

HOW TOURISM BUSINESS CAN MEASURE AND MAXIMIZE DIGITAL IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

In the evolving digital environment, social media has emerged as a pivotal component of marketing strategies within the tourism industry. Despite its growing adoption, the measurement of social media effectiveness presents ongoing challenges for tourism businesses. This paper critically examines the strategic role of social media platforms - including social networks, microblogs, multimedia-sharing sites, and user-generated review systems - in enhancing visibility, consumer engagement, and brand positioning. Emphasis is placed on the necessity of aligning social media initiatives with clearly defined business objectives and utilizing both qualitative and quantitative metrics to assess performance. The study explores established frameworks, such as Paine's seven-step model and Etlinger's Social Media Measurement Compass, which offer structured methodologies for evaluating impact and return on investment (ROI). The paper concludes that a comprehensive, data-informed approach to social media measurement not only justifies investment but also enables continuous optimization of marketing



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efforts, thereby contributing to sustained competitiveness in the tourism sector.

Key Words: Social Media Marketing, Tourism Industry, Digital Impact Measurement, Return on Investment (ROI), Strategic Communication

როგორ შეუძლია ტურისტულ ბიზნესს გაზომოს და მაქსიმალურად გაზარდოს სიფრული გავლენა

ბექა სხირტლაძე

სოხუმის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის ბიზნესის ადმინისტრირების
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ანოტაცია

ციფრული გარემოს განვითარების ფონზე, სოციალურ მედიას, მნიშვნელოვანი როლი აქვს ტურიზმის ინდუსტრიის მარკეტინგული სტრატეგიის ჩამოყალიბების პროცესში. მიუხედავად მისი მზარდი გამოყენებისა, სოციალური მედიის ეფექტიანობის გაზომვა, კვლავ გამოწვევად რჩება ტურიზმის სექტორისთვის. ეს ნაშრომი, კრიტიკულად განიხილავს სოციალური მედიის პლატფორმების - სოციალური ქსელების, მიკრობლოგების, მულტიმედიური გაზიარების საიტების და მომხმარებელთა მიერ შექმნილი შეფასებითი სისტემების - სტრატეგიულ როლს: ხილვადობის, მომხმარებელთა ჩართულობის და ბრენდის პოზიციონირების გაუმჯობესებაში. განსაკუთრებული ყურადღება ეთმობა, სოციალური მედიის ინიციატივების მკაფიოდ განსაზღვრულ ბიზნეს მიზნებთან შესაბამისობის აუცილებლობას და შესრულების შეფასების, როგორც ხარისხობრივი, ისე რაოდენობრივი მეტრიკების გამოყენებას. ნაშრომი განიხილავს უკვე დამკვიდრებულ ჩარჩოებს, როგორცაა პეინის შვიდსაფეხურიანი მოდელი და ეტლინგერის სოციალური მედიის გაზომვის კომპასი, რომლებიც გთავაზობენ სტრუქტურირებულ მეთოდოლოგიას გავლენისა და ინვესტიციის დაბრუნების მაჩვენებლის (ROI) შეფასებისთვის. კვლევა ასკვნის, რომ მონაცემებზე დაფუძნებული ყოვლისმომცველი მიდგომა, სოციალურ მედიაში, არა მხოლოდ ამართლებს ინვესტიციას, არამედ შესაძლებელს ხდის მარკეტინგული ძალისხმევის უწყვეტ ოპტიმიზაციას, რაც ტურიზმის სექტორში გრძელვადიანი კონკურენტუნარიანობის შენარჩუნებას უწყობს ხელს.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: სოციალური მედია მარკეტინგი, ტურიზმის ინდუსტრია, ციფრული ზემოქმედების გაზომვა, ინვესტიციის დაბრუნება (ROI), სტრატეგიული კომუნიკაცია

THE MAIN PART

Social media strategies are an essential component in the tourism sector, requiring significant attention from companies operating within the tourism industry. Piskorski (2012) argues that companies that merely transferred their digital strategies into the social environment and simply aimed to „maximize followers“ - only to push their commercial information to users - did not succeed. According to Piskorski, social strategies on social media platforms must be developed gradually; otherwise, they will fail. (Piskorski, 2013). At the first stage, businesses are advised to build better relationships with people to encourage them to complete corporate tasks voluntarily. In the second stage, companies should make non-intrusive efforts to establish connections between the company and its customers. A well-crafted social strategy creates a „many to many“ form of social engagement. Piskorski (2014) supports three types of social paradigms:

