

Effectiveness of Social Media in Promoting Tourism in Nepal

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Doi: [10.5281/zenodo.7487662](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7487662)

ResearchArticle/Compilation

Article History:

The arrival date: 2022/11/25

Acceptance date: 2022/12/25

Online Publishing: 2022/12/31

Keywords

tourists,
social media perception,
functionalities,
travel destination,
influence

ABSTRACT

In recent years, social media has become more advanced, providing travelers with various opportunities to visualize their destination before executing their plans. On the other hand, social networks have also evolved in such a way that they not only became valuable marketing tools for businesses but also proved to be valuable source of information for consumers as it plays a significant role in the decision-making process.

The objectives of this research study were to determine if social media has any impact on Tourism, to determine what tourists' perceived benefits of using social media when taking trips are, and to ascertain if there were any strategic opportunities for value creation for the tourist. Through a survey answered by 267 respondents, the most influential attributes of social media usage in tourism were ascertained, the travelers' perception of social media was analyzed, and the critical functionalities were determined.

In hypothesis testing, independent variable social media functionalities significantly influenced tourist destinations. Whereas various perceptions of social media had no significant influence on a tourist destination regarding reliability, accuracy, and value.

After analyzing the study, it is concluded that social media does indeed have an impact on tourism. It can even be used as a sustainable competitive advantage if tourism firms develop a positive reputation and focus on personalizing their services as the key element for their value-creating strategy.

INTRODUCTION

With the growing use of Internet, social media tools are changing the way people communicate. Advances in mobile technology have made social media more accessible, allowing to become a part of people's daily lives and routines, (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Over 3.6 billion people were using social networking sites worldwide in 2020, and is estimated to reach around 4.41 billion by 2025, which is 53% of the global population (Statista, 2022). The social networking sites have been the integral part of people's daily life and every day they spend around 15% of their time on such platforms. (Kemp, 2022a). According to

the Nepal Telecommunications Authority, 2.25 million new users were connected to the internet in 2017, translating into approximately 250 new Internet users every hour. However, it has been estimated that there are 11.51 million internet users in Nepal at the start of 2022 and internet penetration rate stood at 38.4% of the total population (Kemp, 2022b). The tourism industry on other hand is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. In reference to Pforr and Hosie (2009), the tourism industry is the largest in the world with a significant annual growth rate of approximately 25%. Still 25% of population in Nepal lives below the national poverty line (ADB, 2010; Bhandari et al., 2022), however tourism along with foreign employment and remittances plays major role towards the country's GDP in Nepal. (MoFE, 2018; Gautam et al., 2021). As per the report published by the Tourism Board of Nepal, the total number of international tourists by air and land was 1,173,072 in year 2018 which increased by 24.77% as compared to year 2017.

The platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, personal blogs have enabled the general public to grasp and realize the places deeply and know what special things people enjoy in social sites. The tourist places and hotels are getting massive exposure through these sites and they are having a competitive chance to increase their business furthermore (Trannum, 2020). Not only the travelers but the travel intermediaries in Nepal also have operated through the social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter; and even customers buy tickets online (Sthapit & Khadka, 2016). Despite the increasing role of technology in promoting tourism activities in different destinations across the globe, there is little research and studies that has been conducted in Nepal determine how tourist destinations use the social media to reach out to customers. Hence, this study intent to identify the opportunities of tourism in Nepal through the use of the Social Networking sites. The main critical issues that this study address is the identify the role of social media in the tourism industry of Nepal, in particular, Pokhara is concerned. In this case, the study enables to understand how travelers utilize different forms of social media to study and plan their travel activities and the functionalities of social media that tourists consider important. This study mainly aims to assess the effectiveness of social media in the tourism industry of Pokhara. The main objective of this study is to identify the impact of social media on tourism:

To evaluate the use of social media platforms for making travel decisions.

