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Factors Affecting Behavioural Intention to Visit Tourist Attractions in Pakistan: Evidence from Social Media Users in Pakistan

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Social media is rapidly evolving across every field worldwide, with tourism being no exception. Pakistan has enormous potential in its tourism industry, which can be augmented through promotion on social media. This research aims to determine the role of social media in affecting the behavioural intent to visit tourist attractions in Pakistan. The data for this study were collected from 225 participants, all active social media users living in major cities across Pakistan. Data acquisition for this study employed convenience and snowball sampling methodologies, and SPSS software was utilised for multiple regression and reliability analysis. Our results of the hypothesis test showed that the positive experiences of travellers, information search regarding travel and tourism promotion play a significant and positive role in building their behavioural intention to travel to the tourism venues or sites in Pakistan. Despite recent negative influences from social media, we aim to promote Pakistani tourist sites through social media by actively requesting visitors to share positive and uplifting reviews. In parallel, we seek to empower the public with greater knowledge about the worth and basic structure of the tourism industry, to achieve a renewed and enduring growth in tourism.



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INTRODUCTION

The swift expansion of the internet and the rise of social media have fundamentally reshaped how people plan their travels. Nowadays, individuals can tap into an unprecedented wealth of information, a stark contrast to past limitations (Xiang et al., 2015). This has fundamentally altered the experience-sharing process by tourists (Javed et al., 2020), with social networking sites today framed as a major destination choice process. (Amrytey et al., 2023). Though internet browsers are still the primary tools used to conduct travel research, the rise of social media and Web 2.0

has changed how travel decisions are made (Patterson, C., 2015). This has led to a volatile landscape in which user-generated content has become a new language in current tourism. The main reason for using social media for tourist planning is that social media affects our feelings, perceptions, and emotions (Usui et al., 2018). A destination's image significantly influences tourist behaviour in terms of recommending it to other travellers, particularly emotional and general perceptions, according to a meta-analysis by Afshardoost & Esghani (2020). At most travel destinations, internet connectivity is quite easy to access, which is a major factor for tourists to communicate their experiences online. This ultimately entices the viewers to visit that destination. This situation has also caused tourism and hospitality agencies to use social media tools as one of the most primary features in their marketing strategies (Bockermann, 2019). With social media sites having more powerful social cues than other forms of media, they have also seen a resulting rise in user-generated content (UGC) (Berger & Schwartz 2011, Van Zoonen 2016). Now, travellers can adjust their content preferences by selecting one of the appropriate channels based on their audience to receive or share experiences with people, including friends, family members, or a custom audience on social media. This freedom to choose has accelerated the spate of sharing tourists' experiences on the Internet, namely: on Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, several travel platforms like AGODA and Booking. Com (Ly et al., 2020).