1. The „Pipe View“ - This paradigm sees social networks as pipes that transmit reliable information to interested parties through the exchange of information;
2. The „Prism View“ - This approach sees platforms as facilitators of connections between two parties, while also influencing third parties who are not directly involved in the interaction;
3. The „Platform as a Cloak“ - This paradigm suggests that social interactions with friends and acquaintances give individuals an excuse to engage in other types of interesting activities, while allowing them to maintain plausible deniability regarding their true intentions. (Piskorski, 2013).

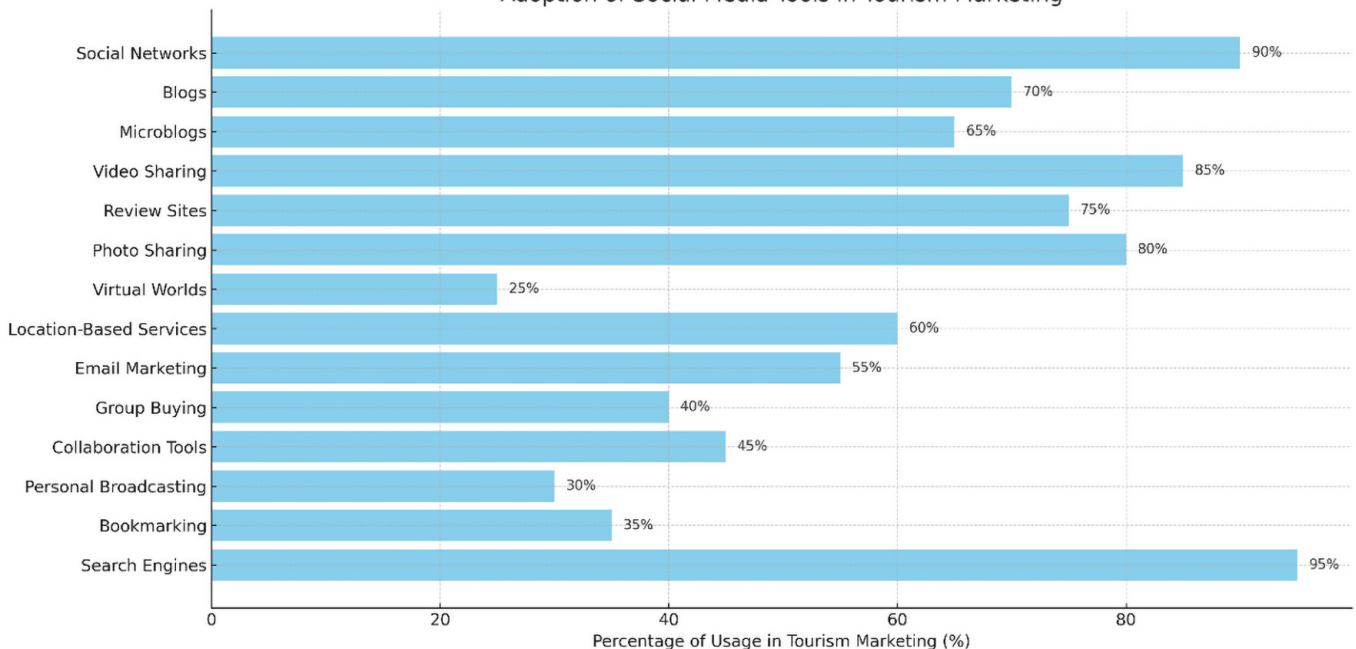
LinkedIn allows users to focus on professional topics, with content tailored specifically to career-related discussions, leaving little room for entertainment or leisure. Facebook, on the other hand, enables users to find new partners

or explore topics related to their interests. Studies show that only 50% of profile and photo views come from friends; the remaining 50% come from unknown visitors. (Piskorski, 2013). A well thought out social strategy is extremely beneficial in the tourism sector. Potential visitors often have a wide range of competing destinations to choose from, but in most cases, they are unwilling to invest significant time in thoroughly researching their options. On the other hand, tourists are often willing to pay more for a high-quality product if it is easily accessible. Social networks have created vast opportunities for developing and maintaining relationships with engaged consumers. As a tourism marketing tool, social media can significantly enhance the reputation of a destination and more effectively convince people that they are an integral part of the marketing strategy. (Yadav & Arora, 2012). Globalization, along with changes in visitors' needs and attitudes, has increased the volume of information that destinations must analyze to remain competitive in the constantly evolving tourism market.