To examine the functionalities of social media that tourists consider more important.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nepal is the land of mountains and considered as naturally gifted country. The natural beauties of Nepal are a major attraction for tourists. Nepalese economy has its major portion from the tourism sector. As tourism is considered to be a major income source for many countries around the globe, it is also a sector that aids in economic development of a nation (Tooman, 1997). Lear (1988) and Sinclair (1998) noted impact of tourism business on the economic development in a country by increasing job opportunities, and creating revenue for

government. On the other hand, social media in recent years have a significant role play in the tourism development of a country. The easy access of social network around the globe in different languages has made it easy to the consumer to get information beyond the borders. In Nepal, approximately 10 million people are active in social networks and approximately 10.21 million are internet users (Kemp, 2020). As individuals are finding it convenient with the use of internet and regular use of social network sites have shown the potential of digital marketing and branding in Nepal. It is however, important that with the convenience of internet and social media, many hotels industry or agencies get hand in digital marketing and branding. Digital marketing and branding provide assistance in order to client identification, retention and maintenance, (Sivathanu, 2016). Tourists on the other hand are managed well when the transportation is appropriate, no difficulty in movement, easy information of tourist destination are available and these are possible upon the technological development which will then lead to the growth of volume of tourist. (Chandra Roy & Roy, 2019). Amersdorffer et al, (2012), strongly emphasized the relationship of social media on tourism highlighting the effectiveness social media bear on promotion of tourism. In the study conducted by Raunch (2014), it is found that the social networks sites and communication network must be considered carefully and by utilizing social media in an extraordinary way through mobile applications which aids in making influence on tourist satisfying their need with various options to choose from to travel around the world. Solis highlights social media as a technological means where individuals and objects or services and places are displayed (Gebreel & Shuayb, 2022).

Social networking sites effect

Social networking sites in recent years have developed a wide range of opportunities for any business. With the development of online platforms and social networking sites, the significant impact of growth in tourism has also been seen around the globe with the pull effect to the customers using social networking sites. Sterne (2010) states social media as a platform where anyone can come to communicate any message and consumer generated messages or contents are then passed through easy-to-access online platform and tools. In current age, social media marketing through social networking sites has become affordable and cheapest way of marketing (Saravankumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). Any business companies through the social networking sites can get information of customers need and behaviors through which they can develop their customer relationship management (Yazdanifard and Yee, 2014). The changes in their behavior are nowadays widely affected due to the social networking sites which gives a space for consumer to connect with any vendors or other consumers (Bilgihan, Peng & Kandampully, 2014). In the behavioral changes due to the social networking sites, Rossides (2012) noted that 82% customers in the US who uses social networking sites look into the online reviews from travel sites for travel related decision making. In this regard, there are many tourists that visits online websites or social networking sites so that they can make their purchasing decision and a lot of these are influenced by the information available by previous tourist who have visited or share

similar experience about the tourist destination. A lot tourist often tends to refer to someone's experience of recent travel so that they can avoid potential threat or risk for their travel (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012). Hence the tourist destinations should utilize social media to ease the visit planning (Tham, Mair, & Croy, 2020) as tourists refer to social media sites before planning their trips.

Social media networking in Nepal:

Social media has become popular in Nepal in recent years. In Nepal, it is found that approximately 10 million people are actively using social networking sites (Kemp, 2020). Under the research conducted by Sthapit and Khadka (2016), it was found that the trend of using social media is increasing, as number of hits and likes in social media sites such as Facebook, Google+ and YouTube by visitors and customers travelling are increasing each year. Most of the travelers use social media networking sites to get information, reviews to make their decision in exploring tourist destination of Nepal. The number continues to soar in recent years due to the technological advancement and as travelers get to choose various sites to get information or where they can input their reaction or feedback. The study result by Sthapit and Khadka (2016) added that most travel purchase decision in Nepal were influenced by product features with price and promotion.

To achieve the study objectives a general research question was formulated: Does social media have an impact in Tourism? However, to determine how tourism can use social media the following sub questions are formulated:

How do Social Media influence tourists when planning/ taking trips?

What are the functionalities of Social Media that tourists' consider more important?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design of this study is based on quantitative approach. The findings of this research are from the primary survey. The data has been collected by formulating a set of questionnaires, which was then distributed and collected from various travelers and individuals in Pokhara valley. The findings are completely based on the data and facts provided by the sampled respondents. The reliability of scales was analyzed by using Cronbach's alpha test.

Pokhara, being one of the top destinations for tourists in Nepal, is selected as the study area. The tourism industry is flourishing here in Pokhara and this made the study easier and more representative.

In order to collect primary data, the questionnaire survey technique was used. The sample sizes of two hundred sixty-seven travelers were provided with questionnaire. A pre-coded closed ended questionnaire was distributed by the researchers through internet using convenience sampling to domestic & international traveler in Pokhara who have visited or planning to visit. For primary data survey, it sampled (267) potential travel-service customers or tourists visiting Pokhara. The survey was performed in five months' time frame between Februarys to July 2021.

