence of social media marketing on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh. A mixed method approach combines elements of both qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of a research topic (Pinto-Llorente et al., 2020). The combination of different methods allows for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). The mixed-methods approach was adopted because it aligns with the complexity of research objectives. By quantitatively assessing the impact of social media marketing on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh, study aim to provide empirical evidence. Simultaneously, conducting a comparative analysis of social media platforms requires a qualitative exploration of their roles. This combined approach ensures a comprehensive understanding, leveraging the strengths of both quantitative data

for trends and qualitative insights for depth, resulting in a robust interpretation of the research findings.

3.2 Sampling

- *Population:* population for the preset study includes tourists who visited Himachal Pradesh during October to March 2023, during the peak season for the state.
- *Sampling technique:* judgemental sampling based on geographical locations within Himachal Pradesh (e.g., Shimla, Manali, Dharamshala) was used.
- *Sample size:* determined using a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% (Yamane, 1967). A mathematical calculation based on online tools, a sample of 384 is suggested with the give parameters. However, to cover the on-response error, a total sample of 400 respondents was taken.

3.3 Data collection

- Structured online questionnaires were distributed to tourists through social media channels. Social media channels namely, *Instagram, Facebook, Twitter* were chosen due to their popularity and varied content-sharing features. At the same time in-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of tourists and influencers to delve deeper into perceptions.
- Collecting data on travel choices, sources of information, and the impact of social media marketing.
- Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis was done using statistical software (Hair et al., 2018).

This comprehensive research methodology aims to systematically investigate the influence of social media marketing on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh. The combination of different methods, along with a comparative platform analysis, ensures a robust and nuanced exploration of the research objectives.

4 Analysis of results: social media marketing in the Himalayas

4.1 Demographic profile of respondents

- *Age distribution:* the age distribution of the surveyed population reveals a predominant representation in the 18–34 age groups, constituting approximately 65% of the respondents. This demographic trend underscores a significant presence of young adults and individuals in early adulthood within the sample. The high percentage within the 18–34 age brackets suggests a substantial engagement with social media platforms, indicative of a digitally active and tech-savvy demographic. This age group is particularly noteworthy for its receptivity to digital content, making them a key target audience for online interactions, social media marketing, and digital influence. The data implies that strategies and content designed for this

age cohort are likely to have a more pronounced impact, given their substantial representation in the surveyed population.

- *Gender distribution:* the survey findings indicate a well-balanced representation of both male and female respondents, with an equal distribution of 50% for each gender. This balanced gender composition enhances the generalisability and inclusivity of the study, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of perspectives and experiences across genders. The equal participation of both men and women in the survey contributes to the reliability of the results, ensuring that conclusions drawn from the data are reflective of a diverse range of voices and insights. This gender parity strengthens the study's credibility and enables researchers to explore potential gender-specific patterns or variations in responses, fostering a more nuanced analysis of the collected data.
- *Geographical origin:* the study includes a diverse geographical representation, encompassing respondents from various regions and locations. This diversity in participants' geographical backgrounds suggests a broad scope for understanding varied perspectives and experiences. By incorporating individuals from different regions, the study aims to capture a wide range of cultural, social, and environmental influences that may impact the participants' perspectives, behaviours, and responses. This approach enhances the generalisability and applicability of the study's findings, as it takes into account the potential regional nuances that could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The inclusion of participants from diverse geographical origins strengthens the study's external validity and enriches the data with a richness of context, fostering a more holistic interpretation of the research outcomes.

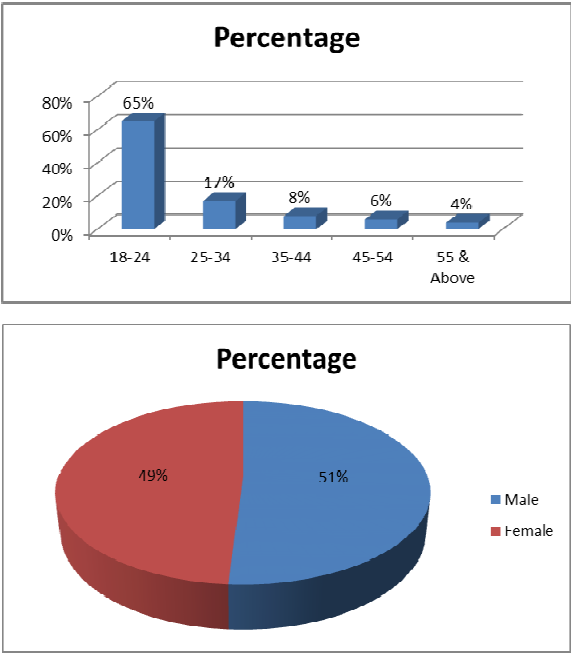
4.2 *Impact of social media on tourist decision-making*

