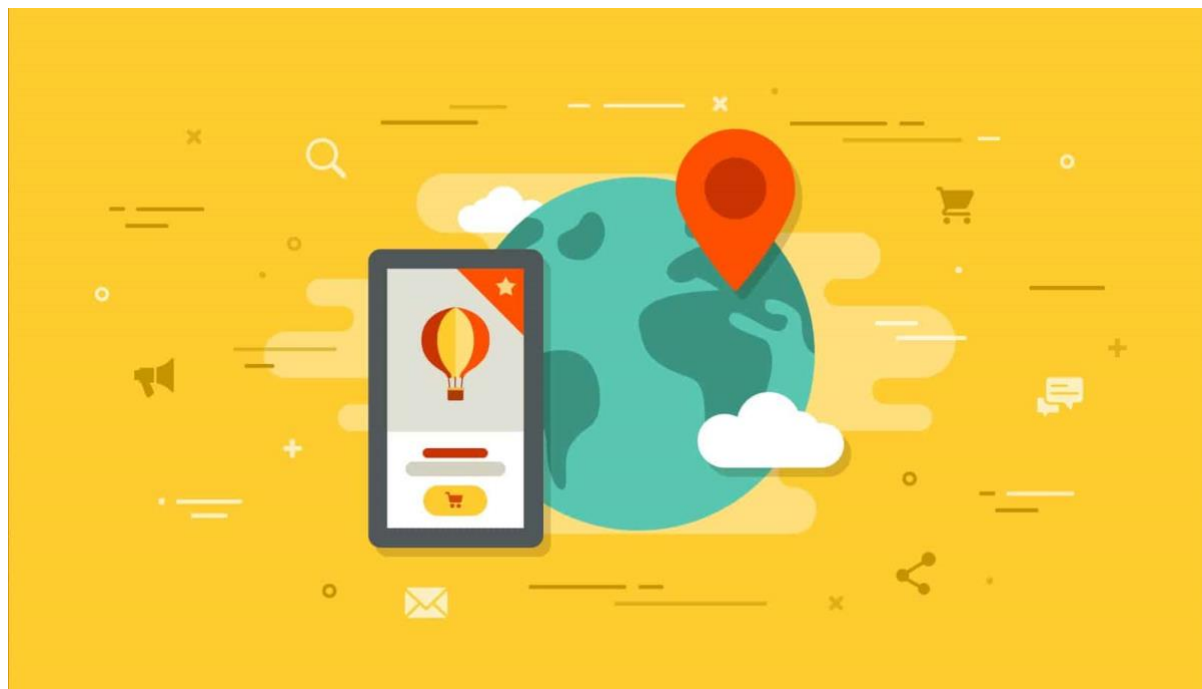


# Master's Thesis on Roles of Social Media in Tourism Industry



## MA in Tourism Management Aalborg University, Copenhagen

**Submitted By:**

Ranjana Tumsing Magar KC

**Submitted To:**

Michael Alexander Ulfstjerne

**Hand in Date:** 31<sup>st</sup> May 2022

**Number of characters:** 88127 (including space)

## **Abstract**

Social media has influenced the tourism industries in many ways. It has enabled the connection between customers and suppliers in ways which was not possible before. This thesis aims to understand such roles of social media in tourism which has impacted the tourism industry. This thesis explores these dynamics of social media usage in tourism where suppliers and consumers are concerned. It further goes on to identify the changes in tourism industry due to social media where users are gaining more advantage of information. The thesis will also look at the ways in which tourism agents are adopting to the changes that are brought using social media in tourism industry.

Qualitative research method is used in this thesis to obtain data and analyse them. Inductive approach helped the author gather and collect the small number of data that was available to generalize and create patterns and themes. Data was analysed using codes and themes and later explored in the thesis which co-related with the information obtained from literatures. Even though there were limitation to the research process the data obtained provided great insight into tourism industry. Discussions regarding future studies are presented in the thesis which are related to use of data in social media, the algorithms of these platforms and ethical issues concerning those.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1 Tourism and social media .....	3
1.2 Social Media Influence in Tourism.....	4
1.3 Research Area .....	6
1.4 Research Question .....	6
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	<b>8</b>
2.1 Application of social media in Tourism .....	8
2.1.1 Social media from Supplier’s Perspective .....	9
2.1.2 Social media from consumer’s perspective .....	11
2.2 Social Media in Tourism and its concerns.....	12
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b> .....	<b>15</b>
3.1 Research Strategy.....	15
3.2 Research Method .....	15
3.3 Research Approach.....	15
3.4 Data Collection Methods .....	16
3.5 Data Analysis.....	17
<b>Chapter 4: Analysis</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>First Sub-question</b> .....	<b>21</b>
4.1.1 Supplier’s Perspective .....	22
4.1.2 Consumer’s Perspective .....	26
<b>Second Sub-question</b> .....	<b>30</b>
4.2.1 The Circle of Representation .....	31
4.2.2 Tourism agents adopting to the change.....	33
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Reference</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix 1- Interview Excerpts</b> .....	<b>41</b>

### List of Tables

Table 1 Common Practices in Tourism Industry .....	21
--	----

### List of Figures

Figure 1 The Circle of Representation.....	31
--	----

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## **1.1 Tourism and social media**

Social media has shaped our lives in many ways and tourism is no exception. Social media has been used by tourism related industries and as well as customers. It has enabled the industry to grow exponentially with its various information sharing platforms. Social media is known to be the most powerful online networking tools. Social media channels are also defined as an ‘interactive technologies and digital channels that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks’ (Kietzmann & Hermkens, 2011). The rising phenomenon of web 2.0 technologies contributed significantly to daily importance of social media (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Social media have emerged as a powerful information and communication channel which have significantly changed the practice of marketing communication for many companies, including those in the tourism and hospitality industry (Song & Yoo 2016). The reliability of the content shared on these channels contributes to the power of social media and these contents provide solid knowledge to travellers about destinations and tourism products (Leung et al., 2013) (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). The influence of social media on travel decision-making has attracted much attention from tourism scholars and there are numerous studies regarding that topic. In addition to that, ‘social media tourism’ has been on rise where the destinations are discovered by the travellers and tourists through social media. Upward trends in social media usage, specifically tourism consumers, have prompted hospitality and tourism organizations to investigate the role of social media in the travellers’ decision-making process (Fuchs, Scholochov, & Höpken, 2009). Social media provides the potential tourists access to other travellers’ experiences which is a vital source of information while making plans for a vacation. The travel planning process is complex in nature and can be classified as a high risk and high-cost decision. Travelers have identified the various uses of social media in aiding them to search, organize, and share their travel experiences (Leung et al., 2013). Today, social media is comprised of various platforms (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube etc.) which allow individuals to post content and multimedia in real-time from various locations. Social media is not only used by travellers who would potentially visit a destination, but the usage of social media has been significant for tourism related businesses. Even though there are numerous studies related to social media and tourist behaviour there are very limited research done on how social media has been used by tourism related businesses. There are many ways by which social media has been a helpful tool for such businesses like in the marketing process and others which will be discussed later in this thesis.

As an intern in tourism consultation company, I had to deal with clients and customers through social media. Social media was the most important tool which was used to share, communicate, and market the new products. Social media were of key importance to promote the products and services efficiently and effectively. It is essential to develop a good relationship with the client to ensure its efficacy, being trustworthy and consistent with the material that has been released to sustain for long-term projects. Working as ‘Content Manager’ for a tourism counselling company also provided me with various insights regarding the use of social media in tourism businesses. Using social media during the internship to promote and market the products and services were of key importance along with other duties that involved social media. Social media was not only used to promote, market and sell those products and services but they were used to educate, inform and aware the audience.

Websites and social media provide a wealth of information regarding the experiences and review of the destination, property, facilities, and restaurants in the tourism through different platforms (Manap Khairul, Hilmi A., 2013). Most tourists always use the Internet for destination information to decide on which destination they should travel to. All actors in the tourism industry value chain, including tourism boards, travel agents, tour operators, transportation providers, hotel and restaurant operators, destination management companies, and local tourism management organisations, use social media tools to reach potential customers (Ernestad V., 2010). Aiding to the research and studies by scholars in the roles of social media there are numbers and statistics which portrays the influence of social media in the tourism industry is huge and growing. According to research by (Macdonald, 2019), 82% of people of which 92% of them were Gen Z generation – born between 1997-2012 (‘Generation Z’, 2022) have researched a destination after being inspired by social media posts of others online. Similarly another report by Statista (*Leisure Travel*, n.d.), showed that 36.5% of people use social media for travel inspiration and ideas with 60% sharing their own content from holidays or travels. It was also noted in the same report that one million travel-related hashtags are searched every week connecting the travellers all around the world. All these studies and facts from all the sources, show that social media is the most easily accessible source of information currently. Aside from calling to question the legitimacy and reliability of information sharing it also demonstrates just how influential the various platforms have become.

## **1.2 Social Media Influence in Tourism**

Social media has enabled tourism agents and tourists to communicate and discover new destination and products. It has enabled the tourism related business to promote their destination and products in cheap and cost-efficient manner. It has also enabled them to share the knowledge related to tourism directly to their audience without having to cross boundaries physically. This virtual relationship between the tourism agents and tourists has helped many in the times of pandemic when tourism had to endure the biggest hit. Even though it is evident that the influence of social media on travellers and tourist have had huge impacts, one of the most concerning one is over tourism. China opened the world's highest and longest glass bottom bridge which stretched 1,000 feet over the lush Zhangjiajie Grand Canyon on August 20, 2016. Thousands of tourists swarmed the bridge who were eager to capture mind-bending photos within few days after its opening. And as a result, after just 13 days, the bridge was forced to close due to overcrowding (Geographic, 2017). Similarly, Manahukot, located on the western top of Damauli bazar drew a huge crowd, after breath-taking photos of the area went viral on social media - Tiktok and Instagram. The place had been receiving around 1,000 tourists every day, but after it got viral on Tiktok, there were more than 10,000 visitors who had flocked the newest popular tourist destination in the area.