For the analysis, the data were exported to various statistical analysis software like excel and SPSS. Firstly, some simple descriptive statistics such as frequencies and descriptive was conducted in SPSS to define the sample and to determine what attributes are most influential for the respondents and consequently test the hypotheses. Pilot testing was conducted on 20 data on the convenience-sampling method in order to identify the reliability and validity of the constructs used for the overall research purpose. The Cronbach's Alpha of all the variables is considered as accepted with values all greater than 0.6. Therefore, the instruments used in this research are considered reliable. The five-point Likert scale was presented to the travelers. 1 being used always and 5 being used never.

Hypothesis Formulation

According to the existing literature, different Social Media sites focus on different functionalities; some focus more on identity, others more on relationships or on sharing (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Nowadays, none of the major Social Media sites concentrate exclusively on one of the functionalities, in fact, according to Gene Smith (2007); Social Media sites usually focus on three or four main functionalities. For example, in Facebook the main functionality is Relationships; however, it also focuses in Identity, Presence, Reputation and Conversations. On YouTube, a media sharing site, the main focus is in the Sharing functionality, however, Conversations, Groups and Reputation are also important. Finally, for LinkedIn, a professional social networking site, the main functionality is Identity, but there also consider Reputation and Relationships (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Based on the above the first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: When planning and taking trips, tourists consider the functionalities of Social Media important.

Moreover, for the purpose of this study it is also relevant to know how tourists perceive Social Media sites. Consumers perceive Social Media as more reliable than corporate-sponsored communications (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), it is essential for businesses in Social Media to be active and engage with the consumer. They must guarantee that the content is accessible to everyone, easy to find, helpful, interesting, entertaining and valuable. For that reason, one of the questions of the survey asked the extent to which the respondents perceive Social Media sites as reliable, informative, interesting, helpful, accurate, easy to find, entertaining and valuable.

Hypothesis 2: Tourists perceive Social Media sites as reliable, informative, interesting, helpful, accurate, easy to find, entertaining and valuable

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The demographic characteristics of different respondents who have participated in the survey which includes age group, gender, nationalities, social media usage and other travel related information. A total of

267 responses was recorded for the purpose of this study. The respondents of the research were those people who use social media for different purpose.

The nationality of respondents consists of Nepalese and Others. The aim was to determine the percentage of distribution of respondents by their nationality. Out of 267 respondents, 228 were Nepalese which consists of 85.7% and the remaining 39 were from other countries including India, Australia, Korea and China, comprising 14.3%.

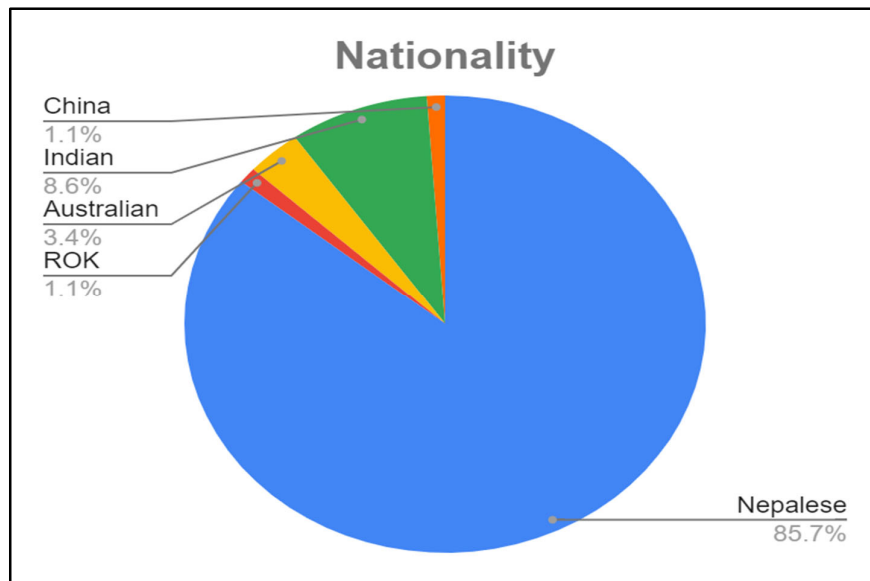


Figure 1 Distribution based on nationality

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the respondents on the basis of nationality. Out of 267 respondents, 228 were Nepalese which consists of 85.7% and the remaining 39 were from other countries including India, Australia, Korea and China, comprising 14.3%.