When discussing social media, the diversity of its tools becomes particularly important, especially due to the significant impact these tools have on the tourism industry. Modern social media can be divided into several categories, often referred to as social media tools, including:

- Social Network Activity - Social networking sites like Facebook, Google Plus, CafeMom, Gather, and Fitsugar allow users to connect and share information with people who have similar interests. These tools enable tourists to effectively stay in touch with friends, family, colleagues, and people around the world. To use Facebook as a business tool, a company should create a branded page and share interesting and updated content with users. The company should help fulfill users' social needs and encourage them to support each other's needs. Depending on the type of

Adoption of Social Media Tools in Tourism Marketing



customer, tailored communication and offers can be created. Businesses can also establish discussion forums to receive feedback on their products and services. (Treadway & Smith, 2010);

- **Microblogs** - Platforms like Twitter, Tumblr, and Posterous allow users to share short text posts that may include links to products, services, and other social media. Twitter is especially popular among celebrities and politicians, making it an attractive tool for companies to reach diverse audiences. Messages (tweets) may include opinions, quotes, news links, images, or product promotions that generate interest and engagement. Tourism businesses should actively seek to grow their network and fan base to boost global engagement;

- **Blogs** - Web journals are platforms where travelers share their personal travel stories and experiences. Blogs are powerful and cost-effective tools for expressing various opinions and interests - whether political, commercial, social, or personal. Blogging platforms include WordPress, Blogger, and Squarespace. Users can participate by posting and responding to messages. Blogs have a strong influence on audiences, making them essential in tourism marketing. Companies often work to win over bloggers whose content can impact public perception. Blogs are also a valuable source for promoting tourism services and destinations. (Khare, 2012);

- **Multimedia and Video Sharing** - Platforms like Flickr (photos) and YouTube (videos) allow for sharing multimedia content. These are essential tools in tourism, with platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, and Viddler playing a major role in destination promotion. It's important for video uploaders to allow users to share content like images and videos. YouTube has over 1 billion registered users and more than 4 billion daily video views, making it the largest video-sharing platform. Tourism businesses can drive traffic using SEO keywords and hashtags aligned with their target segment and brand. (SEOPressor, 2021);

- **Collaboration Tools** - Wikipedia, WikiTravel, and WikiBooks are software-based platforms where users can collaboratively create, modify, and manage content related to social media's role in tourism. (SEOPressor, 2021);

- **Review Sites** - These platforms allow people to post reviews of individuals, businesses, travel destinations, and services. They are strategically developed tools in social media marketing. (SEOPressor, 2021);

- **Photo Sharing Sites** - Platforms like Flickr, Instagram, and Pinterest enable users to upload, edit, publish, and share images and videos. (SEOPressor, 2021) Instagram, a photo and video sharing platform now owned by Facebook, is especially popular among younger users, making segmentation easier. Instagram has around 130 million monthly active users. (ebizmba.com, 2021) To influence users through Instagram, it's essential to post engaging and relevant photos and videos regularly. Content should address users' social, emotional, rational, and epistemic needs. (SEOPressor, 2021);

- **Personal Broadcasting Tools** - Platforms like Talk Radio,

Ustream, Livestream, and Tumblr allow for participatory journalism, where users broadcast their own content;

- **Virtual Worlds** - Platforms like Second Life, World of Warcraft, and Farmville are 3D online communities where users appear as avatars and interact in real time via text or 3D models. (SEOPressor, 2021);

- **Location Based Services** - Apps like Foursquare and Yelp use GPS to connect users to nearby locations and services, such as restaurants, cafes, cinemas, museums, and galleries. These tools help tourists and tourism companies find each other quickly and efficiently. (Corstjens & Umblijs, 2012);

- **Group Buying Sites** - Sites like Groupon, Living Social, Wowcer, and Crowdsavings offer opportunities for bulk discounts and savings, which can result in high transaction volumes. (SEOPressor, 2021);

- **Social Bookmarking and News Aggregation** - Platforms like Digg, Delicious, and StumbleUpon allow users to save and organize links to various websites and online resources. (SEOPressor, 2021) StumbleUpon, with 25 million users, acts as a discovery engine that recommends web pages based on users' interests. It can also share content marked as "liked" and suggest related sites and blogs.

