A Study on the Role of Social Media Marketing in Promoting Adventure Tourism in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: Adventure tourism is described as traveling to a place to engage in adventure activities in an environment that is natural. There are two types of adventure: soft adventure and hard adventure. Soft adventure activities include bird-watching, hiking, camping, and horseback riding, and they need little to no physical ability and expertise. Rock climbing, mountaineering, survival games, and caving are examples of hard adventure activities. Participants in hard adventure are more inclined to engage in physically and psychologically taxing outdoor activities. The aim of this article is to figure out what function social media platforms have in promoting adventure tourism in Uzbekistan. The research focuses on adventure tourism and associated items from the aforementioned places that should be marketed on social media. This report also suggests measures to boost adventure tourism.

Keywords: tourism industry, adventure tourism, soft adventure, hard adventure, social media marketing, promoting adventure.

Introduction: The popularity of social media as a means of communication has caused a paradigm shift globally, allowing users to monitor, interact, and exchange information. The emergence of social media as a new technology has transformed the way the tourist sector operates, which has had a huge impact on the sustainable tourism company. Several international organizations, including the World Wide Fund for Nature, The International Eco Tourism Society, Eco-Tourism Society, Rainforest Alliance, Sustainable Travel International, and Global Sustainable Tourism Council, are constantly working to market and raise awareness of sustainable tourism through social media platforms, as well as through seminars and the publication of annual reports. Tourism providers may stay linked with other stakeholders by using social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google, and Pinterest (Stanciu and Costea, 2012). Tourism is a cultural, social, and economic experience in which people travel from their home to other places and countries to enjoy leisure, local cuisines and delicacies, entertainment, shopping, recreation, education, business, spirituality, health, and even visiting relatives and friends. It covers transportation to and from the chosen place as well as lodging. Sports tourism, religious tourism, medical tourism, culture tourism, rural tourism, spiritual tourism, tea-tourism, wine tourism, and so on are all examples of sustainable tourism. Furthermore, with the rapid advancement of globalization, sustainable tourism has gained traction. Adventure tourism has evolved into a popular niche and a fast developing part of the tourist business since the early explorers (Swarbrooke, 2003). One cause for its rise might be that modern-day living and job life can be devoid of obvious significance. As a result, individuals choose to seek meaning through active engagement in leisure activities and tourism. Participants desire a profound embodied experience that is not present in ordinary life (Van der Merwe, 2009). They feel that adventure tourism may deliver such experiences while also aiding in overcoming certain life worries. New talents may be gained and developed via adventure, contributing in the maintenance of an interesting and creative life filled with wonderful experiences and difficulties. Today, adventure tourism encompasses a wide range of activities, from low-energy activities like snorkeling and hot air ballooning to high-adrenaline sports like bungee jumping, diving with great white sharks, paragliding, and white water rafting (Swarbrooke, 2003). Adventure tourism contributes significantly to a destination's attractiveness since it provides tourists with a variety of activities that take place in stunning surroundings, breath-taking views, and various sceneries. As I previously stated, adventure tourism has evolved and expanded into a niche business

over the last decade, selected by participants for the risk and difficulty it entails. The tourist business was severely impacted by the pandemic in 2020-2021, and hotel service providers and other sector participants received various sorts of public assistance. Although the number of international tourists visiting Uzbekistan increased by 25% in 2021 to 1.88 million, it has yet to return to the pre-pandemic level of 6.75 million. Uzbekistan has developed a visa-free system for citizens of 86 countries, as of May 2022, and e-visas for nationals of 57 countries, including the United States. The government intends to increase tourism-related spending from $1 billion in 2018 to $2.2 billion by 2025 (International Trade Administration, 2022). This will necessitate enormous expenditures in infrastructure (the President budgeted $100 million for tourist infrastructure development in February 2021), hospitality education, and the attraction of big hotel brands. The development strategy calls for the government to fund the building of three- and four-star hotels with at least 50 rooms, raising the total number of rooms from 20,200 in 2018 to 64,000 in 2025. In 2021-2023, Tashkent's tourist sector is expected to receive $903.6 million in investments ($739.5 million of which are foreign investments), with 90 projects planned, including 66 hotels, 12 retail and entertainment complexes, 9 parks, and 3 artisan centers. The government is also working to promote pilgrimage tourism. Uzbekistan was placed 16th out of 140 nations in the Global Muslim Travel Index in 2021. The government amended its plans in 2022, setting the objective of increasing the number of international visitors to 9 million and domestic tourists to 12 million by 2026, as well as investing $300 million in the establishment of tourism and leisure zones (International Trade Administration, 2022). *Therefore, the main aim of this research is to identify the role of social media marketing in promoting adventure tourism in Uzbekistan.*