Social media Usage and Participants

When asked about the social media usage, most respondents claim they spend more than five hours using social media. Figure 1 depicts the social media usage time 107 participants out of 267 (40%), followed by 76 and 70 participants that state they use social media three to five hours a day and one to three hours a day respectively. And a same number of participants i.e., 6 which is only 2% uses social media less than four times a week and less than an hour a day.

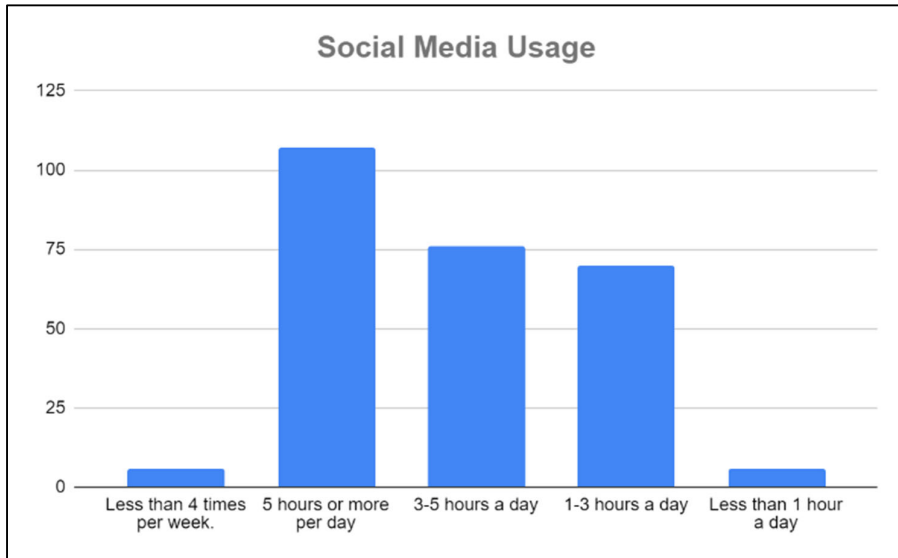


Figure 2 Social media Usage

Travel information on social media

To find out how the respondent considers the travel information on social media they were asked if they consider such information reliable, informative, interesting, helpful, accurate, easy to find, entertaining or valuable. The figure 2 below shows the frequency of what the respondent considers the travel information on social media. Out of 267 almost 200 consider it informative and helpful, and only 60 of them consider it accurate.

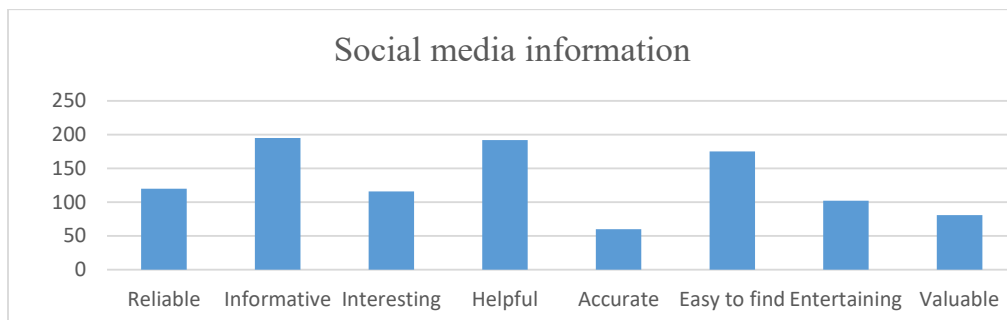


Figure 3 Frequency of travel information in social media

Functionalities

One of the objectives of this study was to determine functionalities and benefits that are more important for travelers, so, two questions were asked in the questionnaire for that purpose, one about the functionalities.

To avoid certain biases, more specifically to avoid that respondent answered what they thought was correct instead of what they actually considered important, instead of asking directly what benefits and functionalities they considered important, the respondents were asked to rate the importance of various statements that represented indirectly the functionalities and benefits.

The functionalities of using social media the respondents were presented with thirteen items. These items are presented as F1, F2, F3..... and F15 respectively, which denote the following statements.