- **Email Marketing** - Sending targeted emails to existing or potential tourists remains one of the most effective online marketing tools. (Jashi, 2013);

- **Search Engines** - Tools like Google, Bing, and Yahoo are widely used by tourists to search for information about companies and destinations. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is crucial to help a specific site appear higher in search results. (Ernestad, 2010).

Social media marketing has become a critical success factor for many businesses today. More and more tourism organizations are investing in social media strategies, raising an important question: does spending on social media actually yield better results for tourism businesses? The answer is not always straightforward. For many tourism enterprises, social media marketing is still in its early stages, which complicates performance measurement. Managers and marketers responsible for social media find it challenging to demonstrate the return on their investments on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Hoffman and Fodor (2010) noted that businesses, particularly marketing departments, are searching for appropriate ways to assess the impact of social media strategies, but most models still rely heavily on reach and frequency metrics. Executives and departmental managers need concrete figures to evaluate investment performance. Without reliable measurement, goals are difficult to track, and unmeasured activities often go unfinished. While numbers have their advantages, poor data management can lead to problematic behaviors and hinder broader organizational goals. Therefore, it's essential to have reliable measurement tools to determine whether goals have been successfully achieved (Demopoulos, Futch, & Pisello, 2008).

Measuring the impact of social media on organizations

will likely guide future investments in social platforms. However, this raises further questions: What should be measured? What key performance indicators (KPIs) can help organizations understand the impact of social media across different industries, sizes, and regions? What effect does it have on tourism objects, and how should these metrics be interpreted? Since social media relies on ideas and creativity, it differs significantly from other marketing tools. It is a science revolving around big data, statistics, and analytics. It involves far more than simply posting, sharing, or tracking likes and followers. Tourism organizations must assess not only social media's influence on their overall business performance but also justify the time and money invested. (Demopoulos, Futch, & Pisello, 2008) Organizations that fail to analyze the data generated from social networks risk rendering their social media marketing ineffective. Tourism organizations should remember that social media shares many of the fundamental principles of traditional marketing measurement. Two essential aspects to consider when measuring social media impact are influence and return on investment (ROI). To assess social media's influence on business performance, companies must answer questions like: What is the direct or indirect impact of social media on business outcomes? How do these impacts vary across sectors, organization sizes, and geographical regions?

Social media ROI measurement presents challenges, especially when trying to quantify non-numerical elements like user engagement and conversations. It's difficult to convert metrics like daily tweets or the value of 1,000 Facebook followers into financial returns. However, businesses must develop ways to define what constitutes a "return" (Bitzer, 2012) Basic engagement metrics (likes, followers) alone are insufficient to measure revenue impact from social media. On the other hand, qualitative metrics such as customer sentiment and feedback provide meaningful insights that can drive business improvement. Without a proper measurement framework, businesses cannot assess whether their strategies are effective.

CONCLUSION

Social media has become a vital tool in the tourism industry, fundamentally transforming how destinations and tourism businesses engage with potential visitors. While its popularity and influence continue to grow, accurately measuring the effectiveness and return on investment (ROI) of social media strategies remains a challenge. Metrics such as

likes, shares, comments, and follower counts offer surface-level insights, but they often fall short of capturing the full impact on business objectives.

To truly understand the value of social media, tourism organizations must adopt structured measurement frameworks that align social media activities with clear business goals. Models such as Paine's seven-step framework emphasize the importance of defining target audiences, selecting meaningful benchmarks and key performance indicators (KPIs), and using appropriate data collection tools. Quantitative metrics should be complemented by qualitative data - such as user feedback and engagement patterns to form a comprehensive view of performance.

Ultimately, measuring social media success is not about collecting every possible statistic but about focusing on the data that reflects progress toward strategic objectives. Without proper measurement, organizations risk misallocating resources and failing to optimize their social media efforts. As the digital landscape evolves, the ability to adapt, analyze, and act on social media insights will become an increasingly crucial component of sustainable success in the tourism sector.

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