New studies show that social media now has an even greater impact on travel planning. In 2024, an estimated 89% of all travellers used platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest as sources of travel inspiration (WinSavy, 2024). Social media influencers also play a significant role in the consideration and decision-making process of tourists. Social Media Influence (SMI) significantly affects its followers' purchase intentions, indicating its considerable impact on followers' visit intentions, leading them to the possibility of visiting a particular place or destination (Rinka & Pratt, 2018; Magno & Cassia, 2018). Social Media Influencers also face challenges (Dabija et al., 2018; Guerreiro et al., 2019) in the travel information search process. Before the rise of accelerated social media, word-of-mouth was the dominant form of destination choice. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and e-word of mouth have been shown to affect tourists' intention to visit in studies (Rizky et al., 2017; Josiassen et al., 2020). A key aspect of the theory of planned behaviour is that attitudes toward the behaviour and perceived behavioural control are important predictors of behavioural intention, and that behavioural intention predicts behaviour itself (MD et al., 2023). Pakistan has some of the most beautiful tourist attractions set in a stunning global landscape, and tremendous potential for growth in the tourism industry. Studies regarding the contribution of social media to the tourism industry in Pakistan have shown that if social media is utilised effectively, its wonders can unveil that potential (Aftab et al., 2019). Experts believe that Pakistan's six-position advance in the World Tourism Index (WTI) is a remarkable evolution, which occurred in May 2022. However, the GDP generated by the tourism industry has decreased from 5.5.7% in 1995 to 2.8% in 2020 (World Bank, 2020), indicating that the tourism industry is not functioning as effectively as desired. Hence, scientific research in the tourism sector of Pakistan is critically needed, especially considering the global inclination towards the information revolution. Modern technologies like the internet and social media require intensive focus from our side. The objective is to explore the role of social media in the travel decision-making process of the Pakistani people and to make contributions that help authorities and businesses further improve performance in this field for tourism in Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The significance of understanding tourist behavior is clear when considering the requirements for successful tourism development. Consequently, the Theory of Planned Behavior is a relevant framework to employ. As per this theory, their attitude, the social expectation, and the perceived control all together construct the intention, which is the predictor of whether someone will engage in a behavior or not (Ajzen, 2002). The model has been extensively applied in the tourism field, investigation of destination choices (Sultan et al., 2019), revisit intention (Ofunre & Abiolaoke, 2018), millennial behavior (Javed et al., 2020), and rural tourism (Joo et al., 2020). Specifically, based on TPB, this study examines various predictors of Pakistani tourist destinations such as Positive Experience, Tourist Information Search, and Tourism Promotion. Furthermore, Self-Congruity Theory, an extension of the Self-Concept Theory, indicates that people prefer destinations that are consistent with their view of themselves (Usakli & Baloglu, 2016). In particular, because social media influencers evoke aspirational behavior, this paper employs ideal self-congruity. The recommendation of the influencer moulds the ideal self of the consumer according to the consumer's preferences. This especially applies to the Social Media Influencers variable in this Pakistan tourism context. Moreover, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) underlines that attitude and subjective norm determine behavioural intention, which are also in line with the frameworks stated above. Studies consistently show the power of shared experiences in influencing travel decisions (Li et al., 2022). Online positive experiences widen the choice of destinations (Sultan et al., 2019), and negative experiences constrain it. Real-time imagery can prevent negativity from festering. Positive social media sharing positively influences post-trip evaluation (2022), which may be amplified by positive audience reaction. Mohamad et al. (2022) found that positive experiences and subjective norms are strong predictors of tourists' intentions. Liu et al. (2019) analysed social comparison and benign envy, resulting from similar high-end tourism experiences, on visit intentions. Kim and Fessenmaier (2015) found that social media sharing during the trip positively influenced perceptions of the destination after the trip as well. Taiwan's case study: Lin and Kuo (2016) in their study on tourism in Taiwan, found that the 107 positive experiences of tourists are related to their perceived value from the trip, satisfaction with their trip, and their willingness to return to Taiwan. In applying psychological concepts, the impact of social media driving in marketing becomes apparent. According to online surveys, there is a strong link between positive experiences and consumer decisions. Because social media has become a relatively low-cost platform for engagement, the authenticity of influencers gives social media an edge over traditional advertising (Ye et al., 2021; Lin & Kuo, 2016). Such perceived authenticity matters to consumers. The influencer marketing effect is explored in-depth in various recent studies. Agostino et al. (2019) studied SMI Trust and influence quantification, illustrating how organizations can utilize various influencer types for PR Pop et al. (2022) recommended that this trend contributes to the role of trust in influencer marketing in tourism, influencing the entire consumer travel decision journey. In addition to that, Lou and Yuan (2019) showed that posts of influencers have a significant positive effect on brand familiarity and purchase intention. An earlier study from 2016 focused on building good partnerships and identifying key actors through interviewing Singaporean influencers (Pang et al., 2016). Lawanwisut et al. (2020) showed the relevance of influencers to Thai tourism by demonstrating that the majority of respondents used influencers to gain travel-related information.