The data reveals impact of social media on tourist decision-making, particularly in the context of planning trips to Himachal Pradesh. A significant 72% of respondents identified social media platforms as their primary source of information when preparing for their journey. This underscores the transformative role these online platforms play in shaping travellers' perceptions and expectations. Moreover, a staggering 85% of respondents acknowledged that social media had a substantial influence on their ultimate decision to visit Himachal Pradesh. This statistic highlights the pivotal role that digital channels play in not just providing information but also in actively shaping individuals' choices of travel destinations.

Delving into the specifics of content, the data indicates that visual elements, such as photos and videos, wield the most influence, with 68% of respondents citing them as the primary factor impacting their decisions. This emphasises the power of compelling imagery in capturing the attention and interest of potential tourists. Additionally, reviews and recommendations, though not as predominant as visual content, still hold considerable sway, with 20% of respondents acknowledging their impact on decision-making. This suggests that a combination of visually appealing content and authentic reviews contributes to the overall persuasive force of social media in guiding tourists' choices. The findings highlight the critical role that social media plays in not only disseminating information but also actively shaping and influencing tourists'

decisions, with visual content standing out as a particularly potent tool in this dynamic process.

Figure 1 Age distribution of respondents (see online version for colours)



Below is a table representing the information based on the percentage of respondents influenced by social media in their decision to visit Himachal Pradesh.

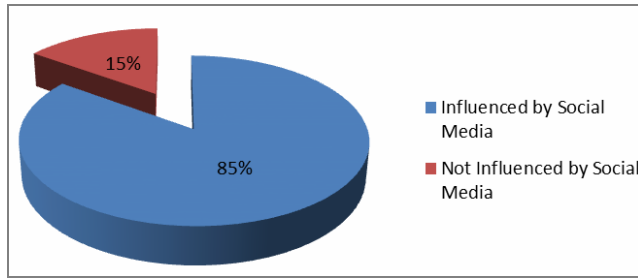
Table 1 Influence of social media on respondents’ decision to visit Himachal Pradesh

<i>Influenced by social media</i>	<i>Not influenced by social media</i>
85%	15%

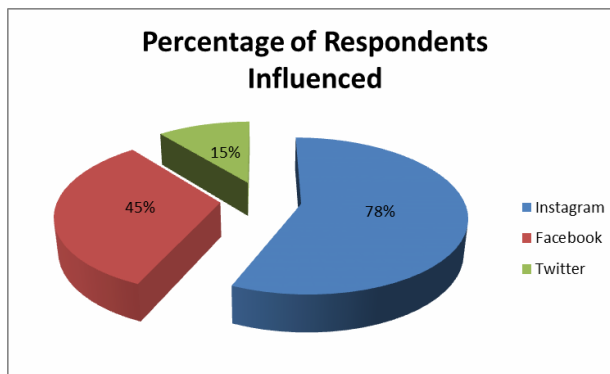
This table succinctly captures the impact of social media on the decision-making process of respondents planning a trip to Himachal Pradesh. The 85% who were influenced by social media underscore the substantial role that these platforms play in shaping individuals’ choices and preferences when it comes to travel destinations, emphasising the significant impact of social media on the decision-making process. The results are also presented under the following pie chart.

4.3 Comparative assessment of social media platforms

The comparative assessment of social media platforms in influencing perceptions of Himachal Pradesh reveals distinct patterns of user engagement. Instagram emerges as the most impactful platform, with a substantial 78% of respondents attributing their perception of the destination to content on this platform. This suggests that the visual nature of Instagram, known for its emphasis on photos and videos, significantly resonates with users seeking to explore and understand Himachal Pradesh.