To tackle over tourism in popular destinations, a new tourism strategy was created in New Zealand which gave an opportunity for lesser-known tourism businesses and locations, whilst relieving the pressure of over tourism on popular sites. This campaign encourages travellers to stop 'traveling under the social influence' and aims to drive visitation to new, and mostly unknown areas of natural beauty and away from popular sites. New Zealand's tourism board offered a \$500 NZD (\$359 USD) domestic travel voucher prize draw to anyone who shares a photo of themselves 'doing something different' on social media platforms (Tourism, 2021). Social media posting will attract more attention, so tourists will visit less popular sites, leading to a spread of the economic benefits of tourism in other parts of the country. As a relatively inexpensive marketing strategy that has a large reach and influences consumer behaviour, prompting a prize for exploring beyond the beaten path is a clever way to create exposure on social media.

The global society is becoming increasingly influenced by social media, the purpose of a trip has been shifted from enjoyment to being able to post it on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Facebook. These cases of over tourism show how social media has changed the way people travel to different destinations. Their motivation to travel and how destination is reacting to these changes. There are numerous studies the roles of social media

in tourist's decision making. These studies show how social media posts like pictures, videos and blogs are responsible for making a tourist go to a certain destination. However, the same influence of social media has led the industry to change in many ways which has not been investigated. This thesis intends to bridge that gap and attempts to shed light on the changes that is happening in the tourism industry now due to different social media platforms.

### **1.3 Research Area**

People have been travelling and visiting new destinations for centuries and it has been a very important part of their life. Adding to that, travelling to a destination after being influenced by social media has been seen as a millennial phenomenon and it keeps on growing. Tourism is a business which continues to grow despite economic conditions. In the digital age tourism growth has grown over the years with better access to different forms of online platforms for the matter of fact. By understanding the factors that stimulate a traveller's use of social media, tourism businesses are leveraging social media to engage with potential customers and tourists. Social medias like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and recently Tiktok has transformed the tourism industry. These platforms have made it easier for people to explore and discover new destinations and share their experience with their audience. It has enabled tourism businesses to market and promote their destinations and tourism products easily and virtually. These different roles of social media have enabled the tourism industry to grow and thrive even at the times of crisis.

The main aim of the thesis is to analyse the use of social media by different tourism stakeholders and the changes the usage has created in the tourism industry. This research looks at the different practices in tourism industry by suppliers and consumers as of now which has helped in the development of tourism industry exponentially. This practices in turn have also shifted some dynamics in the industry and those will be discussed in this thesis. The important goal of this thesis is to identify the changes that is happening in the tourism industry due to use of social media and understanding how tourism agents are adopting to those changes. Therefore, looking at different roles of social media in tourism this thesis will be focussed on how the social media has transformed tourism practices and how are tourism agents and stakeholders adapting to these changes.

### **1.4 Research Question**

The tourism industry has seen changes due to use of social media in how it operates and how the travellers are reacting. This research will discuss how the use of social media has changed

how the tourism industry works. Along with that it will also discuss the way in which tourism stakeholders adopt to these changes.

How is social media reconfiguring tourism industry and in what ways are tourism agents adapting their business practices to this change??

### **Sub Questions**

To answer the research question, it is divided into two sub questions. Answering these following sub questions will provide holistic answer to the main research question. The first sub question will look at the current tourism practices in the tourism industry and the trends by which social media is getting used. The second sub question will dive into the changes that is seen in the tourism industry and the ways the tourism agents are adopting to these changes.

1. What are the existing common practices of social media in tourism ?
2. How are the tourism agents adapting to changes that have occurred in tourism due to social media?

These sub questions will help answer the main research question which will provide the thesis with the balanced result. With these sub questions answered, the thesis will have shown how the tourism industry has been reconfigured due to use of social media by the users both suppliers and consumers. This will in turn bridge the gap that has been seen in the literatures which will be discussed in the next chapter.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this literature review, the studies relating to definition and meaning of social media in tourism, the roles of social media in tourism and their application through the perspectives of suppliers and consumers are presented. The aim of this chapter is to depict the importance of social media in tourism with the help of current bodies of literature in the topic. It further helps to build and provide the concrete evidence that the research on this topic has recognized the importance of roles of social media in various ways. In one hand, this review portrays all the important roles of social media in tourism like marketing, promoting, connecting, and sharing of the destination and tourism products by both suppliers and consumers. In other hand, this review also successfully shows that there is another side to this where use of social media has increased the concerns of mass tourism. The way the users, let that be consumer or supplier use social media have huge impact on the image, authenticity, and numbers in the destination. This will be later used during analysis and discussion in the thesis.

Here, the first part of the review is general concepts in social media and tourism. This mainly talks about how social media is being used in tourism industry and the basic concepts that are used while studying and researching the topic. Then the review is further divided into two perspectives which are through suppliers and consumers. This consists of the body of literature discussing the use of social media by tourism business and entrepreneurs (suppliers) in promotion and marketing of the destination and tourism products. And the other includes various use of social media by consumers of those contents generated by the tourism suppliers to understand the current situation of tourism industry in social media. The second part of this review talks about the impacts and the concerns that social media has brought about in tourism industry. This section focusses on the studies that talks about the destination image, ethical use of data and mass tourism.

### **2.1 Application of social media in Tourism**

With the invention of internet, the possibility of networking and communicating through numerous channels has grown exponentially. There are different kinds of networking platforms and channels, and social media has been one of them. Social media play a particularly central role in tourism while playing an important role in all aspects of life and society and in all industries. One of the reasons for their key role in tourism is that tourism industry is an information-intensive industry which aligns with the business model of social media (Werthner & Klein, 1999). Tourism is also social in nature where recording, recalling, sharing, and talking about travel experiences are enjoyable and socially important activities. Another reason for the

"natural fit" between tourism and social media is the asymmetries in information and the experiential nature of tourism. Tourism has always been characterized by these characteristics, so tourists make or at least inform their decisions largely based on personal sources of information which is known as 'word-of-mouth'. Similarly, social media enables 'electronic word-of-mouth' (EWOM). It is different from traditional word-of-mouth in a way that it is asynchronous, many-to-many and not limited to one's personal social circle as discussed in the papers by (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). In the studies done by (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010) they emphasize that social media cannot be understood without first defining Web 2.0. This is a term that defines a new way in which end users use the World Wide Web, a place where content is continuously altered to allow sharing in a collaborative by all operators. Adding to that (A.M. Kaplan, 2010), use the definition of social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" in his studies. The position of social media has been illustrated and researched progressively in the tourism industry which has been recognized as an emerging concept. Where 'Travel 2.0' is a new term that has been developed as one of those emerging concepts which indicates the progress of social media's significance in travel in the travel industry which has been studied by numerous scholars like (Chu, Deng, & Cheng, 2020; Baker & KaWon, 2019; Lo & Yao, 2019; Chang, Ku, & Chen, 2019; Mariani, Styven, & Aye, 2019). Apart from the influences on tourist consumption behaviour, social media's evolution has influenced the research area related to tourism and hospitality as well.

For the last twenty years, the researchers have acknowledged that social media has made it essential for tourists to decide and plan their trip (Zarezadeh, Rastegar, & Gretzel, 2018; Cholprasertsuk, Lawanwisut, & Thongrin, 2020). The TikTok video platform has been studied by academics in different fields. For example, Du et al. (2020) conducted an analysis of tourist behaviour related to a TikTok video recording. While some tourists use this social media platform to share memories, express themselves, interact with others and peek, others make use of it to market their products (Omar & Dequan, 2020). TikTok has also been studied in research that explores consumer satisfaction regarding purchasing products and services or searching for information on attractions (Han & Zhang, 2020; Susilo, 2020). Hence, the following part of this review consists of social media roles from supplier's and consumer's perspectives.

### **2.1.1 Social media from Supplier's Perspective**

With the advent of social media, there is an increasing role for social media in many aspects of tourism, especially when it comes to searching information, making decisions, and promoting tourism, through the platforms of social media by focusing on the best applications to engage with customers (Sahoo & B.G, 2017). (Sahin & Sengun 2015) focuses on the importance of social media in tourism marketing. He mentioned that tourism industry has started to use social media as a new marketing approach in this rapidly growing internet technologies. This is demonstrated as an excellent technique to exploit social media to sell tourism products and services. Many countries and states view social media as a primary tool for supporting their tourism industries.

An organization's social media marketing strategy describes how the organization utilizes social media resources to fulfil the organization's marketing target. The social media strategy helps to implement and promote eminent approaches offers insights on markets and consumers that are used to build and change the company's business strategy. The company needs further decisions on optimizing the marketing resources available to win more customers based on the amendment strategy they are going towards in terms of using social media marketing to market their company (Gohil, 2015). (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier 2009), pointed out that User Generated Content (UGC) has shaped how destination is visible on social media, and these have also influenced the decision on the selection of destination subsequently. The researchers also mentions that UGC can provide travel consumers with incomparable, unparalleled, latest, and differentiated formats of information indeed (Leung, Law, Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013).

Most businesses monitor social media for the purpose of identifying problems and mitigating complaints as a result of social media (Sparks & Bradley, 2014), this in turn enables them to provide customer service at new levels in differently new ways. Social media further offers opportunities to engage with existing and potential customers beyond transactional interactions, permitting new ways of customer relationship management. According to (Gretzel & Fesenmaier 2012), people follow destinations on social media platforms to be entertained and express emotional attachments, while they engage mostly with travel companies for information and discounts.

A widely recognized role of social media in the tourism literature is its importance for crisis communication and management. A company's ability to use social media effectively to spread public relations messages aimed at preventing or managing a crisis is one aspect of this concept (Sigala, 2011). For instance, (Hvass 2014) illustrates the use of social media by airlines during

the 2010 ash cloud crisis as one of those ability. On the other hand, the literature discusses how social media can be used to connect with tourists during crisis times. According to (Schroeder et al. 2013) travelers are likely to turn to social media during a crisis because of their prominent use of smartphones during travel. It is because of their reduced access to traditional media devices such as radio as compared to residents and their greater risk perceptions. Therefore, increased information needs induced by their unfamiliarity with the destination and with organizations that could provide help.