F1: Creating your own profile

F2: Talking to other tourists in real time

F3: Sharing your own travel experiences

F4: Knowing the geographical position of tourists writing reviews

F5: Possibility of adding friends and connection

F6: Reliable content

F7: Possibility of participating in various groups (for example: a group for adventure tourism, for lone travelers, etc.)

F8: Knowing the identity (age, who they travelled with, likes/dislikes etc) of user who posts information

F9: Possibility of engaging in conversations with the people who wrote the reviews

F10: Reading content/reviews/opinions shared by other tourists

F11: Showing if you are available and knowing if other users are available

F12: Creating online relationships in a travel community

F13: Trusting the site

F14: Having the available information divided into categories

F15: Editing profile's privacy settings

Descriptive study of each questions drafted and overall descriptive study on contents is shown below

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of functionalities of social media

Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
F1	267	2.532	1.2573
F2	267	2.764	1.1986
F3	267	2.816	1.2920
F4	267	2.910	1.2443
F5	267	2.970	1.2351
F6	267	3.360	1.3840
F7	267	2.966	1.1482
F8	267	2.959	1.1803
F9	267	2.854	1.1941
F10	267	3.112	1.3990
F11	267	2.745	1.0236
F12	267	2.794	1.1852
F13	267	3.228	1.2492
F14	267	3.094	1.2605
F15	267	3.000	1.2201

The results in Table 2 show the descriptive analysis of an individual item of various functionalities of social media. There are fifteen statements used to measure the social media functionalities. Each of the 267 respondents submitted their responses in five-point Likert scale. The table 2 shows that the items have a mean value ranging from 2.53 to 3.36. In the data F6 has the highest mean and F1 has the lowest mean. The highest mean of 3.36(SD=1.38) indicates that respondents agree with the statement, that reliable content is the important functionalities of social media. Lowest mean of 2.53(SD=1.25) shows that respondents disagree most to the statement, stating that creating your own profile is important in social media while planning trips.

Additionally, the table shows that F10 has the highest standard deviation whereas F11 has the lowest standard deviation. This means respondents have more deviation with the statement. Reading content, reviews, opinions shared by other tourists is important in social media over planning and taking trips.

Perception of social media

To discover what is the tourists' perception of social media sites when planning and taking trips, the sample is asked to rate, in a scale of 1 to 100 (100 being totally agreed), the extent to which they agree that social media sites are reliable, informative, interesting, helpful, accurate, easy to find, entertaining and

valuable. It is considered that any mean score that is higher than 50 out of 100 means that the respondents perceive social media in that way, and a mean score lower than 50 means that respondents do not perceive social media in that way.

By looking at the figure 4 below, it is clear that the sample perceives social media sites when planning and taking trips as Helpful, Informative, Interesting, Easy to find, and Entertaining. With mean score of 71, 65, 62,55 and 52. However, more respondents of this study do not perceive Social media sites as Accurate, Reliable and valuable; with mean score of 33, 36 and 40. Hence, hypothesis 2 (*Tourists perceive Social media sites as reliable, informative, interesting, helpful, accurate, easy to find, entertaining and valuable*) is rejected, because even though respondents perceive Social media as informative, interesting, helpful, easy to find and entertaining, they do not perceive Social media as accurate and reliable.