Social media is also altering the dynamics of how we obtain travel information. For example, Wang & Park (2022) revealed that the impact of the accidental encounter of visual content on social media on the travel intention of Chinese university students exceeded purposeful searching.

In their study, Chung et al. (2015) examined information search for social media travel with the help of the Value-Based Adoption Model (VAM), highlighting the influence of both benefits and sacrifices. Qian et al., (2015) concluded that social media enhances tourism information structure and dissemination. Tran et al. (2016) explored social media's role in highlighting destinations on search engines in Vietnam. A study by Sun et al. (2022) found that social media is paramount for destination searches among Generation Y respondents. Yilmaz (2017) highlighted the significant role of user-generated content (UGC) in the initial stages of trip planning. The strategic utilisation of social media for tourism promotion seems to have garnered global attention. Gebreel & Shuayb (2022) found that social media has become a primary way to promote Libyan tourism and assist with travel arrangements. Similarly, Nugzar (2017) revealed that social media promotion enhances customer interest, reliability, and satisfaction in Georgia. In destination-specific contexts, Kurniawan et al. (2021) examined Twitter's role in promoting Yogyakarta tourism during the COVID-19 transition, emphasising consistent marketing efforts. Foronda et al. (2021) analysed the social media promotion of the Alcazar of Seville, highlighting its visibility and integration. Chatterjee & Dsilva (2021) investigated the ways social media can help develop sustainable tourism practices in India, revealing its socio-economic impact. Similarly, research by Okonkwo et al. (2015) investigated social media's impact on Nigerian tourism promotion, suggesting government intervention for enhanced utilisation. Expanding upon the work of Javed et al. (2020), this study broadens the demographic scope beyond Millennials to encompass Generation X and Generation Z while also addressing the limitations identified by Pop et al. (2022) through the use of a larger sample size of 225, thus enhancing generalisation.

METHODOLOGY

To understand the core determinants of behavioural intention in Pakistani tourism, this research focused on four primary research questions:

1. What impact does Positive Experience have on behavioural intention to visit tourist attractions in Pakistan?
2. What impact do Social Media Influencers have on behavioural intention to visit tourist attractions in Pakistan?
3. What impact do Tourist Information searches have on the behavioural intention to visit tourist attractions in Pakistan?
4. What impact does Tourism Promotion have on the behavioural intention to visit tourist attractions in Pakistan?

This research uses a quantitative approach to analyse different factors that play a vital role in the behavioural intention of visiting tourist attractions in Pakistan. Digital questionnaires served as the main way data were collected for this study. This approach allowed for efficient data gathering while also ensuring the anonymity of the participants' responses, as highlighted by Jackson & Furnham (2000). The study identifies and explains the cause-and-effect relationships between Positive Experiences, Tourist Information Search, Tourism Promotion, and Social Media Influencers (independent variables) and behavioural intention to visit (dependent variable) as shown in Figure 1. This explanatory research method, as opposed to making generalised assumptions, allows for a deeper understanding of these relationships, ultimately providing stakeholders with actionable insights to enhance Pakistan's tourism industry (Yordanova et al., 2010). To carry out this study, the researchers employed a descriptive research design. This design facilitated data collection from regular social media users in Pakistan who frequently explore travel destinations. The data gathered through this design helped to identify the specific factors

influencing their travel intentions. The researchers also used a structured questionnaire to obtain the primary data necessary for this investigation, which was distributed to active social media users across various Pakistani cities, including Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Hyderabad, Peshawar, and Quetta. This format allowed for data collection and analysis efficiently. The study's population consisted of social media users from diverse Pakistani cities, specifically those who were familiar with various social media platforms.

To obtain a targeted sample, convenience and snowball sampling strategies were employed. Convenience sampling involved distributing the questionnaire to individuals within the researchers' contact lists. Snowball sampling extended this reach by requesting participants to forward the questionnaire to their networks. These non-probability sampling techniques facilitated rapid data collection.