### **2.1.2 Social media from consumer's perspective**

Social media is not only a tool to communicate and share but has also been used as a marketing tool by many companies in recent years. Social media has advanced from being a platform for individuals simply enabling to stay connected with their family and friends. It is now a place where consumers can learn and educate themselves more on the topic of their favourite companies and the products and services they offer. These sites have been utilized by the marketers and retailers as another way to reach to their consumers providing them with new shopping experience. "Technology related developments such as the rise of powerful search engines, advanced mobile devices and interfaces, peer-to-peer communication vehicles, and online social networks have extended marketers' ability to reach shoppers through new touch points" (Shankar et al. 2011, 30) (Paquette, 2013.). (Vemeulen & Seegers 2009) believe that online exposure to other customer's experiences could amplify potential tourist's awareness and consideration to travel. In today's increasingly mobile world, social media are no longer just used to inform travellers, but are also used to guide decisions and provide interpretation during the journey (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011). Hence, they are not only influencing where tourists are going but also the quality of their experiences in the destinations.

The tourists are not only able to consume other's content online but are also inspired to share their travel content. Among the interesting findings of this study (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier 2009) are that travel content on social media encourages daydreaming, stimulates fantasies, evokes nostalgia, and takes the consumer to exotic destinations. Despite the fact that, social media users often post travel-related content to help others or to share experiences with loved ones, they also report that the process can be very enjoyable (Gretzel et al., 2011). (Kim & Fesenmaier 2017) demonstrate that such sharing not only entertains but also leads to more positive evaluations of the past travel experience and therefore fulfils an important psychological function. This has added to the destination image where consumers are able to share their image of the destination which is raw and authentic. The consumers are not only

limited to looking at the contents created by DMOS, media and marketers now because of social media which has changed the way one views the destination. It has been suggested in the studies (Balomenou and Garrod 2019) that the changes in photo-taking and photo-sharing practices brought about by social media influence the circle of representation greatly, with consumers contributing a great deal to the projected image of a destination.

An important role of social media in tourism that has received little attention in the academic tourism literature is social media activism which provides opportunities for consumers to organize and protest (Segeberg & Bennett, 2011). The studies (Mkono & Tribe 2016) identify social media activism as one of the main roles of tourists using social media, but their conceptualization of activism and their research context are limited, so they ignore many aspects of social media activism relevant to tourism. Social-media based whistleblowing exposing problematic or even illegal practices by tourism and hospitality businesses is becoming more and more common as smart phones make it extremely easy to record and capture proof of evidence which is then immediately shared online with others (CNBC, 2017). (Miller 2017) explains that social media “help foster social change by creating a conversational environment based on limited forms of expressive solidarity as opposed to an engaged, content-driven, dialogic public sphere”. Some researchers have warned that merely engaging in symbolic actions might lead to moral licensing effects and thus less cause-related behaviour afterwards (Soyer, Cornelissen & Karelaia, 2013). Social media have also been identified to support activism as they encourage fluid membership and asynchronous participation (Cammaerts 2015). This goes on to show social media is more than a platform for content sharing for consumers in tourism.

## **2.2 Social Media in Tourism and its concerns**

### **2.2.1 Destination image**

Photography and tourism are intricately linked (Garrod, 2009) and social media provide new outlets for tourists to curate and share their travel photographs (Lo et al., 2011). Social media also change how tourists take photographs and videos, and how they frame their visuals (Dinhoplant Gretzel, 2016). Travel advertisements, travel guides, and the popular media have traditionally influenced what tourists depict in their photographs. There are repercussions to this so-called circle of representation (Jenkins, 2003) which has changed because of social media. As tourists are now participating actively in establishing what the iconic, must-see destinations are on social media platforms by sharing their photographs publicly (Månsson, 2011). This has led to loss of control for destination marketers on their brand (Gretzel, 2006).

This phenomenon has also been talked in different literatures where with the invention of technology and social media platforms the power relation can shift. Tourism has long been characterized as an information asymmetric market in which tourists have lower level of information than their suppliers. However, with the advent of modern technologies, and especially with the wide diffusion of the participative Web 2.0 functionalities, it is not difficult to envisage situations where the information asymmetry is reversed, and a traveller is more able to fully value the product offered than the supplier.

### 2.2.2 Use of Social Media Data

The ethical issues regarding datafication and use of social media data in research are also in rising concern. Social media research requires a different way of thinking about data (Quan-Haase & Sloan, 2017) as data is widely available but also incredibly noisy. In the studies (Xiang et al. 2017) on social media research demonstrated that the issue data reliability is significant and exploring it further is of importance. Using social media data to validate the quality of the destination or tourism product is questionable. The study by (Xiang et al., 2018) revealed a severe problem in the reliability of online review data. Particularly, data from even a highly reputable website like TripAdvisor might yield unreliable results and thus potentially invalid conclusions. This study revealed that data quality issues could result from the innate nature of social media and inconsistencies in user behaviour.

### 2.2.3 Mass tourism and social media

Mass tourism is a feeling of suffering due to tourist overload (Borg et al., 1996) in a place, expressed through an individual or collective reaction to the local authorities or in the press-tourists are rarely if ever taken to task. Mass tourism has the peculiarity of involving both local and tourists at the destination, as these also suffer from promiscuity and visitor density. There are few literatures that talk about the relationship between social media and mass tourism. Social media technologies hold the power of persuasion which encourages the users to post and share their experience online for others to view. This power also makes the users to manufacture and produce the contents that are shareworthy and it is done so through visual platforms like Instagram, TikTok and also through location-based applications like Foursquare and Snapchat (Gretzel, 2019). This means that social media are networks of desire that help fuel the creation and consumption of content (Kozinets et al., 2016), where the attractions of travel-related content are evident. The study by (Gretzel, 2019) discusses how social media not only heighten motivations to travel, but they also foster travel to specific destinations and influence behaviours at destinations. Further, it asserts that social media use does not constitute

the only, or even the most important, cause of mass tourism, but it certainly encourages behaviours that contribute to crowding, and it perpetuates images that influence others to travel to certain places and behave in certain ways once there.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this part of thesis, the method used during the research process is discussed. The aim of this thesis is to understand some of the different roles that social media play in tourism, identifying several changes that occurred in tourism due to social media and how it has been handled. To do that the following methods were used to extract data and knowledge from different sources such as interviews and literatures. In more details, this chapter outlines the research strategy based on grounded theory to collect qualitative data in the form of interviews, observation and secondary data drawn from relevant literatures. This chapter also consists of the ethical considerations and the research limitations of the thesis.

### **3.1 Research Strategy**

The research was based on grounded theory where data collection was cyclic and reflective. Grounded theory proposes that careful observation of the social world can lead to the construction of theory (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). This process is iterative and evolving, aiming to construct new theory from collected data that accounts for those data. Grounded theory is an analytic method for constructing theories from inductive qualitative data (Charmaz & Bryant, 2010).

### **3.2 Research Method**

In order to achieve the aim of this thesis, mono method was used where a qualitative research was conducted. The main characteristic of qualitative research is that it is mostly appropriate for small samples, while its outcomes are not measurable and quantifiable. The qualitative research is context driven which also constitutes its basic difference with quantitative research, is that it offers a complete description and analysis of a research subject, without limiting the scope of the research and the nature of participant's responses (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

### **3.3 Research Approach**

The research approach that was followed for the research done in this thesis was the inductive approach. According to this approach, researchers begin with specific observations used to produce generalized theories and conclusions drawn from the research. The reason for acquiring the inductive approach was that it considers the context where the research effort is active. At the same time, it is also most appropriate for small samples that produce qualitative data. Moreover, the inductive approach to the research facilitates identifying themes and patterns in the data to analyze them further. In this thesis, data has been analyzed using themes



and patterns which will be presented in detail in later part of this section. However, there are weaknesses to any approach and one of the main weaknesses of the inductive approach is that it produces generalized theories and conclusions which are dependent on small number of observations resulting to the reliability of research being under question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The number of observations made in this thesis are very few which can reflect on the analysis of the research question.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

To conduct qualitative research primary and secondary data were used for the thesis. The empirical data gathered through interviews and observation were primary data. Whereas the results and knowledge from different bodies of literature is used as a secondary data in this thesis.

#### **3.4.1 Interviews**

The interviews conducted for this thesis were ‘semi-structured’ interviews. ‘Semi-structured’ interviews are kind of interviews that take place with few structured interview questions. There were few predetermined questions which were followed in the manner of normal conversation concerning the research topic under review. It is the combination of structured and unstructured styles of interview. This style provides the advantage of both kinds of interviews with some structured questions to dive deep into the research topic and some unstructured one to establish rapport and comfort with the participant as the conversation advances.

The request for interview were sent to 15 tourism stakeholders which comprised of tourism enthusiasts, business owners, influencers, DMOs and teachers. Only 2 of those responded to the request which were made through telephone calls and social media accounts like Instagram, Gmail, Facebook, and LinkedIn. One of the interviewees, is a travel influencer named ‘Ghumante’ and the other is Co-Founder of the FromZero Alliance (Appendix 1). The interviewees were sent a brief description of the topic that was to be discussed beforehand and the interview was conducted virtually via Zoom on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and 31<sup>st</sup> March of 2022. They were held for 30-35 minutes approximately. The interviewees were free to express their views on topics that were raised, and the conversation went smoothly. Hence, the opinions from the interviewee will be quoted as ‘Ghumante’ and ‘Co-Founder’ in the upcoming chapters of this thesis.