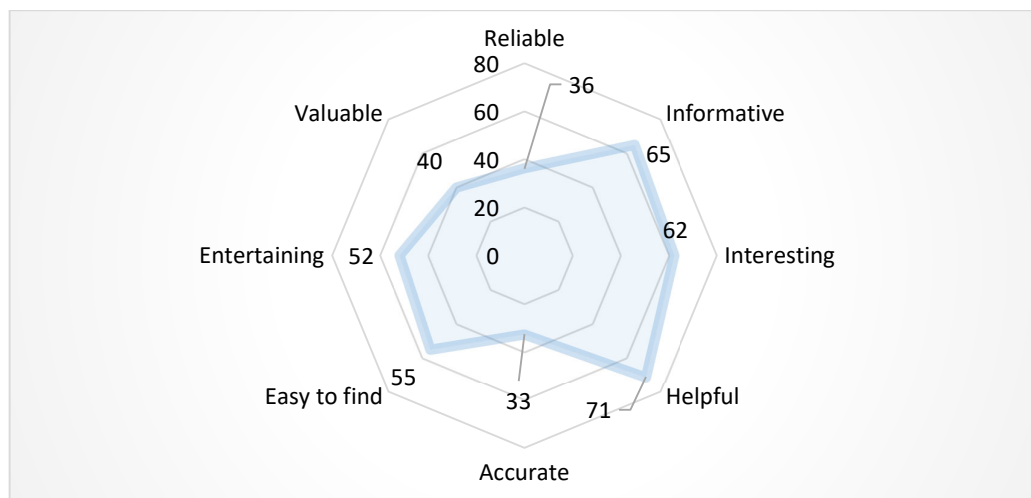


Figure 4 Perceptions of social media

Inferential Analysis

A two factor analysis is conducted to determine how the sample perceived the different types of functionalities, if they perceived any differentiation between the different types of functionalities, and which types of functionalities are considered more important. Fifteen items of the functionalities scale are subjected to a principal components analysis (PCA) in SPSS, but firstly, the suitability of data for factor analysis is evaluated. The examination of the correlation matrix reveals the presence of various coefficients of 0.3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value is 0.903, which exceeds the recommended value of 0.6 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity reaches statistical significance supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

PCA reveals the presence of three components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 54%, 11% and 6% of the variance respectively. An inspection of the screen plot reveals a clear break after the second component, so it is decided to retain two components for further investigation. To help the interpretation of the two components, varimax rotation is performed. The rotated solution reveals the presence of a simple structure with the components showing a number of strong loadings, and all variables, loading substantially

in one of the components. By comparing the rotated components matrix with the mean importance ratings that the respondents attributed to the functionality statements in the descriptive, it is clear that the sample of this study does not differentiate functionalities. Even though Component 1 clearly includes reputations, groups and identity functionalities. Similarly, both components include some elements of the conversation, presence, relationship and sharing functionalities.

The figure 5 below shows the importance of the fifteen functionalities of social media. While respondents do not differentiate functionalities, it is evident that respondents consider component 1 more important than component 1. Respondents clearly consider Reputation the most important social media functionality; the two statements used to test the importance of this functionality are part of component 1 and have the highest mean importance: reliable content has a mean importance with the mean rating of 3.36 out of 5, more specifically 150 respondents stating that they consider reliable content to be very important. The second most important functionalities is, trusting the site with the mean value of 3.2 out of 5. Contrarily, it shows that the respondents consider creating own profile to be less important with mean value of 2.53 with 152 respondent rating 1 or 2, followed by Showing if you are available and knowing if other users are available with mean rating of 2.74 out of 5.

It can be concluded that tourists will consider functionalities important when planning and taking trips, which means that hypothesis 1 (When planning and taking trips, tourists consider the functionalities of social media important.) is accepted. Reputation is the most important functionality for tourists and certain elements of the sharing, identity and groups functionalities, listed above, are also quite important.