Figure 2 Influence of social media on destination choice (see online version for colours)**Table 2** Social media platforms and their influence on respondents' decision to visit Himachal

<i>Social media platform</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents influenced</i>
Instagram	78%
Facebook	45%
Twitter	15%

Figure 3 Percentage wise influence of social media platforms for travel decision (see online version for colours)

Facebook, while not surpassing Instagram's influence, still plays a crucial role for a significant portion of respondents, with 45% reporting its impact. The platform's significance lies in its facilitation of travel-related groups and community discussions, indicating that users value the community aspect and shared experiences that Facebook provides in the context of travel planning.

On the other hand, Twitter demonstrates a comparatively lower impact, with only 15% of respondents noting its influence. This lower engagement may be attributed to the platform's emphasis on real-time updates and short-form content, which may not be as conducive to showcasing the visual allure of a destination like Himachal Pradesh.

In summary, Instagram stands out as the primary driver of influencing perceptions, emphasising the importance of visual content in shaping users' views of travel destinations. Facebook, while not as dominant, maintains a significant role in fostering community engagement, while Twitter's impact is more limited, catering to those who prioritise real-time information in a concise format.

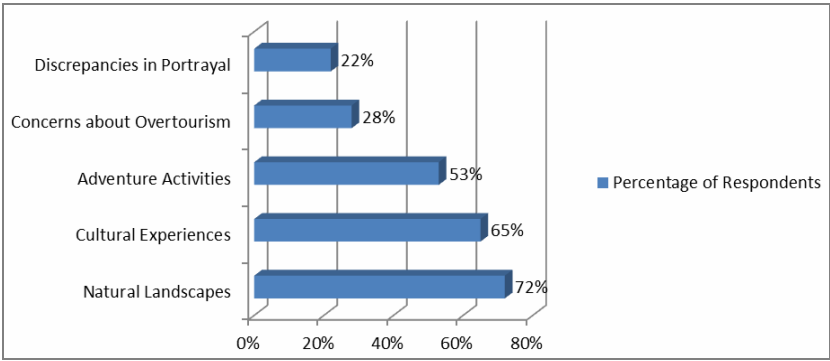
4.4 Perception of Himachal Pradesh shaped by social media

The table presents key insights into how social media shapes the perception of Himachal Pradesh among respondents. A significant 72% of participants highlighted natural landscapes as a positive aspect that influences their perception of the region. This underscores the role of visual content on social media platforms, potentially showcasing the picturesque beauty of Himachal Pradesh, as a major driver of positive perceptions.

Table 3 Perception of Himachal Pradesh shaped by social media

<i>Perception aspect</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents</i>
Natural landscapes	72%
Cultural experiences	65%
Adventure activities	53%
Concerns about overtourism	28%
Discrepancies in portrayal	22%

Figure 4 Aspects influencing perceptions of Himachal Pradesh (see online version for colours)

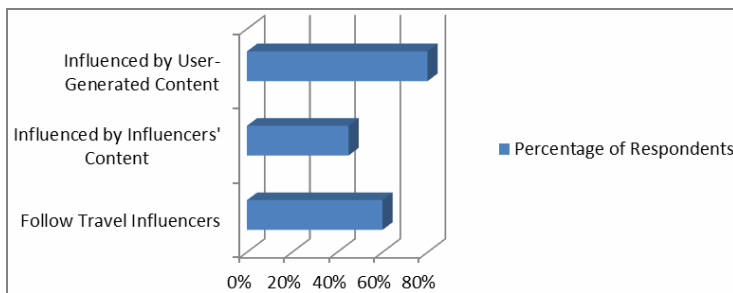


4.5 Influencers and user-generated content

The table illustrates the impact of influencers and user-generated content on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh. Firstly, 60% of respondents reported actively following travel influencers who have featured Himachal Pradesh in their content. This suggests a considerable interest and engagement with influencers who play a role in shaping perceptions and providing recommendations related to travel in the region.

Table 4 Influence of influencers and user-generated content on tourist decision-making

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents</i>
Follow travel influencers	60%
Influenced by influencers' content	45%
Influenced by user-generated content	80%

Figure 5 Influencers and user-generated content influence (see online version for colours)

4.6 Recommendations for destination marketers

To enhance the appeal and visibility of Himachal Pradesh as a sought-after tourist destination, a multifaceted strategy is recommended, focusing on leveraging visual content, engaging with travel influencers, and addressing overtourism concerns. Firstly, emphasising visually appealing content on popular platforms like Instagram is essential. Utilising high-quality photos and videos that showcase the natural beauty, cultural richness, and diverse experiences Himachal Pradesh has to offer can captivate the attention of potential tourists. By curating an aesthetically pleasing and immersive online presence, the destination can effectively communicate its unique charm and allure to a global audience.