### **3.4.2 Participant Observation**

This method of data collection involves observing people's behavior in the environment in which it typically occurs. As an intern who worked in a Tourism Counselling Company, named Travindy as 'Content Manager' I was able to observe and gather how social media was integral to tourism company during the period of 3 months (September-December 2021). It should be noted that the nature of the internship was remote, and the work meetings were conducted through Skype and Slack. The data that is collected in this method can include notes based on their observations and interactions, documents, photographs, and other artifacts. However, for the purpose of this thesis, 'internship notes' based on observation and interaction are used as the primary data which is attached separately as additional documents. The principle behind participant observation is the possibility of important information being accessible to someone who is actively participating in the group or situation or with the ability to interpret them.

### **3.4.3 Secondary data**

The secondary data were used in the writing process of this thesis in the forms of travel journals, news articles supporting the data and different bodies of literatures. Here, the secondary data were important in establishing the existing culture of social media use in tourism. These data were further curated and analysed in the upcoming chapters.

## **3.5 Data Analysis**

In this thesis, thematic analysis was used to dissect the data which was gathered from interviews conducted online. The ability of this analysis to be adapted for using visual and written text which can provide clear comprehension to the reader like reading a magazine (Ahuvia, 2001). There are numerous approaches to conducting thematic analysis, but the most common form follows a six-step process: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. In this form, the transcription of interview recordings is required followed by coding stages. At first, the author read and re-read transcripts to identify potential themes. The themes were reviewed keeping in mind the research question which talks about social media reconfiguring tourism industry. After that the themes were defined and named. In this thematic analysis, I have transcribed the interview in (Appendix 1). The following themes were generated after the re-reading those interview excerpts, being familiar with the concepts generating codes. Codes were generated by associating words which has similar meaning together like promoting, marketing, and selling. These codes were later generated into four themes as follows:

### 3.5.1 Marketing and promotion through social media

Both interviewees talk about marketing tourism destination and locals through social media to create awareness. This was mentioned in three instances which has been presented below.

**Ghumante:** “We also promoted destination which were new and not explored enough. We also promoted local entrepreneurs on our Instagram page and blog posts.”

The promotion and marketing were not only limited to the research of the destination, but they also provided insights on how social media promoted local cultures and tradition.

**Ghumante:** “Our posts and videos are not only helpful in research but is promoting local culture and tradition...”

Social media was used to talk and discuss the tourism products.

**Co-Founder:** “We invite them and talk about the tourism topics and even promote local tourism products.”

The authenticity of the content on social media also plays a huge role in destination promotion as stated by one of the interviewees.

**Co-Founder:** “In Slovenia, they hired young Tiktokers to promote a destination, a mountain destination which was good and spontaneous promotion for that destination. That is the shift that we are seeing now, it’s not only the content that are produced by DMOs that matters now but also from the locals which are spontaneous and authentic and not something that are manufactured and prepared in advance.”

### 3.5.2 Social media at the time of crisis-pandemic

At three instances, social media was talked as being helpful at the time of pandemic where everything was shut down. This theme was recurring during the process of interview while the conversation was about current use of social media in tourism.

**Ghumante:** “When people were locked inside their home due to pandemic, many of our audience said that they felt like they were travelling by watching our videos (Virtual Tourism).”

**Ghumante:** “The mainstream destination reached out to us for their promotion, and I would say people were more aware about the importance of destination...”

**Co-Founder:** “...Our platform is like a discussion ground for what can be done in tourism industry to avoid the impacts of the pandemic.”

### 3.5.3 Responsibility

The participants also emphasized on the responsibility that social media holds in the tourism industry while promoting and sharing their contents.

**Ghuamnte:** “The basic principle of travelling for us as a group is to aware people about travel etiquettes... We teach the travellers to travel responsibly and through our post we try and raise awareness about the way to travel.”

**Co-Founder:** “As a company or a business, we have the power to educate and influence the travellers to visit a destination and can also teach how to visit it and how not to. There is no one correct way to do that, but it is important to be responsible on how you deliver the message.”

#### 3.5.4 Social Media and mass tourism

The interviewees talked about how social media promotion leads to overcrowding of tourists and people in certain destination. This was explored with an example and opinion from both interviewees.

**Ghumante:** “The case of Betane, Biratnagar is another where people flooded to the Chamomile fields to make TikTok videos and ravaged the fields. People have become insensitive towards the local people in that way.”

**Co-Founder:** “There must be strategies and measures to manage the overcrowding in that destination if it gets to that. Because once a destination is promoted in a good way, it is inevitable- the tourist inflow. And sadly, the destination who are actively promoting are not planning further ahead in this case and are overwhelmed when the tourists arrive in large number.”

These were the themes that were the result of thematic analysis of the interviewees that were conducted. From these data I was able to get insight in the tourism industry where the interviewees were working actively. There are lots of different views that have been expressed in these interviews which co-relate to literatures in many ways which will be discussed later in this thesis. It added nuances to the thesis which provided an insight which was surprising for me as an interviewer. The elements of surprise were the use of social media in tourism as a catalyst for change in the tourism industry. Views and opinions shared by both interviewees were driven by the desire to change tourism for better and helping the tourists and travellers leave behind a positive footprint. Adding to that, they also emphasized that the relation between social media and tourism was integral. These data successfully portray how the tourism industry have been doing in the present situation with the influence of social media and what are the changes that have been seen. However, there were many challenges during the writing of this thesis. The key limitation for this thesis is the lack of data. Only two interviewees were conducted successfully at the time of writing this thesis which limited the scope of the study.

The themes generated from few more interviews would have enhanced the reliability of the research.

Lastly, the themes generated from the analysis of the data will provide a structure to the analysis section which will be presenting all the information from observation and the bodies of literatures. These themes will be further explored, analysed, and discussed in the next chapter to answer the research question.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

To answer the research question, the analysis will be divided into two parts with its answers to respective sub question. The analysis will show how the tourism industry has been reconfigured due to use of social media in tourism. The first part in this chapter will analyse the current common practices in tourism with social media which will highlight how suppliers and consumers use social media. The first part will heavily rely on the secondary data that were derived from literatures. Whereas the second part will focus on the supplier's point of view on how use of social media has changed the tourism industry and how are they adopting to the changes that have occurred. This will be done with the help of the data obtained primary data as interviews and secondary data as literatures.

### First Sub-question

4.1 What are the existing common practices in tourism with the use of social media?

As a convenient alternative to connect and share with the masses at an unprecedented level, social media use has been growing rapidly. Individuals, corporations, and public figures also use social media in different ways. In the present decade, it is almost difficult to think about a future without social networks. In this part of the thesis, we will be looking at existing common practices of social media in tourism. To do this, I will be looking at different studies which have illustrated the roles of social media backed by information obtained from interviews with tourism agents. In this part of the thesis, we will be looking at the common practices in tourism through suppliers' and consumers' perspective. The way in which both the parties are using social media to carry out their responsibilities in tourism industry currently is the focus of this part of the analysis which will be connected in the later parts of the analysis. The analysis will not only discuss the positive aspects of social media usage in the tourism industry but the current malpractice and its implication that can have in the industry in the future.

**Table 1: Common Practices in Tourism Industry**

Supplier's Perspective	Consumer's Perspective
Promotion and Marketing (EWOM)	Destination Discovery
Customer Service Human Resource Management	Sharing experience and connecting with others
Research and collaboration	Awareness through social media
Crisis Management and Innovation	Social Media Activism

*Table 1 Common Practices in Tourism Industry*

As seen in the Table 1 there are many ways the suppliers and consumers of tourism industry are using social media in the current situation. The analysis in the following section will discuss how all the stakeholders are using social media in the present situation and how has it been aid to tourism industry. Not only that the use of social media has also led to the suppliers losing its control over brand, the impact of social media algorithms on the tourism industry has also been highlighted which is one of the causes in overcrowding of destination.

#### **4.1.1 Supplier's Perspective**

In this part we will explore how different suppliers in tourism industry are working with social media in the current situation. Tourism suppliers are those who provides tourism service to the tourist in their destination let that be tourism business holders, DMOs, tourism counsellors, tourist guides and even government. Upon findings of collected data and research following were some of the social media usages in tourism industry.

#### **Promoting and Marketing (EWOM)**

“Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that contribute towards building of ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan, 2015).” Marketing via Social Media is trendy method market communication using different tools of Social Media; Facebook, Instagram LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs. YouTube, TikTok social bookmarking, forums, group on etc. (Stelzner, 2011) . Other type of tools include; email marking, search engine optimisation, event marketing, press releases, online adds google ad word, direct mail, print display ads, sponsorships, webinars and other ads. There are many tools or platforms of social media marketing (Ernestad V., 2010) these days which has enabled the information to flow virtually. Social media enable electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM), which is different from traditional word-of-mouth in that it is asynchronous, many-to-many and not limited to one's personal social circle (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008).

Various agents of tourism like DMOs, tour operators, tourism related companies and other stakeholders of tourism use social media to promote, market and spread the knowledge of the destination and tourism products effectively through EWOM. As an intern of a tourism related company, we worked with clients and customers in promoting and marketing out products through social media. We used various platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube to share our products which were related to tourism counselling. As a company who were dependent on social media for promotion of products, the platforms were effective and cheap way of marketing.

The study (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier 2009) recommends that User Generated Content (UGC) has increasingly shaped how destination is visible on social media. An examples of use of UGC in destination marketing can be seen in a campaign which was organized by Visit Florida, FloridaState's official tourism marketing corporation called-Sunshine Moments<sup>ll</sup> that was launched in 2011. The campaign wanted to reach families through digitaladvertising on Facebook, AOL, Yahoo, and other Social Media tools. This Facebook campaign targeted families in 16 of Florida's key drive markets. Participants were to upload their favourite Florida vacation images to Visit Florida's Facebook page. The followers in that page then could vote for their favourite photo and select one grand prize winner. The winner would receive a Florida vacation, a Mazda CX-7 and aKodak PlayTouch video camera. The campaign showed a 10-point increase in the intent to visit Florida and a significantly improved opinion among the state's key demographic of 25-34 year olds. The \$1.1 million, five-week Social Mediadriven campaign resulted in more than 279 million Facebook Ad impressions, and 18,481 people submitted photos in the sweepstakes (Aboutourism, 2012). During the competition period, the Facebook page of Visit Florida received 162,237 new likes; the page reached nearly 50million users, and 51,086 unique competition.