Literature review: According to Blackshaw (2006), "Social Media" are internet-based applications that carry consumer-generated content, which includes media impressions created by consumers, usually informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers. In the technical sense, social media encompasses a number of programs that allow customers to "Post," "Tag," "Digg," or "Blog" on the internet. These applications generate a range of new and developing online information sources that are developed, initiated, distributed, and used by customers with the goal of teaching one another about products, brands, services, and concerns (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2006). Xiang and Gretzel (2010) studied the significance of social media in their study. The authors investigated the extent to which social media appear in search engine results for travel-related queries. Their investigation revealed that social media accounts for a sizable portion of the search results, implying that search engines directed passengers straight to social media sites. Social media has become an integral platform for businesses as it supports marketers to remain connected with their customers in an effective way. The users put in writing their own reviews on blogs, visual communities and social networks, thus providing a platform to share any audio, video, picture or any other media files on YouTube, Flicker, internet (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Pergolino. (2012) contend that a destination will be successfully visible through a well-developed communications strategy focusing on social media. An increase in brand awareness, brand engagement, online word of mouth (WOM), friends like trust and social validation are the benefits of adopting this communication strategy. According to Buhalis (1998), tourist items are acquired in advance and distant from the site of consumption. As a result, fast and reliable information that is relevant to tourist demands is critical to customer happiness and the destination's competitiveness. It is also worth noting that the tourist business is at the forefront of internet usage and online commerce. Inversini (2019) noted the relevance of reputation and the trend toward online reputation in a recent literature review. According to the literature review, the aggregation of social media, along with increasing processing capacity, has enabled real-time reputation evaluation. Furthermore, it has permitted rapid comprehending and comprehension of reputation breakdowns. According to Yadav and Arora (2012), social media is a significant tourist marketing tool that may improve the reputation of a place. Given the foregoing, tourist operators must see social networking sites as an essential component of their marketing plans. According to Schmallegger and Carson (2008), sustainable tourism destinations have employed social media as a promotional tool for interactive marketing. When compared to traditional media techniques, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) discovered that social

media platforms allow tourism destinations to reach prospective tourists at a cheaper cost and with more efficiency. According to the research, social media serves as a means of contact with significant cost savings for all stakeholders. Tourism is classified into two types: mass tourism and alternative tourism. Mass tourism is defined as tourism in which a large number of individuals seek cultural replication in institutionalized settings with minimal cultural or environmental contact from an authentic location. Alternative tourism, on the other hand, offers kinds of tourism that are congruent with environmental, social, and communal values and that allow both hosts and visitors to have pleasant and valuable connection via shared experiences, as defined by Fluker and Turner (2000). Certain sub-categories of alternative tourism are highlighted, such as cultural features, events, and nature-based tourism. Nature-based tourism is further subdivided into adventure tourism and nature-based tourism. The origins of adventure tourism may be traced back to traditional recreation and include activities that require specialized abilities in an outdoor location. The distinction between conventional recreation tourism and adventure recreation is found in the conscious pursuit of risk, as in adventure recreation, as well as the uncertainty of the outcome (Weber, 2001). If there is no danger, the desire to engage decreases since risk becomes the primary source of enjoyment with the event. Participants in adventure tourism accept a certain amount of risk and danger in order to meet higher-level demands through exciting activities, but without completely neglecting their safety requirements. Adventurers seek risks in order to match their own talents and ability with the situational danger (Weber, 2001). Soft adventure and hard adventure are the two types of adventure tourism activities. Soft adventure is one of the fastest growing categories of tourism travel, and it is loved by everyone searching for something more than a normal beach or sightseeing holiday. These "soft adventure" activities are typically done to augment standard vacations and may include excursions to ecotourism or particular interest expeditions or themes. It provides more comfort in terms of sleeping arrangements and gastronomy. Soft adventure provides a broader selection of activities and adventure experiences for the alternative traveler (Van der Merwe, 2009). Soft adventure needs little time and only basic abilities. Camping, motorcycling, boating, horseback riding, and photography safaris are all common activities connected with it. Hard adventure activities, on the other hand, are high-risk activities in which participants must be physically and mentally fit to participate (for example, skydiving, white-water rafting or kayaking, rock climbing, cave exploration, survival games, and mountaineering) and where participants thrive when exposed to high-risk activities. Participants are more likely to engage in physically and intellectually demanding outdoor activities that require extensive prior expertise and high levels of proficiency. Participants get an adrenaline boost from taking chances, even though they can usually limit the dangers due to their experience (Swarbrooke, 2003). A high degree of dedication is required, and weather conditions, sleeping arrangements, and nutrition become secondary considerations. Hard adventure comprises a close encounter with the nature and culture of the destination (Swarbrooke, 2003; Van der Merwe, 2009). Adventure travelers learn or get something important from their experiences.