Given time constraints, a representative sample size was determined using Stevens' (1996) rule of thumb for multiple linear regression: a 15:1 ratio, where 15 shows how many people responded and 1 represents the number of continuous items. With 15 research items, a sample size of 225 (15 x 15) was considered appropriate to generalise the findings to the broader demographic of those social media users who reside in Pakistan. This study seeks to understand why tourists intend to visit certain destinations. Specifically, the behavioural intention to visit serves as the dependent variable. The independent variables explored are positive experience, social media influencers, tourist information search, and tourism promotion.

S.no	Research Questions	Variables		Techniques
		Independent	Dependent	
				Reliability analysis, Multiple regression analysis
1	R1	Positive Experience	Behavioural Intention to Visit	Reliability analysis, Multiple regression analysis
2	R2	Social Media Influencers	Behavioural Intention to Visit	Reliability analysis, Multiple regression analysis
3	R3	Tourist Information Search	Behavioural Intention to Visit	Reliability analysis, Multiple regression analysis
4	E4	Tourism Promotion	Behavioural Intention to Visit	Reliability analysis, Multiple regression analysis

Table 1: Research Variables

2.2 Research Instruments

For this study, we utilised a five-point Likert scale, as shown below.

S.no	Variables	No. of items	Scale	Sources
1	Behavioural Intention to Visit	3	Likert	Mohamad et al. (2022)
2	Positive Experience	3	Likert	Mohamad et al. (2022)
3	Social Media Influencers	3	Likert	Goldsmith et al. (2000)
4	Tourist Information Search	3	Likert	Javed et al. (2020)
5	Tourism Promotion	3	Likert	Javed et al. (2020)

Table 2: Research Instruments

Research Methodology for Data Analysis

For analysing the information they gathered, the study used a method to make sure the data was dependable and could be repeated with similar results. They also used another method, multiple regression, to see how factors like positive experiences and social media affected people's plans to visit.

Research Model

$$BIV = c + \beta_1 (PV) + \beta_2 (SMI) + \beta_3 (TIS) + \beta_4 (TP) + e$$

Where: constant (c), behavioural intention to visit (BIV), positive experience (PE), social media influencers (SMI), tourist information search (TIS), tourism promotion (TP), and error (e).