Apart from promotion of destination and tourism product, the social media has also promoted the local culture and traditions in a destination. The tourism suppliers have been able to market and promote the authentic experience of a local destination and its culture through social media influencers. As said by Ghumante, "Our posts and videos are not only helpful in research but is promoting local culture and tradition. When we post about a destination, the people who watch our videos or sees at our posts can identify the cultures that are unique to them like 'Shaman' culture and tourist visit that destination just to see that."

However, UGC has also led to the tourism suppliers let that be DMOs, tour operators, tourism related businesses lose control over their brand because of the active participation of tourists on these platforms. The UGC has played an important role in establishing the must-visit and iconic destination as they are available on the internet through social media (Månsson, 2011). The electronic word of mouth is noisy and full of consumer biases which can easily hamper the reputation of the tourism suppliers.

### **Customer Service and Human resource management**

Social media plays an increasingly important role in many aspects of tourism, exclusively while searching information, making the decision, and promoting tourism focusing on the best applications to engage with customers through the platforms of social media (Sahoo & B.G,



2017). Another arena where travel brands are feeling the impact of social media is the customer service. Many travel brands now have a social media presence, which is often leveraged to deliver customer support. According to Twitter, there has been a 59% increase in tweets aimed at brands in travel, transportation, and hospitality industry (Paquette, n.d.) between March 2013 and February 2015. A full 53% of users expect a brand to respond to their tweet within an hour, and this figure rises to 72% if the tweet is a complaint. Social media further allow tourism operators and destinations to provide customer service in new ways and at new levels, with most businesses now monitoring social media in order to identify problems and mitigate complaints (Sparks & Bradley, 2014) as the statistics from the Twitter also depicted. In addition to that, social media further explores customer and supplier relation by offering the opportunity to engage with both the existing and potential customers. This relationship is mostly beyond transactional interactions which gives permission to form a new way of customer relationship management.

(Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom 2015) show that successful engagement with customers via social media has significant consequences for a company's reputation. Successful engagement is also seen as instrumental for offering co-creation opportunities (Chathoth et al., 2016). The ultimate goal of customer relationship management on social media is to cultivate involved consumers who not only like and share contents but also who creates them. This enables the companies to not only have their own social media presence but have the customer portray the company in a favorable manner. Due to the importance of EWOM, successfully driving customer engagement has become a significant concern for tourism providers and destinations (So et al., 2016; Ge & Gretzel, 2017). As the review and ratings of the customers are visible in different social media, the business owners and DMOs must be cautious in portraying the image of the destinations and products.

Social media usage in tourism is not only limited to customer and client services. Only a few studies discuss social media use in this context (e.g. Madera, 2012; Ladkin & Buhalis, 2016). Gibbs, MacDonald and MacKay (2015) specifically address the significance of social media for recruiting, hiring and communicating with employees in hospitality and tourism firms. As a tourism company intern working remotely, I can draw from my experience the fact that I was hired through social media channels and communication were maintained in those channels.

## **Research and collaboration**

UGC on social media is increasingly being considered as a new source of information for market research, as well as internal and external environmental analyses. Noone et al. (2011) suggested that reviewing UGC on social media may derive a better understanding of the characteristics of consumers who use specific social media applications. The information might be used to guide the development of target advertising and a promotional message for specific social media applications. Moreover, the information will help hotels better assess the revenue opportunity that various social media applications provide.

In the business services field, as solving business problems often requires collaboration and communication among people, social media can help businesses communicate and gather customer input on future strategies and products (Jonassen, Howland, Moore, & Marra, 2003). My Starbucks is an example where Starbucks customers are able to suggest their ideas for new products or store features. By communicating with customers through different social media applications, the destinations or companies could gain insights relating to their competitive advantage and customer preferences (Huang, Yung, & Yang, 2011). This conversation may generate clues for marketers to research and customize new products or services to satisfy customers' needs. However, social media research requires a different way of thinking about data (Quan-Haase & Sloan, 2017) as data is widely available but also incredibly noisy. (Xiang et al. 2017) demonstrate that data reliability is a significant issue that needs to be further explored which emphasizes on the use of social media data to validate the quality of the destination or tourism product to be questionable.

The use of social media is not only seen in the product research and collaboration related to the above-mentioned instances. The destination has actively collaborated with locals to provide the consumers with the authentic and non-biased information. As said by the Co-Founder, "In Slovenia, they hired young Tiktokers to promote a destination, a mountain destination which was good and spontaneous promotion for that destination." The collaboration between different parties have been possible due to the use of social media.

## **Crisis Management and Innovation**

During the pandemic, tourism industry had to endure the biggest hit of all industries in the world. However, in response to this crisis, there were new strategies that develop to revive the tourism with collaboration. 'TourismFromZero' was one of those start-ups which was established as a platform to share knowledge about how tourism can be revived and work

together with different stakeholders in the community. According to the Co-Founder, “Our questionnaires were developed in such way that anyone could answer and help tourism to grow from zero after pandemic. This way the tourism stakeholders who were unaware of what to do next were able to find answers to their problem. Our platform is like a discussion ground for what can be done in tourism industry to avoid the impacts of the pandemic.”

It was done through social media channels like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. This is one of the examples which pertains to company’s ability to effectively use social media to spread public relations messages aimed at preventing or managing a crisis (Sigala, 2011). Hvass (2014) and Schroeder et al. (2013) suggest that travelers are likely to turn to social media during a crisis because of their prominent use of smartphones during travel.

While the tourism industry was juggling through the difficult times during pandemic, there were also new scopes that were introduced. The concept of virtual tourism came into light even though it was an old concept. Virtual tourism being aid to the tourism industry was studied and have shown to have great potential(Lu & Xu, 2020.). This study showed that virtual tourism had promising future, and this will not only reduce carbon footprint but will possibly solve many problems in the tourism industry. Social media has been a driving force in this phenomenon where Ghumante said, “When people were locked inside their home due to pandemic, many of our audience said that they felt like they were travelling by watching our videos (Virtual Tourism).”

#### **4.1.2 Consumer’s Perspective**

This part of the analysis will look at the consumers perspective in tourism industry. The different way a consumer uses the social media to discover destination, inform and share the knowledge of the destination and local culture online are some of the topics that is dealt in this section.

##### **Destination Discovery**

The way one research about their next holiday has undergone significant changes in the digital age. Sites such as TripAdvisor along with social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, are now the most popular mediums for travel-related research. TripAdvisor revolutionised online travel research and has been the driving force behind the rise of online travel reviews which allow users to research a destination, hotel, resorts, and other travel related services before they book. It has become common amongst the younger generation to conduct the travel related research through the social media platforms.

This shows that the value of immediate and trustworthy opinion from other customers in the decision-making process of a traveller. The use of social media and travel sites to look for destination online has therefore become the most popular way of researching and discovering the destination.

The recent phenomenon known as the Instagram effect which has an out-sized impact on travel plans of millennials. This has also been seen as several studies have discovered how important the medium is in making travel decisions. According to a recent study (#travelinspo, 2022.), 30% to 40% of travellers under the age of 30, make their travel plans based on how Instagram-able the potential destination is. Potential customers discover destinations and make their travel plans based on the fact if they can later share their travel pictures, videos, and other graphic content on their Instagram profiles or other social media networks. Hence, social media has been proven to be one of the primary mediums to discover destinations.

For example, The Canada Tourism Commission launched a website and application for iPhone or Android Smartphones, 'Explore Canada like a Local' in 2011. The campaign was organized with the aim to enhance the Canadian experience by sharing local experience and insider information which is authentic. This campaign enabled the visitors to plan their journey online and the application served them through comprehensive guide during their trip using social media channels. As a result, the travellers started sharing travel contents like travelling tips, photos, videos, and new destination and venues which were not featured anywhere. This goes on to show how social media campaigns can help in the discovery of new destination which are not explored enough to new travellers.

### **Sharing experience and connecting with others**

The studies go on to show knowledge sharing engages members of a society in different activities including sharing experiences, skills, knowledge, and interests (Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002). Today, websites containing travellers' feedback and comments are becoming popular. Hence, many researchers have considered the significant role of such websites in the travel planning process (Huang, 2012; Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011). Through social media, travellers share their experience, but knowledge and observations of their trip (Ana Maria Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). The study has also shown that when posting their travel-related content users also derive lots of pleasure. When the users post on social media to help others or to share their experience with their followers or loved ones, users gain enjoyment from posting about their experience (Gretzel et al., 2011). Kim and Fesenmaier (2017)

demonstrate that such sharing not only entertains but also leads to more positive evaluations of the past travel experience and therefore fulfils an important psychological function. This also helps in the positive branding of the destination which can influence other consumers.

Social media facilitate new forms of sociality (Munar, Gyimóthy & Cai, 2013). First, it is possible to stay connected with family and friends because of social media (White & White, 2007). Second, social media also allow one to symbolically take others with when traveling by documenting the trip in real-time and engaging in conversations with others, which serves entertainment as well as social and safety purposes. Geolocation is a feature that plays an important role in this feeling of safety because it allows one to see if anyone else is nearby. For example, Lean and Condie (2016) explain the role of the social media app Tinder in facilitating what they call “Tinder tourism”. The geolocation helps to find the people who are travelling and the use of social media to meet up/hook up with others while traveling helps the tourism industry. It further goes on to challenges the boundaries between online and offline tourism experiences. Similarly, Luo, Huang and Brown (2015) illustrated how instrumental social media are to the phenomenon of “donkey friends” in China which has to do more with Chinese backpacking community and the social media facilitating those trends.

Sharing knowledge and experience about a destination in social media by the tourism has also led to the overcrowding in that destination. As discussed previously the Instagram effect where tourists want to go to places where they can create iconic photos and videos. This phenomenon has also led to many instances of local damage. Like in a case where Ghumante said, “The case of Betane, Biratnagar is another where people flooded to the Chamomile fields to make TikTok videos and ravaged the fields. People have become insensitive towards the local people in that way.”