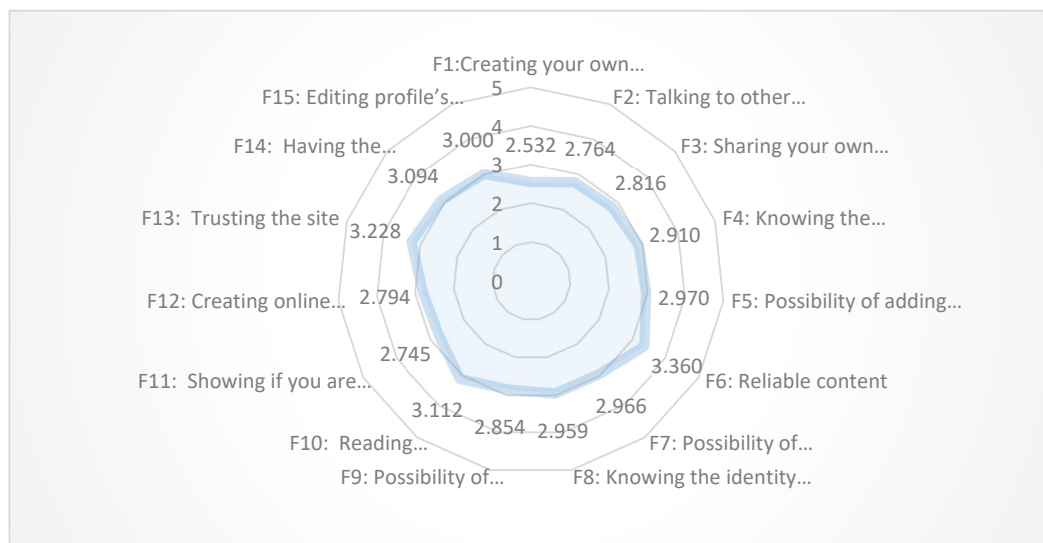


Figure 5 Functionality mean the importance

Correlation Analysis

Table 3 Correlation between and among dependent and independent variables

Functionalities		1	2	4	5	6	8		
1.	Identity	Pearson							
		Correlation	1						
		Sig. (2-tailed)							
	N	2							
		67							
1.	Conversation	Pearson							
		Correlation	.789**	1					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
	N	2	2						
		67	67						
2.	Sharing	Pearson							
		Correlation	.685**	.682**					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000					
	N	2	2	2					
		67	67	67					
3.	Presence	Pearson							
		Correlation	.714**	.779**	.757**	1			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000				
	N	2	2	2	2				
		67	67	67	67				
4.	Relationship	Pearson							
		Correlation	.729**	.734**	.714**	.57**			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.00			
	N	2	2	2	2	2			
		67	67	67	67	67			
5.	Reputation	Pearson							
		Correlation	.698**	.544**	.732**	.13**	.631**		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.00	.000		
	N	2	2	2	2	2	2		
		67	67	67	67	67	67		
6.	Groups	Pearson							
		Correlation	.765**	.636**	.694**	.66**	.669**	.802**	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.00	.000	.000	
	N	2	2	2	2	2	2		
		67	67	67	67	67	67		
7.	Influence on Planning	Pearson							
		Correlation	.647**	.536**	.752**	.87**	.522**	.734**	.653**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.00	.000	.000	.000
	N	2	2	2	2	2	2		
		67	67	67	67	67	67		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the correlation analysis between variables in the study, and it is conducted for whole sample. In table 3, all the independent variables namely Identity, Conversation, Sharing, Presence, Relations, Reputation, Groups have positive correlation. The correlation between influence on planning and identity

functionalities is observed to be positive and significant at 99 percent confidence level with correlation coefficient of 0.647. Conversation and influence on planning trips has correlation coefficient of 0.536. This value clearly articulates that there exist positive relationship between conversation functionalities and influence on tourists planning. Similarly, the relationship of other functionalities like sharing, presence, relations, reputation and groups with the influence on planning trips are also positive and significant at 99 percent confidence level with correlation coefficient of at 0.752, 0.587, 0.522, 0.734 and 0.653 respectively.

Regression Analysis

Table 4 shows the model summary of correlation coefficient (R) between dependent and independent variable as well as coefficient of determination. The correlation coefficient between dependent variable and all independent variable is 0.814. This value indicates that, there exist strong positive correlation between dependent and independent variable as a whole in behavioral research. From the value; we can infer those independent variables and dependent variable have positive correlation.

The coefficient of determination (R square) describes the contribution of independent variable in measuring the impact in dependent variable. When all the other things remaining the constant, coefficient of determination measures the impact of independent variable in dependent variable. The coefficient of determination in the existing research model is 0.653. This means, 65.3% of changes in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable after adjusting the value of coefficient of determination. Precisely, the sum of independent variables; Groups, Conversation, Relationships, Sharing, Reputation, Presence, Identity explains 65.3% of influence in planning trips. In addition, out of all factors, independent variables solely contribute 65.3% in deciding the influence in tourist planning for trips.

Table 4 Regression Model Summary

Model	Mod	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.	.814 ^a	.662	.653	.55671

a. Predictors: (Constant), Groups, Conversation, Relationship, Sharing, Reputation, Presence, Identity

ANOVA

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) in a multiple regression analysis is used to show whether the model is significant or not. ANOVA further is used to establish the appropriateness of the regression model in giving reliable results. The regression model is deemed appropriate when the significant value is less than level of significance (alpha) of 5% or less. Table 5 shows that p-value of regression model is less than alpha i.e. 0.000 which means the regression model is appropriate and the results is reliable.

From this ANOVA table at 95% confidence, we can conclude that Groups, Conversation, Relationship, Sharing, Reputation, Presence, Identity are best at influencing planning trips and has some sort of positive impact over tourists planning for trips.