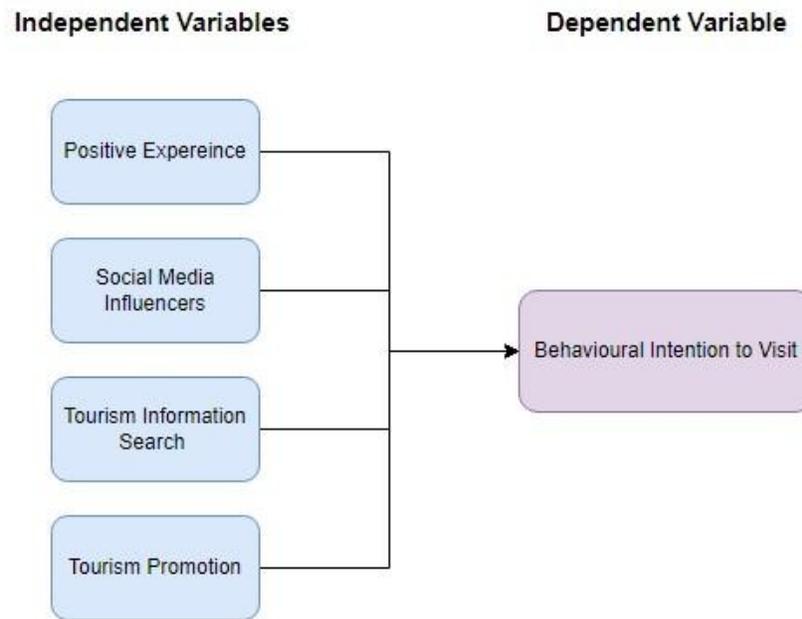


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Results and Discussion

Demographics and Respondents

A total of 225 digital questionnaires were analysed, revealing a strong female presence, with 155 respondents (approximately 68.9%) identifying as female, compared to 70 males (31.1%). The age distribution was heavily weighted towards young adults. Specifically, 206 respondents (91.6%) were aged between 18 and 25. The next largest age bracket, 26-35, accounted for 13 respondents (5.8%). Smaller percentages were observed in other age brackets: below 18 (1.3%), 36-50 (0.9%), and above 50 (0.4%). The majority of participants were students, with 196 respondents (87.1%) falling into this category. Private employees made up 11.1% of the sample (25 respondents), while government employees represented 1.8% (4 respondents). Educational backgrounds varied, with a significant portion holding undergraduate degrees. 163 respondents (72.4%) were undergraduates, followed by 37 graduates (16.4%). Other qualifications included intermediate (5.3%), post-graduate (4.9%), matriculation (0.4%), and professional qualification (0.4%). The data revealed that Instagram was the most used social media platform, as it was preferred by 111 of the study's respondents. (49.3%). Facebook was the second most used platform with 61 respondents (27.1%). YouTube was used by 27 respondents (12%). Snapchat had 11 users (4.9%), and 15 respondents (6.7%) reported using other applications. Daily social media usage varied considerably. 12 respondents (5.3%) spent less than an hour, 66 (29.3%) spent 1-3 hours, 82 (36.4%) spent 3-5 hours, and 65 (28.9%) spent more than 5 hours. The overall demographic profile emerging from the data is largely composed of young female students who exhibit high engagement with Instagram and allocate a significant portion of their daily time to using diverse social media.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	70	31.1
Female	155	68.9
Total	225	100.0
Age of Respondents		
Below 18	3	1.3
18-25	206	91.6
26-35	13	5.8
36-50	2	0.9
Above 50	1	0.4
Total	225	100.0
Occupational Status		
Student	196	87.1
Private Employee	25	11.1
Government Employee	4	1.8
Total	225	100.0

Qualification of Respondents		
Matriculation	1	0.4
Intermediate	12	5.3
Undergraduate	163	72.4
Graduate	37	16.4
Postgraduate	11	4.9
Professional Qualification (ACCA, CFA, etc.)	1	0.4
Total	225	100.0
Most Used Social Media Application		
Instagram	111	49.3
Youtube	27	12

Facebook	61	27.1
Snapchat	11	4.9
Other	15	6.7
Total	225	100.0
Daily Approximate Time Spent on Social Media		
Less than 1 hour	12	5.3
1-3 hours	66	29.3
3-5 hours	82	36.4
More than 5 hours	65	28.9
Total	225	100.0

Table 3: Respondents' Profile

Reliability Analysis

To ensure that the research questions used in the study were consistently measuring the same thing, the study used a reliability analysis. This involved checking how well the different questions related to each other. The researchers used Cronbach's Alpha to measure this, and scores above 0.7 were generally seen as indicating good reliability. The results showed that all the factors that the researchers studied, including positive experience (0.875) and social media influencers (0.763), had Cronbach's Alpha scores above 0.7. Following the criteria established by Hair et al. (2009), the collection of data for this study exhibits satisfactory reliability, as all Cronbach's Alpha values surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.7.

Name of variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items.
Positive Experience	0.875	3
Social Media Influencers	0.763	3
Tourist Information Search	0.821	3
Tourism Promotion	0.805	3
Behavioural Intention to Visit	0.858	3

Table 4: Summary of reliability analysis

Hypothesis Testing

The effect of independent variables on the dependent variable was analysed using regression analysis. The results, shown as beta coefficients (β) and p-values, reveal the strength and significance of these relationships. Positive Experience ($\beta = 0.118$, $p = 0.039$), Tourist Information Search ($\beta = 0.329$, $p = 0.000$), and Tourism Promotion ($\beta = 0.332$, $p = 0.000$) demonstrated significant relationships with the dependent variable. However, Social Media Influencers ($\beta = -0.046$, $p = 0.417$) did not exhibit a significant relationship. The R-squared value was found to be 42%. This suggests that the model accounts for 42% of the variation in the dependent variable.