### **Awareness through social media**

Social media in tourism is not only responsible for sharing, entertaining and discovering destinations. There are different kinds of information in social media and the consumers can use the platform to learn and educate themselves through social media as Ghumante said, “The basic principle of travelling for us as a group is to aware people about travel etiquettes. It is believed that wherever Nepali tourist travels, there is pollution and noise, and we want to change that. We teach the travellers to travel responsibly and through our post we try and raise awareness about the way to travel.”

By following these kinds of influencers in social media, consumers not only can learn about the destination but are also able to educate themselves on the way to travel and help locals in the process. With the help of social media, the consumers are not only able to learn but are also able to contribute their knowledge to the suppliers and locals. As an intern working in the tourism counselling company, I have experienced the power of learning through social media where consumers are actively involved. We used to create different questionnaires and Instagram posts to understand the current demand in the tourism industry. For example, if we were working for a client to create a compendium of “100 green practices” we would ask our audience to share with us any of their green practices. In this way, the consumers also helped aware the suppliers about different topics through social media.

Like this, ‘FromZero Alliance’ also worked with the same principle of everyone contributing to uplift the tourism industry from zero during pandemic. Everyone from suppliers to consumers were able to share their ideas in this platform. Co-Founder said, “Our questionnaires were developed in such way that anyone could answer and help tourism to grow from zero after pandemic. This way the tourism stakeholders who were unaware of what to do next were able to find answers to their problem.”

### **Social Media Activism**

As smart phones make it easier to capture and record videos of misconduct, social-media based whistleblowing has become common as it exposes problematic or even illegal practices by tourism and hospitality businesses and share them immediately with others online (CNBC, 2017). For example, consumer activism on social media called the “United breaks guitars” was a prominent one where the mishandling of luggage by United Airlines resulted on the damage to a customer’s property (Carroll, 2012). Another more recent incident of a United Airlines customer posting a video on Twitter showing him being dragged off a plane (New York Times, 2017). Another case as such is the anti-tourism movements with the use of #boycott in combination with destinations like Hawaii and Arizona to mobilize consumers against travel to these states (Destinations International, 2017).

This goes on to show social media is more than a platform for content sharing for consumers in tourism. The social media has helped consumers in voicing their criticisms and bringing the required change from the tourism suppliers. There is increasing reliance of tourism providers and destination on their reputation online (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2011). In this situation it is critical for them to avoid or effectively manage it and not only understand what drives social

media activism. This ability of social media to expose has enabled the consumer to voice their opinions efficiently when the traditional media is expensive and not reachable.

Hence, these are some of the ways that the social medias are being used currently in tourism industries. Tourism agents are using effective and cheapest way of promoting and marketing the destinations and their products through social media. They are also being used as a platform to communicate with customers, clients and staffs by the tourism businesses and stakeholders. The social media campaign has been helping the customer to discover new places and share their knowledge with others. These platforms have helped the people to come together and work as a team together by sharing their knowledge, information, and goals. Building on this I will advance to the second sub question in the next part of this analysis.

### **Second Sub-question**

4.2 How are the tourism agents adapting to changes that have occurred in tourism due to social media?

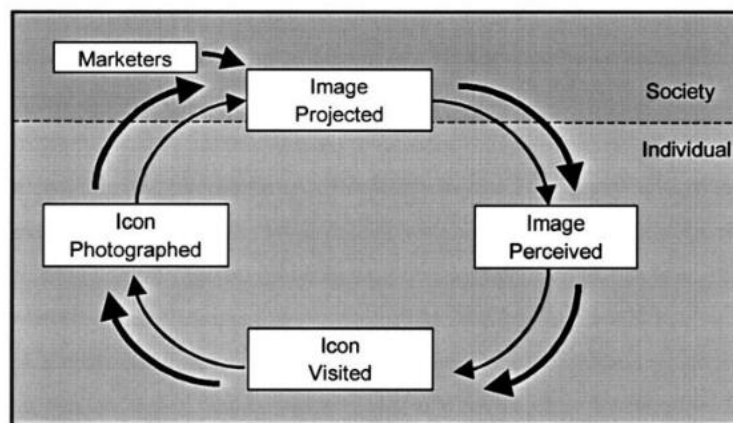
As discussed in the above section of this chapter there are various ways social media has been used by suppliers and consumers in tourism industry. This part of the analysis will be focussed on the supplier's perspective where the data derived from two interviews and secondary data from literature will be analysed. This part of the analysis will portray the changes that have occurred in tourism due to social media influence and the ways the suppliers are coping with the change. These changes have occurred due to information asymmetries as the consumers are able to get more information about a destination and tourism products through various platforms. Consumer domination and fierce competition in the virtual environment makes it compulsory to take more strategic decisions on product presentation, pricing policies, publicity decisions and place elements (Meydan & Bayram, 2013). Similarly, in the tourism industry the social media influence has made the DMOs and tourism related business to adopt to the changes by taking strategic decisions regarding destination, tourism products and services.

Firstly, the analysis will be looking at the changes that have occurred in the tourism industry because of change in the preference of consumers. As supported by the data derived from the interviews the changes are seen in the video content they consume and the places they visit. Finally, the measures taken by the tourism agents to cope with these changes will be presented in the second part of the analysis.

### 4.2.1 The Circle of Representation

The use of social media also changes how tourists take photographs and videos, and how they frame their visuals (Dinhopland Gretzel, 2016). Tourism advertisements, travel guides, and popular media have traditionally influenced what tourists depict in their photographs. Social media has shifted this so-called circle of representation (Jenkins, 2003) since tourists are now active participants in establishing what iconic, must-see destinations are by sharing their photographs publicly on social media platforms (Månsson, 2011). This has led to building and rebuilding a destination image at times. As discussed earlier, the discovery of a new destination through these images and visuals have shown the positive impacts of social media in tourism. However, this has also led to destination marketers increasingly losing control over their brands (Gretzel, 2006).

**Figure 1: The Circle of Representation**



*Figure 1 The Circle of Representation*

Adding to that, the change that has been seen in the tourism industry is regarding this circle of representation where images were projected which has shifted to videos. Now, the users have shifted to video form where they are projected and perceived by both consumers and suppliers through social media and then the tourism destination or products are engaged and recorded. This has been seen by the tourism agents through a social media platform called TikTok where 15 seconds video of a destination goes viral resulting in mass tourism in that destination ([source](#)).

### **Consumer's Preference for Video Content-TikTok**

Consumers look for increasingly real information that shows other people's experiences at tourist destinations (Hyun et al. 2009). They consume UGC to get information and organize their trip, and this sharing of the experiences of others influences their own tourism experience (Lim et al. 2012) and their tourism-related decisions. Hence, it is very important for suppliers



to keep up with the changing tourist behaviours which is entirely based on the types of content they consume through social media. From the interview by Co-Founder the important change that was seen in the tourism industry was the consumption of video content by the tourists. He said, “Everything is going more into video, especially short video like TikTok. Those destination which started doing TikTok videos and Instagram Reels, they started getting boost and recognition.” Videos allow travelling mentally and emotionally without moving (Jansson 2002). The advancement of technology with the emerging and evolving high-definition cameras in smartphones and easy editing programs it has facilitated the users to create tourist videos in social media which are inspirational. Similarly, contemporary tourists are also using social media application like TikTok which is a highly popular application (Feldkamp, 2021) to create and share videos. This has been used more and more during the trip, on-site experiences and feedback stages, these tools are increasingly guiding consumer behaviour in the travel industry and shaping tourists’ perceptions, feelings, and experiences (Leung et al., 2013, Luo & Zhong, 2015 & Pop et al., 2021).

However, the videos generated by destinations, DMOs and tourism businesses are not only the content that has influence on the consumers, but they prefer the authentic representation of the place and culture through local perspective. In the above motioned context, Co-Founder added, “That is the shift that we are seeing now, it’s not only the content that are produced by DMOs that matters now but also from the locals which are spontaneous and authentic and not something that are manufactured and prepared in advance.”

Social media has become an essential marketing strategy for tourism promotion (Chu et al., 2020), and undoubtedly TikTok serendipity promotes destinations. Despite the considerable body of research focusing on social media and destination marketing, there is still a need to explore the impromptu influence of TikTok on the popularity of a destination. There has been seen a lack of understanding in tourist destination providers their knowledge, and readiness to receive a sudden influx of visitors. This creates issue in the destination on how to provide sufficient infrastructure for these high numbers of tourists and how to cope with that. Similarly, this can also impact locals because of the high number of tourists trying to create such videos like they have seen in these app. As Ghumante said, “The case of Betane, Biratnagar is another where people flooded to the Chamomile fields to make Tiktok videos and ravaged the fields. People have become insensitive towards the local people in that way.”

This is an example of the persuasive power of social media technologies that encourages users to post, and travel experiences lend themselves perfectly to the purpose of producing and

posting lots of shareworthy content, especially on visual platforms like Instagram and location-based applications like Foursquare and Snapchat (Gretzel, 2019). Meaning social media are networks of desire that fuel the creation and consumption of content (Kozinets et al., 2016), where travel-related contents are particularly viewed to be attractive. Social media not only heighten motivations to travel, but they also foster travel to specific destinations and influence behaviours at destinations (Gretzel, 2019). As we can see in the above example, the chamomile field in Betane was a specific destination that got many tourists flooding in because of the viral videos that the other users were creating. The study by (Gretzel, 2019) further goes on to say that social media use is not the only, and likely not the most important, reason for mass tourism. But it certainly contributes to the behaviours that lead to crowding as it perpetuates images that influence others to travel to certain places. It further adds to the way a tourist behaves at the place. Again, coming back to the same example of chamomile field, people were making videos in the fields, they were destroying the field for their selfish purpose which was entirely the result of what the people had seen in the TikTok videos.