Methodology of the research: The study's research approach was centered on finding foreign tourist respondents from various countries who were visiting Uzbekistan's key adventure tourism attractions. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect responses for the study. The first phase investigated the influence of social media in adventure tourism motivation. Because the researchers had easy access to these locations, a straightforward sampling strategy was adopted for data collection. A suitable sample of 20 responders was chosen for this purpose. The original sample includes individuals who were willing to engage and dedicate quality time to the interview procedure with the researchers. As a result, an interview questionnaire was created and apply by using direct interview method.

Results: According to the interview results, the demographic information of the respondents ranged from 20 to 30 years and above. The majority of responses were between the ages of 20 and 30, followed by 31-40 years and 41 years and above. Approximately 52% of the responders were male, with the remaining 48% being female. In terms of marital status, 25% were married and 75% were single. The bulk of the identified respondents were graduates, 25% were postgraduates, and around 20% had intermediate education. In terms of occupation, 33% of respondents were students, followed by 24% in government employment and 23% in commercial sectors, with the remainder jobless. It is

worth noting that more than 65% of those polled were between the ages of 20 and 30. The increased number of older respondents reflects extensive use of social media and the internet. The age demographic and their use of social media and the internet are strongly linked. Social media and internet usage are increasing among the young, and it is also increasing in other age groups. In contrast to the aforementioned findings, respondents reported being comfortable with social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Telegram, Instagram, and state government travel websites. The research also recognized and classified Uzbekistan adventure tourism elements. The aforementioned products were the primary growth drivers of the country's economic development. These items also encouraged men and women to pursue self-development, challenges, and new options for adventure activities such as extreme sports, Airbnb, Booking.com, resorts, and local cuisine. As a result, adventure tourism goods not only reduce poverty but also help to build a sustainable host community. The findings are consistent with previous research on the relationship between social media usage and socially adventure travel in economically advantaged places.

Discussions: Uzbekistan is endowed with natural and cultural resources that are mostly undiscovered, and as a result, it has high tourist potential. As previously said, both competent men and women participate in adventure tourism to improve personal abilities, challenges, and acquire information. Adventure resorts are being constructed, where tourists may indulge in sports like as skiing, climbing, zip lining, and ecological tourism. at addition, Uzbek hospitality is being promoted at a number of Uzbek tourist areas. Uzbekistan is also endowed with a wealth of resources, such as historical sites and monuments. However, much more work is needed to promote "Adventure tourism." One strategy may be to organize and promote specialized adventure tourism events on social media. Cultural heritage tourism, on the other hand, has been on the tourist map in Uzbekistan for a long time. Aside from cultural heritage tourism, there is also the possibility for items like as ceramics, textiles, carving, and carpets. New tourist goods such as education tourism and agro tourism present potential that should be pursued further. Uzbekistan is making significant attempts to advertise its tourism offerings on social media. However, much more effort must be made on social media to promote and empower adventure and other types of tourism. *Amir Soy*, *Bildir Soy*, and *Chimgan* resorts from Tashkent, for example, would receive more recognition if resorts were aggressively marketed on social media platforms. More particular, coordinated efforts at the national and state government levels are required to promote adventure tourist sites in Uzbekistan's south.

Conclusion: The growth of the internet has resulted in a paradigm change in worldwide consumption habits. Tourism is a significant revenue-generating business that empowers and improves the sustainability of adventure resorts. As a result, it necessitates a strategic media platform for promotion that is easily accessible. The study indicated that active promotion of adventure tourism sites on social media platforms will increase the destination's exposure and accessibility to tourists. This research has offered important insights on adventure tourism in the state. The most important revelation was the relationship between social media usage and adventure tourism in terms of the country's economic development. The two major outcomes involving views on interpersonal skill enhancement were man and woman empowerment. Another significant conclusion is that adventure tourism may not be the first option for tourists who have never been on an adventure trip before. As a result, marketing adventure tourism to the upper and middle classes would be more effective. In contrast to previous findings, the study suggests that young people use social media and the internet extensively. This connection, however, requires additional investigation and research studies. The study highlighted several adventure tourism items for optimum visibility and promotion on social media sites. Adventure factors and social media platforms had a considerable presence on social media and websites marketing its various tourist goods among the adventure resorts considered for this study. As previously stated, adventure and other sorts of tourist goods are promoted in Uzbekistan using both traditional and new media outlets. The aforementioned tourist items have enormous potential to contribute to adventure tourism in Uzbekistan. However, there are certain local difficulties that must be addressed in terms of tourism infrastructure. Despite being blessed with great biodiversity, adventure resorts have generally gone untapped, owing to insurgency difficulties, inadequate marketing, and strategy makers' careless approach. Future study should investigate the influence of

social media in promoting adventure tourism at the national level, followed by state-by-state comparisons. It is worth noting that survey respondents generally supply generous replies. As a result, the face-to-face interview may not have been done or scored appropriately in terms of reactions to specific advantages acquired by visitors. To criticize, the current study's interview questions should have been phrased better. Perhaps the writers will keep this in mind when they construct interview questions for future study.

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