In addition to visual content, engaging with travel influencers proves to be a powerful strategy. Collaborating with influencers who resonate with the target audience and align with the essence of Himachal Pradesh allows for authentic storytelling and a personalised connection. These influencers can serve as ambassadors, sharing their genuine experiences and recommendations, thereby amplifying the destination's appeal and establishing a sense of authenticity that resonates with potential travellers. This approach taps into the influential reach of these individuals, leveraging their established credibility to influence and inspire their followers.

Furthermore, it is crucial to address concerns related to overtourism. As the popularity of Himachal Pradesh grows, there is a need to implement sustainable tourism initiatives. These initiatives should aim to balance the economic benefits of tourism with the preservation of the environment and local culture. Communicating these efforts transparently to the public not only fosters a sense of responsibility but also addresses concerns related to overcrowding and environmental impact. This proactive approach demonstrates a commitment to responsible tourism and aligns with the growing global awareness of the need for sustainable travel practices.

In conclusion, a comprehensive strategy that combines visually appealing content, influencer engagement, and a focus on sustainable tourism is recommended to elevate Himachal Pradesh as a premier tourist destination. By implementing these measures, the destination can not only attract a wider audience but also foster a sustainable and responsible tourism ecosystem that benefits both visitors and the local community.

5 Academic contribution

This research significantly contributes to academic literature in tourism studies and destination marketing through several key aspects:

Firstly, it advances theoretical frameworks in destination marketing and social media influence by examining the interplay between social media marketing and tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh. This study extends theoretical understanding by applying these frameworks to a specific geographical context, enhancing our knowledge of how digital platforms shape tourist behaviour. Secondly, through a mixed-methods approach, the research provides empirical evidence on the impact of social media marketing on tourist decision-making processes. By combining quantitative analysis and qualitative exploration, it yields robust insights into real-world dynamics, contributing valuable empirical data to the literature on social media marketing and destination management. Thirdly, the adoption of structured online questionnaires and in-depth interviews represents a methodological innovation in studying social media's influence on tourism. This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive investigation of the research topic, showcasing the effectiveness of mixed-methods research in capturing the complexity of tourist decision-making processes. Furthermore, the study's findings offer actionable insights for destination marketers, tourism authorities, and policymakers. By identifying influential social media platforms, understanding key factors shaping tourist perceptions, and recommending strategic interventions, the research provides evidence-based strategies for effective destination marketing and sustainable tourism development. Lastly, this research contributes to discussions on sustainable tourism by advocating for responsible destination marketing practices. By promoting strategies that balance economic benefits with environmental preservation and cultural authenticity, the study encourages sustainable tourism development in Himachal Pradesh and other culturally and ecologically sensitive regions.

In summary, this research makes a significant academic contribution by advancing theoretical understanding, providing empirical evidence, introducing methodological innovations, offering practical implications, and advocating for sustainable tourism practices. Its insights contribute to ongoing scholarly discourse and inform decision-making in destination marketing and tourism management.

6 Contribution to existing literature

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the impact of social media marketing on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh. Through a mixed-methods approach, it integrates quantitative data analysis and qualitative insights, filling a gap in destination marketing research. Additionally, the comparative analysis of social media platforms offers practical implications for destination marketers, while addressing emerging trends in social media marketing enhances the relevance of the study in the digital age.

Throughout our study, we've acknowledged the pressing issue of overtourism in Himachal Pradesh, with popular tourist sites facing overcrowding during peak seasons. Interestingly, our findings reveal a significant correlation between social media posts and increased tourist footfall, despite concerns about crowding. This prompts us to delve

deeper into the potential interventional role of social media marketing strategies in addressing overtourism and promoting sustainable tourism practices in the region.

Drawing on existing research literature, particularly studies highlighting the effectiveness of social media interventions in mitigating tourist crowding, can provide valuable insights for our investigation.