#### **4.2.2 Tourism agents adopting to the change**

There are many ways in which tourism agents have been adopting to these changes as brought by tourism industry. In a study (Lim et al. 2012) advised DMOs to monitor the videos generated by tourists and use UGC to develop good brand and image management. DMOs should create resources in experience design and site management to help tourists to share nice videos as suggested by (Dinhopl and Gretzel 2016). Not only DMOs but travel marketers and business owners have recognised the great potential of message amplification and targeting afforded by travel social media influencers (Gretzel, 2017). The factors that positively affect followers' trust is the informative value of influencer-generated content, influencer's trustworthiness, attractiveness, and similarity to the followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Some DMOs are asking influencers and TikTok creators to create these videos for them. As said by Co-Founder, "In Slovenia, they hired young TikTok creators to promote a destination, a mountain destination which was good and spontaneous promotion for that destination." And that, in turn, can have an impact on the type of tourists that visit the destination with high number of tourists usually resulting to mass tourism. The study done by (Wengel et al., 2022) on TikTok effect destination development proposes a rapid response plan framework for mass tourism due to TikTok. This study also paves the way for future 'TikTok effect' studies in tourism and hospitality management.

Working as an intern in the company, we were assigned to come out with strategies to reach to as many customers as possible. We as a team worked on creation of a short video in Instagram known as “Reels” because we found these short forms of video were getting more engagement than photos and posts in Instagram. We also went on to create a TikTok account when we saw good results from the Reels we posted. This goes on to show that as a company, tourism agents can meet the consumer’s demand by providing them with short and engaging video content online.

From the above analysis we can see that in one hand social media has been an aid to tourism industry. In the other hand it has also led to different issues in terms of tourism consumption. However, there is no denying that social media in tourism has changed the whole system of tourism industry. It has done so by giving the power of knowledge to consumers through different social media platform. Earlier the tourism marketers used to use traditional media to promote their business whereas social media has helped them in promoting, marketing, and branding the destination and tourism products. Not only that social media has enabled consumer-supplier relation to be more intimate than ever through social media interactions. Use of social media has entirely changed how one travels, now tourists are more aware and knowledgeable because of the information that is available to them. Consumers can connect and share through social media which has helped the tourists in their travel journey from planning their trip to returning from the trip. There has been significant change in the consumption of travel related content as the analysis showed the tourists are more interested in short form video. This has also created curiosity and interest in the destination which has become an effective way to attract tourists in the destination. This curiosity and intent of sharing their photos and videos in the destination has led to tourist overflow. To manage the change and the increasing influence of social media tourism agents must adopt and improvise along the way.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The research has shown the significance of social media and its impacts that continue to change travel behaviours and experiences as well as tourism businesses, destinations and their offerings and strategies (Leung et al., 2013). The literatures that were reviewed in this thesis suggests that there is a growing body of research that informs our understanding of social media in tourism but also point out shortcomings in terms of underused methodologies, neglected research areas and lack of systematic approaches (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Sotiriadis, 2017; Lu, Chen & Law, 2017). There are many complexities to the dynamics of social media. This thesis describes those complexities with the help of refined conceptualizations of social media, their users in the tourism industry and the context in which they use these social media. This chapter will give clarity to the importance of a comprehensive and updated knowledge of social media for theoretical understanding of contemporary tourism which is pertinent to the success of the tourism industry.

The rate of development of consumers' online behaviour is fast. They are partaking in variety of activities ranging from consumption of content to participating in discussions, from sharing knowledge with other consumers to the contribution of that information to influencing other consumers' activities. This active consumer behaviour is changing the media and marketing landscape as consumers are invading companies' marketing sphere (Berthon et al., 2008). The use of social media in tourism industry has been discussed excessively in this thesis where suppliers and consumers are concerned. The previous chapter portrayed the changing tourism preference for short videos let that be in the marketing of the tourism products and destinations or in the consumption of those content by the consumers. As mentioned by the tourism agents, the form of content and the platform in which they are posted also plays vital role in how consumers are using social media. Even though there are numerous studies on how important social media to the tourism industry is and how it might have impacted the industry. There are very limited studies regarding the platforms and their algorithms.

An algorithm is a set of mathematical rules for describing how a group of data behaves. Algorithms aid in the ranking of search and advertisement results in social media. Facebook, for instance, uses an algorithm to display content and pages in a specific order. About 45% of the world's population uses social media, making up approximately 4.5 billion internet users as of October 2021(O'Brien, 2022). Monitoring and managing that is a huge undertaking. A user's feed is sorted using algorithms on social media and with this mass of content available, algorithms is a way by which the platforms prioritize the content that they think the users will

like based on several factors. In addition to that function algorithm also is responsible for filtering out irrelevant content or content that is not of high quality. As a result, it deprives the users of the content that might be relevant to them, but the algorithms deem it irrelevant because it did not fit the criteria. An analysis of YouTube found that videos got millions of views even though they were not relevant to the user but were chosen by the algorithm. These social media algorithms are built to feed the users with the information and knowledge that they think is relevant for the users. Let that be a video sharing platform like TikTok they are recommendation system that determines which video will appear keeping the users hooked into their application, if possible, for as long as they can.

There can also be further studies regarding datafication and use of social media data in research. Social media research requires a different way of thinking about data (Quan-Haase & Sloan, 2017) as data is widely available but also incredibly noisy. The reviews and comments seen in the social media platforms are not reliable for research purpose as those depend on the human emotion and their state of mind. As demonstrated by (Xiang et al. 2017) data reliability is a significant issue that needs to be further explored and they cannot be used to validate the travel experience of a tourist. (Xiang et al., 2018) revealed a severe problem in the reliability of online review data from even a highly reputable website like TripAdvisor which has the possibility to yield unreliable results and thus potentially invalid conclusions.

The research that has been carried out regarding the various roles of social media in tourism industry has been limited to the traveller's behaviour. There are plenty of knowledge on this aspect of tourism where consumer behaviour from different destination is analyzed by different scholars in the process. Further studies can look more into one of the most important aspects of tourism industry is the tourism business holder. Even though this thesis attempted to recognize and identify the changes in the tourism industry through supplier's point of view. There is a need of the study that can suggest and recommend the tourism business holder to navigate through the changes that is happening all over. The consumer behaviour has constantly changed throughout the history, and it will continue to change. With the rise in technological innovation, the change is inevitable and there is the risk of suppliers losing their power to influence and direct customers to their destination and products. This will not only impact the suppliers, but consumers will also be robbed off from the possibility to discover potential new destinations and the quality tourism products.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The main objective of this thesis was to identify the several roles of social media in tourism and how has it reconfigured tourism industry. Through the entire process of writing, reviewing literatures, finding data to analyse, and discussing the topics this thesis can successfully portray how social media is of huge importance to both suppliers and consumers of tourism. The tourism has constantly been changing and social media has played an integral part on how a tourist behaves and travels. Social media has not only influenced motivations to travel to a certain destination for a traveller, but it influences one's behaviour at that destination.

Tourism related businesses have been using social media as a marketing and communicating tool. However, this thesis has highlighted some of the other ways that social media is being used such as in the hiring, recruiting, and communicating process. Social media has been part of everybody's lives and particularly tourism as it is a visual medium. Because of its features of being able to portray and present the destination in a visually attractive manner, social media has been more than efficient way to market and promote destination.

As discussed in the above chapters, the use of social media not only facilitate users but sometimes creates challenges for them. Suppliers are increasingly losing control on their tourism brands and how it is portrayed online because of the information asymmetries and the persuasive power of these media. In one hand, it has become a platform to learn and discover destination and tourism product through reviews and posts that other share (UGC) in these social media platforms, it is equally unreliable to trust them. The reviews are based on the current sentiments and perspective of a traveller or a consumer which can differ for another consumer. The experiences shared through these social media are purely based on their point of view which is subjective and not reliable at times. They are also portrayed in a way which encourages the other travellers and tourist to visit that place which leads to mass tourism.

Whereas, apart from the human emotions clouding the judgement of a destination, the social media algorithms also play an important role. The way the search engines and these platforms works are completely based on the programs that is designed to influence and direct consumers to use the application and stay using it. This unsystematic system of promoting whatever that keeps the users engaged, have prevented tourists and travellers from experiencing new and unexplored places. In the bright side the tourism agents are adopting to these changes by using social media influencers to organize campaigns and promote destinations.

## Reference

Buhali, D., & Law, R. (2008). Progress in Information Technology and Tourism Management: 20 Years on and 10 Years After the Internet

The State of eTourism Research. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 609-623.  
doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2008.01.005

Carroll, D. (2012). *United breaks guitars*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc. Destinations International (2017). The Weaponization of Travel.

Accessed online (April 1, 2022) at:

[https://destinationsinternational.org/sites/default/master/files/Destinations\\_International\\_Weaponization\\_of\\_Travel.pdf](https://destinationsinternational.org/sites/default/master/files/Destinations_International_Weaponization_of_Travel.pdf).

Chan, N. L., & Guillet, B. D. (2011). Investigation of Social Media Marketing: How Does the Hotel Industry in Hong Kong Perform in Marketing on Social Media Websites?

*Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 28(4), 345-368.  
doi:10.1080/10548408.2011.571571

Chang, Y.-C., Ku, C.-H., & Chen, C.-H. (2019). Social media analytics: Extracting and visualizing Hilton hotel ratings and reviews from TripAdvisor.

*International Journal of Information Management*, 48, 263-279.  
doi:10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2017.11.00

Charmaz, K., & Bryant, A. (2010). Grounded Theory. In P. Peterson, E. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education (Third Edition)* (pp. 406–412).

Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.01581-5>

Chen, C., Zhang, D., Guo, B., Ma, X., Pan, G., & Wu, Z. (2016). TripPlanner: Personalized trip planning leveraging heterogeneous crowdsourced digital footprints.

*IEEE Transactions on Intelligent Transportation Systems*, 16(3), 1259-1273

Ernestad V., H. R. (2010). *Social media marketing from a bottom-up perspective - the social media transition*.