Dependent Variable	Independent variable	Value of Beta (Standard coefficient)	Significance Value (P value)	VIF	Result
Behavioural Intention to Visit	Positive Experience	0.118	0.039	1.226	Accepted
	Social Media Influencers	-0.046	0.417	1.211	Rejected
	Tourist Information Search	0.329	0.000	2.060	Accepted
	Tourism Promotion	0.332	0.000	1.969	Accepted
R-square	0.421				
Adjusted R-square	0.410				

*Note: **Significance level at 0.05*

Table 5: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis

Discussion:

The advent of social media has permeated nearly every sector globally, and the tourism industry is no exception. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Xiaohongshu, and YouTube have become a central part of how people find out about, organize, and talk about their trips. Given the considerable potential of Pakistan within the tourism sector, comprehending the role of social media in shaping prospective tourists' intentions is of significant importance. The regression

analysis conducted within this study revealed that the independent variables examined showed varying degrees of influence on people's prospective desire to visit tourist spots in Pakistan.

Firstly, a positive experience demonstrated a significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.118$, $p = 0.039$), leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. This finding aligns with prior studies, like that of Muhammad et al. (2022), which draws attention to the beneficial aspect of social media travel experiences and subjective norms in predicting tourist behavior. Similarly, Kim & Fessenmaier (2015) and Li et al. (2022) emphasized the positive impact of shared positive experiences on social media on post-trip evaluations and viewer intentions to visit.

On the other hand, Social Media influencers had an insignificant relationship with behavioural intention ($\beta = -0.046$, $p = 0.417$). The data analysis resulted in rejection of the initial hypothesis and acceptance of the null hypothesis of 'no significant effect detected'. This finding contrasts with many prior studies, including Pop et al. (2022), Lou & Yuan (2019), Lawanwisut et al. (2020), and Ovens et al. (2020), which have found that Social Media Influencers (SMIs) can promote tourist intentions. This variation provides a room for further research in a Pakistani context to understand the causes of this anomalous finding. The Tourist Information Search had a strong positive impact ($\beta = 0.329$, $p = 0.00$), thereby supporting the alternative hypothesis. This finding is consistent with previous findings of Qian et al. (2015) & Tran et al. (2016), which showed the beneficial impact of social media-based tourist information searching on the choice-making process and the popularity of these selected destinations. Lastly, the effect of Tourism Promotion was also significantly positive ($\beta = 0.332$, $p = 0.00$), resulting in the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. This is in line with the observations by Javed et al. (2020) and Aftab et al. (2019), which called attention to the positive relationship between the promotion of tourism through social media and tourists' intention to visit.

As discussed above, Positive Experience, Tourist Information Search, and Tourism Promotion played a statistically significant positive role on behavioural intention to visit tourist destinations in Pakistan, whereas Social Media Influencers did not. The finding of the impact of Social Media Influencers opens up a prospect of investigation in the Pakistani tourism context as to how influencer marketing specifically operates in this particular socio-economic and market context.

Conclusion:

To summaries, this study used primary data from the users of the Pakistani social media and concluded that Positive Experience, Tourist Information Search, and Tourism Promotion have a significant and positive impact on the behavioural intent to visit different locations in Pakistan, with the tourism promotion effect being the greatest. In contrast, SMI exhibited a negative and insubstantial correlation, contravening existing outcomes. This research additionally verifies that stakeholders need to focus on improving positive visitor experiences, offering real jurisdiction on social media, and utilizing social media for marketing of tourism to improve the Pakistan tourism sector. Future research could extend this study by replicating it in other countries, expanding the independent variables to include factors such as financial availability, and employing random sampling methods. Furthermore, the unexpected role of Social Media Influencers warrants further investigation, particularly with larger sample sizes to clarify their influence within the Pakistani context.

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