Table 5 ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	157.224	7	22.461	72.470	.000 ^b
	Residual	80.272	259	.310		
	Total	237.496	266			

a. Dependent Variable: Influence on Planning trips

b. Predictors: (Constant), Groups, Conversation, Relationship, Sharing, Reputation, Presence, Identity

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

With reference to the demographics, out of total 267 respondents, 108 females which consist of 40% and 149 males which consist of 55.8%, remaining 10 respondents which consist of 4% didn't prefer to reveal their gender. Similarly, out of 267 respondents, 228 were Nepalese which consists of 85.7% and remaining 39 were from other countries including India, Australia, Korea and China, comprising 14.3%. The majority of respondents are Nepalese and between the ages of 24 and 29 years (about 63%), followed by around 17% of the respondents between the ages of 18 and 23 years, approximately 13% between 30 and 35 years, 3% in the 36 to 40 age group, and finally about 4% that are younger than 18 years.

From the findings, 107 participants out of 267 (40%), followed by 76 and 70 participants state that they use social media three to five hours a day and one to three hours a day respectively. And a same number of participants i.e., 6 which is only 2% uses social media less than four times a week and less than a hour a day. The majority (82) of the sample travel abroad twice a year (around 31%) or once a year (approximately 20%), for leisure purposes (42%). The information source that respondents use more frequently when planning and taking trips is social media, with a least mean rating of 1.8 (SD=1.19), with 156 respondents stating that they use social media always as source of information.

There are fifteen statements used to measure the social media functionalities. Each of the 267 respondents submitted their responses in five-point Likert scale. The highest mean of 3.36(SD=1.38) indicates that respondents agree with the statement, that reliable content is the important functionalities of social media. Lowest mean of 2.53(SD=1.25) shows that respondents disagree most to the statement, stating that —creating your own profile is important in social media while planning trips. Independent variables (social media functionalities) are meant to explain nearly 68.4% of variation in tourism destination which is shown by the coefficient of variation in this study.

To test the relationships and its significance t-test was conducted. Further ANOVA test was conducted to test the relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the study. From ANOVA, we can conclude that Social media perceived benefits and functionalities are best at influencing the tourism destination while planning trips and has some sort of positive impact over tourism destination.

There is significant influence of social media functionalities on tourism destination planning. Coefficient table shows the significant value of social media platforms to be 0.000. So, this hypothesis is also accepted. From the findings, out of 267 respondents 200 respondents consider travel information in social media to be informative and helpful which consist of total of almost 75% whereas only 60 respondents consider the information to be accurate which almost 23% of total respondents is.

To sum up, independent variables i.e., social media functionalities have significant influence on tourism destination. Ahmad, Hamad, Raed and Maram (2019) studied that social media is not an optional extra in the tourism industry and tourism companies, the tourism companies must participate in other social media sites in order to succeed in today's highly competitive business environment. In his research respondents agree that social media can actually make them consider travelling to a place they never thought they would. Implying the findings in this research, social media functionalities influence the travelling decision.

Deloitte Digital (2015) affirms the argument that social media platforms are important sources of information to consumers and as a result, whenever a product, service or brand has positive reviews from social media users, the perceived risk of purchasing such a product or services reduces significantly, and the level of trust in the brand increases. Similarly, in this study the sample perceives Social Media sites important when planning and taking trips and the information in these media are considered as Helpful, Informative, Interesting, Easy to find, and Valuable. Strategic resources from social media can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage because they are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

After analyzing the strategic impact of social media in tourism, it can be concluded reputation is the most influencing factor and travellers do not differentiate most social media functionalities like Sharing, Identity and Groups. Moreover it can be concluded that tourism firms can create a successful value-creating strategy, and consequently increase switching costs, if they focus on the personalization of their services.

On the other hand the sample perceives Social Media sites when planning and taking trips as Helpful, Informative, Interesting, Easy to find, Reliable and Valuable.

Nepal has been regarded as high potential destination for tourists, but lack of proper planning and information we are not able to increase the flow of tourists in the country. So, effective marketing strategies should be made jointly by the government and private sector and proper coordination between the concerned bodies should be maintained. Nepalese travel agencies should maintain data of their clients and create social media campaign to attract more tourists. Nepal Tourism Board should encourage researcher from universities

to explore more knowledge on social media in order to promote tourism products and services. The tourism promotion body should invest in digital and social media marketing so that awareness of Nepali tourism products can be increased.

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