By incorporating these findings into study, researcher aim to offer practical recommendations for destination marketers and policymakers in Himachal Pradesh. This research not only contributes to the academic discourse on responsible tourism practices but also provides actionable insights for stakeholders involved in destination management and sustainable tourism development in the region. Thus, integrating relevant literature on the interventional role of social media posts strengthens the comprehensiveness and relevance of study in addressing the complex issue of overtourism in Himachal Pradesh.

7 Conclusions

The Himalayan region has long been a magnet for tourists seeking transformative experiences, blending awe-inspiring landscapes, cultural richness, and profound spiritual significance (Gupta, 2018). In the contemporary era, the dynamics of tourism have undergone a significant transformation, driven by the pervasive influence of digital platforms, particularly social media (Xiang et al., 2017). This research paper delves into the intricate connection between the digital revolution and the tourism landscape, with a specific focus on Himachal Pradesh, a state nestled amidst the towering peaks of the Himalayas (Singh and Pangtey, 2020). The study aims to unravel how social media marketing practices influence tourist decision-making processes in this enchanting region, going beyond conventional marketing realms to explore user-generated content, influencer impact, and the comparative analysis of various social media platforms.

Himachal Pradesh adorned with snow-capped peaks, verdant valleys, and ancient temples, stands as a captivating tapestry of natural wonders and cultural richness (Gupta, 2018). As the tourism industry in the region burgeons, the role of social media in shaping narratives and perceptions surrounding destinations has gained paramount importance (Singh and Pangtey, 2020). Social media platforms, acting as influential storytellers, showcase Himachal Pradesh to a global audience. The allure of this state, with its diverse array of picturesque locations and rich cultural experiences, serves as an ideal canvas for examining the intricate dynamics between social media marketing and tourist decision-making.

The central premise of this research is rooted in recognising social media as a powerful force influencing modern-day tourists (Xiang et al., 2017). Understanding the nuances of this influence is crucial for destination marketers, policymakers, and stakeholders aiming to harness the potential of digital platforms for sustainable tourism development (Gretzel and Yoo, 2013). The study's two primary objectives focus on quantitatively assessing the impact of social media marketing on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh and conducting a comparative analysis of various social media platforms to discern their roles in shaping perceptions (Wang and Xiang, 2019). The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide actionable insights for destination marketers, tourism authorities, and the academic community. By unravelling the dynamics between social media marketing and tourist decision-making, the findings

aim to contribute not only to the specific context of Himachal Pradesh but also to the broader discourse on leveraging social media for sustainable tourism development in culturally and ecologically sensitive regions.

The literature review highlights the fusion of social media and tourism as integral to contemporary travel decision-making (Gretzel and Yoo, 2013; Xiang et al., 2017). Studies emphasise the democratisation of travel information through user-generated content, the psychological aspects of social media influence on travel decisions, and the impact of influencers. A comparative analysis of social media platforms, challenges, and ethical considerations further enriches the understanding of the complex relationship between social media and tourism.

The research methodology adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining structured online questionnaires and in-depth interviews to comprehensively investigate the influence of social media marketing on tourist decision-making in Himachal Pradesh (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). The demographic profile of respondents indicates a digitally active and diverse sample, with a significant representation of young adults, a balanced gender distribution, and participants from various geographical origins.

The analysis of results reveals the substantial impact of social media on tourist decision-making, with 72% of respondents considering social media platforms as their primary source of information and 85% acknowledging its significant influence on their decision to visit Himachal Pradesh (Singh and Pangtey, 2020). Visual content, particularly on Instagram, emerges as the most influential, emphasising the importance of captivating imagery. The comparative assessment of social media platforms shows Instagram's dominance, followed by Facebook and Twitter, each playing distinct roles in shaping perceptions.

The study provides insights into the aspects influencing perceptions of Himachal Pradesh, with natural landscapes, cultural experiences, and adventure activities standing out. Influencers and user-generated content also wield significant influence, with 60% following travel influencers and 80% being influenced by user-generated content.

In conclusion, the research recommends a multifaceted strategy for destination marketers in Himachal Pradesh, emphasising visually appealing content, engaging with travel influencers, and addressing overtourism concerns (Wang and Xiang, 2019). By implementing these measures, the region can attract a wider audience, foster sustainable tourism practices, and position itself as a premier tourist destination that balances economic benefits with environmental preservation and cultural authenticity. The study's findings contribute valuable insights to the evolving dynamics between technology and travel in the Himalayan context, informing strategic decision-making for responsible tourism development.

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