Retrieved March 28, 2022 from [http:// www.carphonewarehouse.com](http://www.carphonewarehouse.com)

Generation Z. (2022). In *Wikipedia*.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Generation\\_Z&oldid=1080824285](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Generation_Z&oldid=1080824285)

Gretzel, U. & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2012). Customer Relations 2.0 – Implications for Destination Marketing (Abstract). TTRA Annual International

Conference, June 17-19, 2012. Virginia Beach, VA. Accessed online (April 1, 2022) at: <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1755&context=ttra>

- Gretzel, U. (2019). 5. The role of social media in creating and addressing overtourism. In *Overtourism* (pp. 62–75). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110607369-005>
- Kaplan, A. M. (2015). Social Media, the Digital Revolution, and the Business of Media. *International Journal on Media Management*, 17(4), 197–199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14241277.2015.1120014>
- Kurashima, T., Iwata, T., Irie, G., & Fujimura, K. (2010). Travel route recommendation using geotags in photo sharing sites. CIKM '10: Proceedings of the 19th ACM international conference on Information and knowledge management (pp. 579–588). New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery.
- Leisure travel: Planning methods U.S. 2019. (2019.). Statista. Retrieved 6 April 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/185454/technology-used-to-plan-leisure-travel-in-the-us-2011/>
- Litvin, S., Goldsmith, R. E., & Pan, B. (2008). Electronic Word-of-Mouth in Hospitality and Tourism Management. *Tourism Management*, 29(3), 458-468. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2007.05.011
- Lu, J., & Xu, Z. (2020). *Can virtual tourism aid in the recovery of tourism industry in the COVID-19 pandemic?* 7.
- Paquette, H. (2021). *Social Media as a Marketing Tool: A Literature Review*. 27.
- Seegerberg, A., & Bennett, W. L. (2011). Social media and the organization of collective action: Using Twitter to explore the ecologies of two climate change protests. *The Communication Review*, 14(3), 197-215.
- Song, S.J., Yoo, M. (2016) ‘The Role of Social Media during the Pre-purchasing Stage’, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology* 7(1): 84–99.
- The Independent (2017). Anti-tourism attacks in Spain: Who is behind them and what do they want? Accessed online (March 11, 2022) at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/spain-attacks-anti-tourism-british-tourists-visit-barcelona-majorca-valencia-san-sebastian-a7886371.html>.
- Tussyadiah, I. P., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2009). Mediating tourist experiences: Access to places via shared videos. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 36(1), 24-40.
- Tussyadiah, I., Park, S., & Fesenmaier, D. (2011). Assessing the Effectiveness of Consumer Narratives for Destination Marketing. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 35(1), 64-78. doi:10.1177/1096348010384594



- Wengel, Y., Ma, L., Ma, Y., Apollo, M., Maciuk, K., & Ashton, A. S. (2022). The TikTok effect on destination development: Famous overnight, now what? *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, 37, 100458. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2021.100458>
- Werthner, H., & Klein, S. (1999). *Information technology and tourism: a challenging relationship*. Springer-Verlag Wien
- Winduwati, S., & Putri, C. R. (2020). The Role of Social Media and Youth Participation in Developing Local Tourism (Case Study On Generasi Pesona Indonesia Lombok). *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 478, 905-909
- Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management*, 31(2), 179-188. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2009.02.016
- Xiang, Z., Du, Q., Ma, Y., & Fan, W. (2017). A comparative analysis of major online review platforms: Implications for social media analytics in hospitality and tourism. *Tourism Management*, 58, 51-65. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2016.10.001
- Xiang, Z., Wang, D., O'Leary, J. T., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2014). Adapting to the Internet: Trends in Travelers' Use of the Web for Trip Planning. *Journal of Travel Research*, 54(4), 511-527. doi:10.1177/0047287514522883
- Xiang, Z., Du, Q., Ma, Y., & Fan, W. (2018). Assessing reliability of social media data: Lessons from mining TripAdvisor hotel reviews. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 18(1), 43-59. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-017-0098-z>
- Yoo, K.H., Gretzel, U. (2011) 'Influence of Personality on Travel-Related Consumer-Generated Media Creation', *Computers in Human Behavior* 27(2): 609-21.
- Zeng, B., & Gerritsen, R. (2014). What do we know about social media in tourism? A review. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 10, 27-36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2014.01.001>
- #travelinspo: *Social Media's Rising Impact in Travel Marketing and E-Commerce*. (n.d.). Retrieved 17 April 2022, from <https://www.wearemarketing.com/blog/travelinspo-social-medias-rising-impact-in-travel-marketing-and-e-commerce.html>

## Appendix 1- Interview Excerpts

### Interview 1

Name of Interviewee: Ghumante

Number of Members: 7

Instagram Followers- 44000

YouTube Subscribers- 199000

TikTok Followers - 50000

Based in Nepal

#### The beginning

“We were normal travellers who loved travelling and going to new places. We started by writing travel blogs. As we started posting pictures and videos, we got more followers, and we were famous. We were responsible for providing information, we used to provide itinerary to women who needed to participate in the project by Nepali Travellers. They used to provide fund to solo women travellers and for that the participant needed itinerary. It made us more popular. We also promoted destination which were new and not explored enough. We also promoted local entrepreneurs on our Instagram page and blog posts. Our main aim is to discover unexplored destination in Nepal and distribute the tourist evenly to reduce over-tourism in most popular destinations.”

#### Social Media during Pandemic

“When people were locked inside their home due to pandemic, many of our audience said that they felt like they were travelling by watching our videos (Virtual Tourism). When the restriction was lifted the domestic tourism boomed and it has to do with social media as well. The destinations which used to cater and serve the foreign tourists, now were serving domestic tourism and people were able to earn their livelihood through internal tourism. And after that the importance of domestic tourism was realized and was supported by different organization as well. The mainstream destination reached out to us for their promotion, and I would say people were more aware about the importance of destination promotion because of the pandemic.”

#### Social Media and Responsibility

“The basic principle of travelling for us as a group is to aware people about travel etiquettes. It is believed that wherever Nepali tourist travels, there is pollution and noise, and we want to change that. We teach the travellers to travel responsibly and through our post we try and raise awareness about the way to travel.”

#### Social media and Over tourism

“The case of Betane, Biratnagar is another where people flooded to the Chamomile fields to make Tiktok videos and ravaged the fields. People have become insensitive towards the local people in that way. For a few seconds of fame, people were ready to destroy the livelihoods of local people and that has been the most dangerous aspect of social media. Social media is a big deal as it is the most efficient way of marketing and the more, we market, the more people will go and visit, and we must be sure to market destination responsibly and travel responsibly.”

#### Social media in research and tourism influx

“Nepal is regarded as a one-dollar destination and many tourists mostly international prefer Nepal because it is cheap to travel. With the help of social media, it has been easier for the tourist to get information about the destination in details. The cost and expenses of the whole

travel can be calculated and managed before even travelling to a certain destination. This has enabled people to know if a destination is affordable for them to travel and because of that I think more people will be interested to travel to Nepal if they can get these kinds of details from the social media pages like ours. Similarly, our posts and videos are not only helpful in research but is promoting local culture and tradition. When we post about a destination, the people who watch our videos or sees at our posts can identify the cultures that are unique to them like ‘Shaman’ culture and tourist visit that destination just to see that.”

## Interview 2

Name of Interviewee: TourismFromZero

Instagram Followers: 926

Facebook Followers: 3000

Based in Slovenia

### Social media and crisis management in Tourism

“I can’t even imagine our initiative of ‘tourismfromzero’ without social media. It was very helpful because everyone saw the use of social media to help tourism. Our questionnaires were developed in such way that anyone could answer and help tourism to grow from zero after pandemic. This way the tourism stakeholders who were unaware of what to do next were able to find answers to their problem. Our platform is like a discussion ground for what can be done in tourism industry to avoid the impacts of the pandemic. We used Facebook and Instagram in the beginning and asked the people to share their travel story with us and we reposted them on our pages. By using UGC which was about travel and tourism at the time when everyone was restricted to travel made people miss travelling and led them to share their travel history and that way, we gained followers organically.”

### Using social media to create awareness

“Podcast, as a long form content we have been able to aware our audience about various tourism topics. We invite tourism enthusiasts, professors, scholars from academia in tourism, local guides, local entrepreneurs, practitioners, travel journalist and people from sport tourism. We invite them and talk about the tourism topics and even promote local tourism products.”

### Reviving Tourism

“The goal of the TourismFromZero was to gather the concrete ideas on how to restart tourism from the ground level. And to gain some project to have some people work in sustainable tourism as a start-up. We started LocalsFromZero which intended to help local providers who were not techno-friendly and young entrepreneurs like us came into the picture to help them. The students from the University of Turistica were able to find such local entrepreneurs who needed help from all-over Slovenia to become visible online. We at TourismFromZero are not only talking and discussing about the tourism impacts but are also working actively to recover tourism in better way to set up some new systems and new foundation.”

### Changes in Tourism

“Everything is going more into video, especially short video like Tiktoks. Those destination which started doing Tiktoks and Reels, they started getting boost and recognition. In Slovenia, they hired young Tiktokers to promote a destination, a mountain destination which was good and spontaneous promotion for that destination. That is the shift that we are seeing now, it’s

not only the content that are produced by DMOs that matters now but also from the locals which are spontaneous and authentic and not something that are manufactured and prepared in advance.”

#### Social media and Over-tourism

“It is dangerous how one promotes. There must be a balance between promotion and number of tourists in that destination. How do you limit the tourists from coming to the destination that is going viral in the social media? There must be strategies and measures to manage the overcrowding in that destination if it gets to that. Because once a destination is promoted in a good way, it is inevitable- the tourist inflow. And sadly, the destination who are actively promoting are not planning further ahead in this case and are overwhelmed when the tourists arrive in large number.”

#### Social Media and Responsibility

“Marketing in general is a big responsibility. It is important how you communicate. As a company or a business, we have the power to educate and influence the travellers to visit a destination and can also teach how to visit it and how not to. There is no one correct way to do that, but it is important to be responsible on how you deliver the message.”